Sunday, Church Day; Monday, Wash Day

The Way We Lived
on the Hills and in the Hollows of Highland
in the Late 1930s and Early 1940s.

By Clarence Vredevoogd

The Vredevoogd Farm Buildings circa 1940 – watercolor by the author

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A 1996 memoir from Christian school teacher and native of Highland Township, Osceola County, Michigan, Clarence Vredevoogd (1926-2006), entitled “Sunday, Church Day; Monday, Wash Day: The Way We Lived on the Hills and in the Hollows of Highland in the late 1930s and early 1940s.” A manuscript copy can be found in the Calvin University Hekman Library, Heritage Hill Collection No. 321. A limited number of bound printed books were distributed by the author in 1996.

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Preface

Shortly after the Civil War, enterprising Dutch people left the settled areas of western Michigan to locate in the middle of the Michigan mitten, creating the villages known today as Vogel Center and Lucas. John Vogel, a Civil War veteran from the town of Noordeloos near Holland, Michigan, heard of quality farmland in Missaukee County which could be homesteaded or bought for little money. In 1867 he and three companions traveled by wagon as far as Hershey, then walked to Missaukee County to verify the rumors. They decided the land eventually would be productive enough to farm, though at the time it was wooded, some with valuable timber. In 1868, Vogel and his friends moved their families and established homesteads near the Clam River. Other friends and relatives followed. The community grew rapidly.

In 1873, another enterprising Dutchman named Hiram Lucas moved into an area fifteen miles west and a few miles north of Vogel Center to begin the community of Lucas. In both communities, the sand loam soil tilled easily, a plentiful supply of timber awaited cutting, and the climate was invigorating. Most were religious men and women of the Reformed persuasion.

Word of an opportunity to make a profit has always spread rapidly among the Dutch. The coming of a railroad from Grand Rapids to Cadillac in 1873, followed shortly by a line running from the southeast through Cadillac and McBain multiplied interest in the area.

The coming of the railroad brought people into the area from ethnic backgrounds other than Dutch. Eventually these people helped build the towns of McBain, Marion, and Lake City. A few of them settled on farms, squeezing between their Dutch neighbors.

Within thirty years of the coming of the two patriarchs who began the Dutch community, enough Dutch people had moved into the area to have settled fully a somewhat circular area some twenty miles in diameter. The center of the circle lay about three miles north of McBain. Established within that area were several congregations of the Christian Reformed Church, a conservative denomination of the churches of the Reformed persuasion.

The first two churches in the area naturally were Vogel Center (1872) and in Lucas (1883), though the Lucas congregation was not located in the village of Lucas itself. A Reformed Church would eventually be built there. The Lucas Christian Reformed Church was built a half mile south of a four-corners intersection called Stoney Corners, three-and-a-half miles west of McBain, a mile-and-a-half south of the village of Lucas. In 1894, a third church, Prosper, three miles north of Vogel Center, opened its doors. Daughter churches sprang from these three.

Highland, the church of our family, was a daughter of Lucas, built three miles south and a mile east of its mother. Aetna, daughter of Prosper, was built a few miles north of her mother. West Branch (now Calvin, McBain) sprang from Vogel Center, and it was built four miles west and a mile south of her mother. In the city of McBain itself, a Christian Reformed Church was established to meet the demands of her Dutch population, though, by this time, the town already had a Presbyterian and a Catholic Church. Finally, far to the north, six miles northwest of Lake City, the Arlene Church grew. Much later, the Cadillac and Lake City congregations were formed.

The Dutch community in the middle of the palm of the mitten called Michigan was built around her churches. Her people were isolationists to a greater degree than even they realized. They interpreted church history to teach that if churches were to stay doctrinally pure and sound in practice, their people had to resist intermingling with the "American" people and denominations around them. A most practical method of resisting the influence of such undesirables was to preserve the language barrier between themselves and the people around them, especially within their religious activities.

Dutch was the language of the churches until 1926. All of the business transacted within the churches was done in the Dutch (Holland) language, all the sermons were preached in Dutch, and the church papers subscribed to by the parishioners were printed in Dutch.

Eventually, the language barrier weakened and disappeared, though even today traces of it can be found. An occasional Dutch word still flavors the vocabulary of young people three generations removed from the first settlers. One does not have to listen long to conversation in the area before hearing such Dutchisms as "too yet," as in, "I have to do that too yet."

A second means of perpetuating the barrier between cultures was the cultivation of an understanding that our Dutch people were farmers, only farmers, and nothing but farmers. A select few might set up in business as grocers, though they would certainly serve first and foremost the Dutch community since the language of the grocer was at first totally Dutch and later primarily Dutch. Non-Dutch neighbors who spoke no Dutch were not made to feel totally welcome in those stores.

This business barrier was a slow one to shrink and disappear. Early in the thirties, there was a hardware store in McBain, owned and operated by Ed De Young (who was also the local mortician), but because Ed De Young was a Presbyterian, he was classified more as an "American" than Dutch. Later, the Vander Woudes set up a Chevrolet agency in McBain, to which they later added a farm machinery line. People did ask questions about the seriousness of their faith, but they bought their cars and tractors at Vander Woudes. For

years, only those two of the many businesses in McBain could lay claim to anything Dutch. With few exceptions, the Dutch people avoided the business world for the greater part of two generations in their attempt to keep their religious life as pure as possible.

It was into the Dutch community of Highland that my Grandparents with their family of three children moved from Pleasant Street in Grand Rapids in 1904. Moving from an urban community in which the Dutch people played a large role into a rural community where nearly everyone was Dutch was a comfortable transition for the family. They joined the Lucas Christian Reformed Church. Attending Sunday worship services involved a trek of nearly five miles and the packing of a noon meal to share with others who traveled as far or farther to worship. In 1914, my grandparents were instrumental in the establishment of a much more conveniently located congregation in Highland township.

My grandparents spent most of their working days on their eighty-acre farm. On the same farm, my parents spent almost all of their working days. On the same farm, we, the third generation of a Dutch immigrant family, grew up in a community still regarded as Dutch. In this, the third generation, major changes revolutionized the community and the farms of which it was and is comprised.

As we grew up, it became apparent that a family could no longer make a living off eighty acres. Nor would adding another forty suffice. One by one, those who lived in the farm homes built by their grandparents found work in occupations other than farming. Though they continued to live in the buildings on the farm, they at first rented the land to neighbors interested in expanding their farming operations, then sold the land to them. More sons and daughters of the third generation moved out of the community to earn a livelihood than stayed in the area. Most moved to Grand Rapids, a hundred miles to the south.

Though life today within the community resembles somewhat what life had been in the past, obviously everything has changed. The family farm is gone. Full-time farmers with their families are in the business of agriculture. A bit of the flavor of the family farm can still be tasted in the lives they live, but so much has changed that everyone knows that the family farm is history.

In the case of our family, my sister and her husband still live on the farm. The original house burned down some years ago. They built a new one, though not on the same location. My brother-in-law, Dick Winkel, made use of the land to an extent but never made his living from the farm. Finally, he began renting it to the Veddler family, and he recently sold to them the land, except for the few acres on which the buildings exist.

Life in the community flourishes. The roots of the families living within its bounds are sunk deeply into the past and into the soil. The members of the community who are the

descendants of its originators take understandable pride in their heritage. Their love for their homes, their churches, their schools, and their lifestyle is shown by the care they take of their community and their loyalty to it. Those whose roots sink down deep into the history of the community have built what they now have on the foundations their ancestors laid. They are enjoying the lives they are privileged to live, and in their living of these lives are reserving for their children and grandchildren a future within the historical community for those willing to claim it.

The main purpose of this book is to preserve for the descendants of those who once lived on the hills and in the hollows of Highland (and to any who have an interest in the community) a detailed description of what life was like in one family, a representative of the community, in a day and a culture long gone. Perhaps such knowledge will help them understand why the community is today what it is. Perhaps they will achieve a greater sense of appreciation for those who have handed down to new generations so rich a heritage. Perhaps they will also be able to understand themselves better and appreciate themselves more fully as they learn about the rock from which they were hewn.

A second purpose of this book is to pass on to my children and grandchildren a little of the flavor of the wonderful life we enjoyed long before they came on the scene. May they experience a joy of living in their generation more completely because they know these bits and pieces of a history to which they are connected in a real but distant way.

Meet the Family

My mother was 26 years old when I came into the world, my father 25. My older sister was stillborn, so, in effect, I was the oldest child in the family. My father's parents were Nick and Effie Vredevoogd. Before I was born, they had lived in the same house my folks lived in. Eventually, they lived next door and across the road, next door being nearly a quarter mile to the east of our home, down a small hill and up a much more impressive one. Grandpa was 56 when I was born, Grandma only 50. My parents had bought my grandparents' farm when they married, but my grandparents had not yet finished building their new "retirement" house. They lived in the house and on the farm where I was born until shortly before my birth.

When two families live under one roof, they invite trouble. When the two families are a young married couple and their in-laws, the chances of trouble are double. Fueling the friction between the two couples, according to the repeated parental revelations, was the unconcealed fact that Grandpa and Grandma had frowned on the match of my father and my mother. Since the day my father had informed them he was "seeing Dora Westmaas," they had called to his attention several eligible girls who lived "closer by," but my father was not to be dissuaded. Anyone but a staunch Calvinist would claim that both the lives of all concerned could have been much more comfortable had my father listened to his parents. My parents were Calvinists who believed in predestination. They knew they were meant for each other and were willing to live with the consequences of that fact.

As thankful as Dad and Ma were when Grandpa and Grandma moved into their new home, their lives would have been happier still had there been a greater distance between the two homes. Grandpa and Grandma could still look down the big bill and up the little hill and see the smoke coming from the chimney of our house. They could see when the lights came on in the morning and went out at night. They could see at what time the wash hung on the clothes lines on Monday morning. They could see too much!

To Grandma, I was Klaasje. Grandpa's American name was Nick. His Dutch name was Klaas. I was their first grandson. I was Klaasje, little Klaas.

Aunt Betty was 22 years old when I was born. I first remember her when she came home during summer vacations from her teaching jobs in Muskegon or Grand Rapids. Usually, she had fellow teachers or friends with her, so I never got to know her well.

Besides Aunt Betty, Dad had a brother and another sister. Uncle Jake was the oldest of the family, twelve years older than my father. He was married and lived a mile west of our farm, in a red brick house with two oval-framed pictures, each hanging above a side of the buffet

in the dining room. One was a picture of a catch of fish, trout, I think. The other was a picture of three dead pheasants hanging by their feet, the prize of some hunter.

In the yard between the house and unpainted hip-roofed barn was parked an ancient, huge, steel-wheeled Oil Pull tractor, used only for belt power, but ever so inviting for young boys to climb on and drive away into the vast stretches of imaginary fields.

Aunt Tena was my father's older sister, two years his senior, married to Adam Westmaas, brother of my mother. During my early years the families of Uncle Adam and Uncle Jake had produced between them four daughters but no sons. Though I would not have called my female cousins playmates, I do recall we had some riotously good times together early in our years.

As I remember it, Grandpa never worked on the farm after he moved “up the hill.” He had a couple of chicken coops filled with 500 white leghorns, which kept him as busy as he wanted to be. He rented on shares the sixty acres on which he lived, thereby getting much of the grain he needed for his chickens. He had a large vegetable garden but also a meticulous flower garden, of which he was justly proud. Financially, Grandpa and Grandma had been extremely blessed during their years on the farm, and they could live comfortably on the egg money the chickens brought in and my Uncle Adam's and my father's payments on their farms. Both had borrowed the money to buy their farms from Grandpa and Grandma. Grandpa had also loaned money to Uncle Jake to buy his farm, which strained their relationships once the Depression came along, but that is another story.

Martin and Grace Westmaas, my mother's parents, lived on a farm three-and-a-half miles northwest of ours. Grandpa was 58 when I was born and Grandma was 54. I recall them driving into our farmyard in their 1926 black Model T Ford, isinglass side curtains flapping in the middle of a summer morning, when Grandma had been invited to come and help Dora do some canning. Grandpa came along. Which is not the whole truth. If Grandpa had not come, Grandma couldn’t come, at least not by car. Grandma had never learned to drive. For that matter, neither had my mother. When Grandma came, it was Grandpa who drove her. Grandpa spent the day helping a bit with whatever needed fixing. The binder needed new slats on the canvas, or the potato digger needed some of the bolts replaced on the oblong elevator gears. Or a new calf pen needed to be built in the stable area of the barn. Grandpa was handy at almost anything on the farm. He had boys at home to do much of the work on his own farm.

Uncle Adam was five years older than my mother. He had married my father's older sister, Tena, and had moved to their own farm some three miles south of his home. My next living uncle on the Westmaas side (two had died before they were twenty and before I was born)

was Uncle Bill, sixteen when I was born. Uncle Bill could handle anything there was to handle on the farm when Grandpa and Grandma came to our house to help out for a day. But they always had the morning chores done before they came and they always went home in time for the chores in the late afternoon.

Uncle Fred, thirteen when I was born, was never very strong. He did what he could on the farm, but his “bum leg” limited his contributions to the workload. Not that he didn't want to do the work. He was as willing as Uncle Bill any day, but he couldn't be on his feet much. The doctors said he had TB of the bone. A series of operations in Grand Rapids had probably saved his life, but he would never be strong. I remember him as the uncle who had time to entertain me when I went to Grandpa's house. He showed me how to make a real slingshot, not the kind made from a crotch of a sapling and a couple rubber bands cut from an inner tube from the tire of a car. Uncle Fred was far above using such a corrupted innovation to propel stones. His slingshots were invented before David used his to stun Goliath and could project stones a country mile.

While most of our visits to Grandpa and Grandma Westmaas took place on evenings or on holidays, I do recall a few times that I stayed there overnight. Those were the times when I got to know Grandma's girls, my aunts. Aunt Jenny, two years older than my mother, was a nurse at Pine Rest, a psychiatric hospital in Cutlerville on the south fringe of Grand Rapids, that distant town a hundred miles south of us. She was seldom home. When she did come home, she brought presents for us. We loved Aunt Jenny.

Aunt Lyda was two years younger than my mother. We never could be sure she would be home when we came to visit because often she worked for a week or two at the home of some family who was going to be or had been blessed by the birth of an additional family member. I don't recall much about Aunt Lyda except that to fix her hair she used curling irons heated in the glass chimneys of the kerosene lamps, and then stuck into her hair and twisted them to make curls. Hot hair smells! Burning kerosene smells! The imprint of the smelly combination is still fresh in my memory.

Aunt Lena was eighteen when I was born, and away at college in Grand Rapids most of the time. My memories of her begin much later, after she had graduated and was my teacher in our little two-room school.

Aunt Tressa was the youngest in her family, only ten years older than I. When we visited Grandpa and Grandma, she was so busy helping Grandma we didn't find time to play together. Setting table, washing dishes, and peeling potatoes kept her busy.

My parents' family increased quite rapidly after my birth. My sister Gertrude arrived a short two years after I did. Naturally, I don't recall her arrival. My brother Marvin came along a

little more than four years after I did. I don't remember that either. Within three more years, both Jack and Dennis were born, and during the next five years, Wilfred and Esther were born. Esther's birth is the only one which I can actually recreate in my mind. At the time she was born, my mother discovered that she had pernicious anemia. She was constantly tired and pale. Besides, when she took walks with Dad to the back of the farm to see how the crops were growing, she would often stop where the rains had washed little piles of sand free from the topsoil and had scoured it clean and white. She would pick up a small handful of the sand and eat it. Dad bawled her out for doing such a crazy thing, but she had such a craving for sand that Dad finally was convinced that there had to be a medical cause for the craving.

Dr. Masselink, who practiced in McBain, had delivered all of us Vredevoogd babies up to that time, but when Esther was due, he was out of town. Besides, his reputation had fallen upon evil times. It seems that his personal life was not everything expected of a Dutch doctor in a religiously Dutch community. Later he gained back much of his reputation, but that didn't help Dad at the moment. The baby was due and a doctor was a much-desired person to have around. As soon as Gert and I left the house for school in the morning, Dad phoned the office of Dr. Torrey in Lake City explaining the situation. Dr. Torrey had been up much of the night on a similar case and was as tired as only the good country doctors of his day knew the word to mean, but he laid aside all thought of personal ease and drove the eighteen miles to our home. Once there he examined my mother, determined that, yes, the baby could and probably would come anytime, but not within the next half hour, and yes, he would welcome a cup of coffee and a sandwich.

Noon came, and the progress my mother had made was scarcely detectable. And yes, the good doctor would like some dinner. Another examination after dinner found the situation quite at a stalemate. Dr. Torrey asked permission to relax on the couch and was deep in sleep as soon as his head hit the pillow. For two balmy September hours he slept the sleep of the exhausted.

Dad had put the usual farm routine on hold after the morning chores, so he was in the house to answer the phone when it rang at 2:30. Dr. Torrey's wife was frantic. His office was filled with patients who had come to see the doctor, but there was no doctor. What must she tell them?

Dr. Torrey calmly yawned and told his wife about the beautifully relaxing morning he had enjoyed and the wonderfully restful couple of hours of sleep he caught, and that he had no intentions of returning to Lake City until the baby made its appearance. “Tell those patients who are really sick to stick around, and I'll get back as soon as I can, and the rest of them can go home and come back tomorrow. That's the best I can do,” Dr. Torrey advised his

wife. Hardly had he hung up the phone than the action in the bedroom began. Within a half hour, Esther was safely ushered into the world, my mother was much relieved, and the Doctor was on his way back to Lake City.

Before he left, he told my father, “Case, just as soon as your wife can be up and around, take her into my office. I think she has anemia. Her blood doesn't look good to me.”

Those words put real fear into Dad. Within two weeks Dr. Torrey saw my mother, checked her blood under a microscope, and determined that her red cells were far too few, and many of those he could see were not perfectly round, all indicating pernicious anemia. He gave her an immediate injection of iron-based medication, prescribed a routine of two or three huge rust-red capsules per day for as long as the situation persisted, and left Ma with an appointment at his office in three months. The change in her capacity to live was dramatic, and much appreciated by all the family, but especially by my father, I'm sure.

When I was fourteen, brother Calvin was born. Since he was supposed to be the youngest member of the family, he was appropriately spoiled. However, after five years of privilege, his status was usurped by the twins, Larry and Harry, born when I was nineteen, in college, and for all practical purposes out of the house. Those births were nearly the death of my mother. I shall never forget the morning Uncle Jake drove me home from summer school at Calvin College because I had twin brothers and my mother was hovering between life and death. I had my own car, but my father showed extreme wisdom when he phoned Uncle Jake and asked him to drive me home rather than allowing me to drive my own car. I'm afraid I would have tried to shorten that long hundred miles by the compression of the accelerator under my foot, probably to my own regret. My sister Gert, who had been working in Grand Rapids, had returned home a month or two earlier to help. Ma regained her strength extremely slowly, but eventually she was again able to take over.

That is a portrait of the family from which I came. By today's standards, a family of ten children is far too large. Fifty years ago, such a family was excellent “social security,” a guarantee of an “old-age pension” as well cheap help in the barn and in the fields. Besides, the Bible's blessing on large families was not to be overlooked. “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them” (Psalm 127:3-5a).

Our Farm of Hills and Hollows

The mailing address of the farm was 4800 East Hibma Road, Marion, Michigan. It lay within the northernmost mile of Highland Township, Osceola County. It consisted of eighty acres of hills and hollows, laid out in a typical rectangle twice as long from north to south as it was wide.

For the most part Grandpa had carved out the farm from the forest. When he came to the land in 1904, there was a small four-room house, a shed or two for animals, and an outdoor privy.

Twenty acres were cleared for farming, the rest covered by a variety of hardwood trees and a quantity of hemlock.

By the early 1920s, another fifty acres had been cleared. The house had grown into a two-story, five-bedroom building, considered one of the finest in the community. Grandpa built the entire addition, except that he did hire out the plastering. He painted the exterior neatly with white lead and linseed oil paint, white, trimmed with dark green. During the remodeling of the house, Uncle Jake and my father were quartered in the barn. Room for their bed was found in the stables. Their clothes were protected in an old chest of drawers, except for their Sunday suits which stayed in the house, so the boys didn't smell like the barn when they went to church.

The barn grandpa built in 1914 (before the remodel work on the house) was a two-story 40' x 60' x 30' hip-roofed structure, supported by trusses rather than beams, as were most of barns of the day. Grandpa hired a local farmer-designer, by name Gerrit Bierma, to draw the plans and a local carpenter named Wyma to do the building with whatever help the family could provide. The location of the barn did not allow for a walk-out basement to serve as stables for the animals.

Had it been built another two hundred feet from the house, it could have had such a basement, but that would have made the distance between the two buildings impractical. The stables were part of the main floor. Grandpa painted the barn in traditional red with white trim. A few years later Grandpa added a tile silo to the west end of the barn.

Besides the house and barn, there was a large chicken coop, built in two sections some ten years apart in time. The last major building was a two-story tool shed, which we usually called the “garage.” It was the building farthest from the house, built to house pieces of farm machinery during the seasons in which they were not in use. The building was never intended to house the family car, which was conveniently parked on the north side of the house.

North and south expansion wings on the garage provided “carport” type shelters for farm machinery. The south wing concluded in a corncrib along its entire southern length. Unique to this tool shed was that, under it, was the root cellar of the same square footage as the main structure of the garage. The cellar was ten feet deep, had a dirt floor, and was cool as only root cellars can be cool, used to store the potatoes grown on the farm, keeping them in prime condition from October harvest until the following June. Hundreds of cratefuls of newly harvested potatoes rolled down chutes into the cellar every fall.

When Grandpa built the tool shed, he designed and installed an elevator to lift bagged potatoes out of the cellar for shipment after they had been sold. It was constructed alongside the trapdoor stairs in the southeast corner of the cellar. The floor of the elevator formed part of the ceiling of the basement. Ropes and pulleys ran from the upper crossbeams of the elevator cage to the second story of the garage where they were connected to the axle of a pulley mounted outside of the east wall of the garage.

Operation of the elevator was by one of two methods. For sizable runs, a gasoline engine on skids was brought alongside the east wall of the garage and a belt was run from its pulley to the pulley high on the wall. Tightening or loosening a hand-held rope on the elevator itself raised or lowered the elevator. For the removal of only a few bags from the cellar, the elevator could be operated by a hand-over-hand pulling of the main elevator rope. What a blessing that elevator was. No one will ever know how many thousands of one-hundred-pound bags it lifted out of the cellar, six or eight at a time, bags which, but for the elevator, would have been carried out one at a time on our backs.

One morning, fifteen or more years after the tool shed had been built, its floor collapsed. The collapse wasn't Grandpa's fault. To make the cellar absolutely free from frost, a three-inch layer of sawdust had been spread over the floor of the garage, thus insulating the ceiling of the cellar. Even so, white frost built up an inch thick on the entire ceiling, thicker near such openings as the two chute holes or the elevator and stairs. The practice of using sawdust for insulation was sound except that it should have been scraped off during the warm summer months to allow the wood of the floor under it to dry. This didn't happen. Over time, moisture rotted the floor. Hidden under the sawdust, no one noticed.

One beautiful spring morning, Clarence Sikkema, our hired man at the time, had harnessed two horses inside the barn. He led them out singly through the narrow door, and was standing between them, snapping the snaps at the ends of the lines (reins) to the rings on the bridles thus making of the two a team. As he snapped the last snap, the floor of the garage collapsed to the floor of the root cellar. The binder, the cultivator, the cultipacker, the grain drill, the mowing machine, and Clarence's Model A coupe all smashed into the cellar with a huge crash.

The team did not wait to ask what had made the noise. Primeval instincts for survival screamed so loudly in their brains that they thought no thoughts and asked no questions until they ran out of both energy and fear at the east line fence halfway to the back of the eighty acres. Since Clarence was between the horses when they began their escape from the noise, the lines he had just snapped set him firmly but quickly on the ground. Turning toward the source of the noise he slowly grasped the truth of what had happened. By that time the dust from the collapsed floor with its load of sawdust was rolling upward out the open doors of the garage. If one stands at the west end of south side of the barn late at night and listens very carefully when all other sounds have ceased, one can still hear the Clarence's slow but expressive “Holy Moses!” as he viewed the carnage from his prone position.

Grandpa built the privy, that most essential building on every rural home of its day, a tribute to his building skills. A hinged lid on its back lower section allowed for periodical cleaning of the concrete holding tank. Most privies in the community were more simply built over a rectangular hole in the ground. When the hole was full, a new hole was dug and the privy slid over it. The soil of the new hole served to cover the contents of the old.

Each successive move somewhat weakened the structure of the privy, allowing for more cold winter drafts and less certainty that a shut door stayed shut. Not so with Grandpa's privy. The cold north winds did not blow through chinks in the wall, nor did they create an updraft as they slipped between its walls and its cement pit. This privy was built to last!

Another building important to the farm was the brooder coop. This ten by twelve foot building was set to the northeast, back and away from the rest of the buildings largely for safety reasons. We used the building only in the early spring to shelter the two hundred white leghorn chicks ordered from a hatchery and shipped either by freight train or by U. S. Mail. If they were shipped by freight, they came to the McBain depot, which meant we had to drive to the depot to pick them up. If they were shipped by mail, the poor mailman had to endure their chirping in the back seat of his car the seven miles from the post office in Marion to our farm.

Each spring, before the chicks arrived, every available family member helped to clean the brooder coop of last spring's litter and an accumulation of cobwebs and dust, spreading on the floor an inch-deep layer of new sawdust hauled fresh from the local sawmill. It took our concerted effort to properly set up the kerosene burning brooder stove on the floor, assemble its four-inch sheet metal chimney, sticking it up through the permanent metal hole in the roof, and attaching fuel pipes from the burner to a supply tank mounted on the back outside wall of the building. The thermostat that regulated the temperature of the coop by controlling the flow of fuel in the line had to be tested and retested to be certain it

worked accurately and didn't leak. The feed troughs and water troughs were placed properly on the floor of the building on top of newspapers spread out on the new sawdust. We eliminated every possibility of draft by stuffing all the chinks around the windows with wads of newspaper.

For two days before the chicks arrived, we fired the brooder to make sure that it would hold the building at seventy-four degrees, day and night, as measured by the thermometer hanging inside the window. Since brooder stoves had a reputation of causing fires in the fresh, dry sawdust, the building was located far enough from the other buildings that, should the building bum, it would not set fire to any other of the farm buildings.

One night, late in my years at home, our brooder coop did burn. The chicks were only a few days from the hatchery, as cuddly and downy as any we had ever bought, but in the middle of a windy spring night, something went wrong. Dad called us all out of bed. Perhaps he feared the blast of wind might carry an errant spark onto the wood shingles on the roof of the house. He surely didn't want to take the chance of having to spend precious time waking all of us out of a deep sleep if the house should catch fire.

In an hour, the entire building was gone and with it, all of the chicks. The wind was from the northwest, and all of the sparks sailed through the apple orchard and away down the hill toward the road away from the buildings. When the fire had burned itself out, we went back to bed, eyes filled with tears since none of us could erase from our minds thoughts of the fate of those poor chicks.

The last building on the farm was the least noticed and the least cared for. It was located in the center of our orchard, built twice the size of the brooder coop, and designed only to shelter the young hens, known as pullets, after they had grown too large for the brooder coop and before they were ready to be moved to the chicken coop as laying hens. A chicken-wire run to the south of the building provided room to exercise. Roosts built along the north wall gave them a place to sleep at night, though there always were a few renegades who somehow or other got out of the run and chose to roost in the apple trees.

A set of three or four clotheslines, forty feet long, firmly supported at both ends and at the middle of their length, filled up most of the space between the privy and the brooder coop. A huge lilac bush and our well filled the rest of the space.

To the west of the buildings, the land along the road maintained an almost level pace for a distance, but along the west quarter of the property, the land dropped away into what we called a hollow, a severe depression, no doubt scraped out by a glacier thousands of years ago. Grandpa was wise enough never to have cut all the trees off the steepest slope of that part of the land.

Besides being too steep to profitably farm, it was also plagued with one of the thickest accumulations of stones on the entire eighty. Most were the size of soft-balls or smaller, but they were so numerous that, where the vein of stones crossed the sloping road directly south of the house, a person would swear the road was built of cobblestones. The stones were not only on the surface. They ran to a depth of several feet. I know. After our road was finally improved and the mail route extended down its length, Dad decided the post for the new mailbox should be near the end of the driveway where the vein of stones ran thick and deep. I got the job of digging that hole, all two feet of it. The walls of the hole were almost a solid face of stones.

Digging down through those stones with a post hold digger meant prying each loose, picking each up, and lifting it to ground level, all of which took a frustrating amount of time and effort.

The northern edge of the hollow on the west side of the south edge of the farm was as nearly as steep as its eastern and southern slopes. Grandpa had cleared that area, which was a mistake. Dad tried to hold the soil on the slope by planting it into hay and grasses, but the soil was light and apparently lacked enough nutrients to grow them well. Finally, he decided to put rye in the field to build up the soil before again trying grass seed. The result was a disaster. No sooner did he have the field worked up and the rye planted than a grand mid-Michigan thunderstorm, a gulley washer, did the field in. When the rains had stopped, three wash-outs, each over four feet deep at their deepest, permanently scarred the field. Later rains did further damage. Finally, Dad decided enough was enough. He planted the entire plot into red pine trees.

When Grandpa cleared that land, he had decided that the northwest corner of the eighty should remain a woodlot. The land there was no better and no worse than any of the rest of the farm, but the wood on the land was of high quality, splendid beech, majestic elm, broad basswood, and prolific maples vied for a place in the sun on the six acres reserved for them.

Besides these deciduous trees, there remained two hemlocks, left purposely to remind us of what had once been.

To the immediate south of the eastern third of the woodlot was another of the spectacular hollows on the property, this one outdoing the southern one by a depth of twenty feet. The northern slope from the woodlot into the hollow never seemed all that steep. The southern slope facing the woodlot was terribly steep. The soil of the entire hollow was a fairly heavy loam.

Except for one row crop each of corn and potatoes, as long as I can recall, the entire field was kept in hay, and for that reason the slope never did erode to speak of.

Had the northeast corner of the farm been as free from stones as was most of the farm, it would have been one of the most profitable pieces of land we owned. As it was, its productivity was cut by a third due to a bed of stones which ran diagonally across its northeast quadrant, rivaling the vein on the southwest corner of our land. The rest of the field was most excellent.

The field to the south of that corner field was laid out from east to west to stretch two-thirds of the way from the east line fence to the west line fence, also a very productive piece of land. It did have in it one unusual rock. Set in a mild slope toward the west, it stuck its crest three feet out of the soil. Many more feet of rock were rooted under the ground. No source of power we owned was great enough to move that piece of Michigan granite. We estimated that the cost and the work involved in blasting it out with dynamite was more than the getting rid of it was worth. The rock stayed and we worked around it.

The next field to the south along the east line fence was set on the top of the rise in which the stone was embedded, a more or less level plateau with fine soil. To the west of that field was one telling a different story. It was the basin of slopes from four directions, none of which was steep, but which, through the years had allowed soil to wash and accumulate to a depth of eighteen inches or more. Two things made that field unique. First, since every rain created a small lake in the basin, row crops in the field were doomed to drown. Therefore, the field remained almost perpetually a hay field. However, the proper varieties of hay in the field had been crowded out by quack grass, poor hay at best. Because the soil in that shallow hollow was composed of the best that four hillsides contributed through constant erosion, the field produced the best and most slippery quack grass in the country. To keep it on a fork was all but impossible. To try to load it on a wagon rack was ridiculously hilarious. We had more frustrating fun with that quack grass than with any other plants on the farm.

A second unique quality of that shallow hollow was its stone pile. Allow me to explain. When Grandpa began the farm he located stone piles at regular intervals, more often at the bottom of hollows than anywhere else, simply because it made more sense to work with gravity than against it. Stones less than the size of soft-balls were allowed to exist where they were except in the two glacier-strewn stone belts on the farm. To remove those, we often used potato scoops, short-handled forks with a dozen or so tines spread over eighteen inches in width, fifteen inches long, and curved upward on both outer edges. With these we would scoop up a forkful of dirt, shake it to remove the soil but retain the stones, which we then deposited on the stone boat.

The stone boat itself demands description. It was another invention with one eye on the force of gravity. It consisted of a simple platform made of five-foot-long pieces of two by six lumber spiked across two logs which had been somewhat dressed with a draw-knife. A chain on the front end of the apparatus connected it to the evener, which was connected to the singletrees, the hooks of which were attached to the chains at the end of the tugs of the harness of the team of horses which pulled the boat over the soil.

The stone boat decks were only four feet by seven. A small load was all a team of horses could pull, and they would much rather pull them downhill than up, hence the wisdom of placing stone piles at the bottoms of the hollows on the farm.

That takes us back to the stone pile in the middle of the quack grass field. The pile was established early in the history of the farm. We often studied it, marveling that it should be slowly but surely sinking into the soil to a depth all but equaling in diameter the large stones in its outer ring. We never recognized that enough soil constantly was washing down the slopes around the hollow to cover the stones to the depth it had. Major lessons in soil conservation unfolded before our eyes, and we didn't recognize until later the facts it was trying to teach us!

The land that formed the southeastern field of the farm was entirely on a slope, the high point lying near the northeastern corner of the field. That point sloped away toward the eastern line fence on an evil angle. The slopes in all other directions were mild by comparison. The soil itself was sandier than most of the farm, limiting its use. We never grew potatoes on that field. It was not good enough for that. Beans, yes. Potatoes, no.

The two remaining areas of the farm were those closest to the farm buildings. The field directly behind the barn completed the rise on which the farm buildings were built. The top of the rise formed a natural shelter for our buildings, its north and opposite slope ran down toward the quack grass hollow. The two-track trail of access to all of the back fields of the farm arced in a northerly direction through the middle of the field. When that two-track got beyond that first field it traversed the western slope of the quack grass hollow. The slope was too steep to be safely negotiated by a wagon load of hay, so Grandpa had borrowed a road scraper and dug out a level terrace to serve as a roadbed. He should have built it wider. Too many loads of hay slid off the rack when a wagon wheel came too close to the outside edge of the terrace and slipped down.

As Grandpa cleared each field from the wooded area, he built a fence around it. Most of those fences were still there and still used during the days of my earlier memories. Slowly they began to fall into disrepair until few remained.

East and north of the house was the orchard. Grandpa had planted in it thirty trees selected from a mail order catalog from a nursery somewhere in New York. The variety of trees he chose was interesting. I cannot completely reconstruct the entire orchard, but I do recall the Snow Apple tree at its southeastern corner, the four Spy trees which completed the south row of five trees, two pear trees and a plum tree along the western edge of the orchard, a Russet apple tree at the top of the hill, and its neighbor crab apple tree. Two Transparent apple trees were quite centrally located. They were the earliest of the summer apples, ripening late in July. Another tree, one that produced an abundance of early, red-skinned, white mealy apple, was located just south of them. There were a couple varieties of pie apples with large fruit, too tasteless to eat raw, and a green apple resembling the modern Granny Smith. No doubt I have forgotten other varieties.

In one corner of our root cellar Grandpa had built a wooden stall into which we stacked potato crates filled with apples every fall. We ate from them all winter. Some begged to be eaten when picked. The Spies didn't begin to taste good until January, but they were the last sound, crunchy apples in the spring.

Such was the farm, a stage with all the props in place, ready for the action to begin. In another sense it could be compared to an orchestra, with the instruments tuned, ready to play a delightful symphony. Perhaps it was most like the setting for a novel, eagerly anticipating all which will transpire in its pages. Each of us who lived on that farm has played one of the instruments, produced some of its symphonic music, and has written the words of a chapter or two on its pages. Listen carefully and you will hear some of what the farm communicates.

Our Standing in Our Community

Financially, at the time I was born, the Vredevoogd family was sound and solvent. Let me show you around so you can understand what I mean. We begin in the house by going down into the fruit cellar under the kitchen. To get there, we must open the three by five foot trap door to the left of the kitchen stove and immediately under foot as you enter the kitchen through the north door. The trap door leans against the north kitchen door when opened. More than one person has barged into the kitchen through that north door when the trap door was open. More than once, the trap door has dropped shut to the surprise of the entrant and the fear of the person in the basement whose exit was temporarily cut off. Loud expressions of disgust, anger, and frustration usually punctuated the occasion, followed by huge laughter.

On a yard-high, yard-wide cement ledge along the north wall of the cellar room is a carbide generator, a tin monster half the size of the furnace in the other basement, and adorned with several cranks, gauges, and half inch pipes. No doubt it had been installed at considerable expense to my grandfather, and since it was mounted permanently, it went with the house when my parents bought the place. When in operation, the carbide plant manufactured acetylene gas, piped throughout the house to the light-producing fixtures in the ceiling and the walls of the various rooms. The light produced was almost pure white and much brighter than light produced by a kerosene lamp. No doubt it had been the envy of the community. Few homes in the area knew such luxury.

Other reminders of what once had been were plentiful. Two musical instruments, an English horn and a violin, purchased during the days of plenty, occupied the shelf in the clothes-closet shared by the two downstairs bedrooms. Sometime during the late 1910s, two musical organizations had existed in Highland. The first had been a band. My father had joined, hence the English horn. Later, after the band had disbanded, an orchestra was formed. My father had joined that, hence the violin. I have no idea what either organization produced in the line of musical accomplishment except for one depressing clue. My father had very little music in him. Though he could whistle, only those with huge musical imaginations could recognize the tune he produced. He could read music, and he knew how to produce both sharps and flats on the English horn, but he couldn't hear the difference between a sharp, a flat, or a natural. What he did to that poor mail order violin was criminal, but he never knew it. He couldn't hear the difference between music and noise. As he said when he was much, much older, “Music has never meant anything to me, even if I do enjoy listening to some of it.”

Back to the shelf in the clothes closet. On it were two of my father's hats, the newest being clean, smartly styled, and worn elegantly. It had cost a pretty penny. The other was

obviously cheaper. The best one was reserved for Sundays, funerals, and very special occasions. Dad wore the other only when he went shopping in Cadillac or visited friends and relatives. There was no money to replace either until after World War II.

A fox-fur stole, complete with the head of the fox, beady black glass eyes, and metal spring-loaded toothless jaws, hung on my mother's side of the closet, probably bought about the time I was born. I recall being scared of its mouth. No doubt, somebody had fastened it to one of my fingers to help me understand its clasping powers, but my fears and imaginations impressed me more than my educator would ever realize. Mother's coats and hats and Dad's suits and overcoats were all of quality material, well cut, well fit, and totally paid for, but there were seldom replacements of either suits or coats as long as I can remember. New shirts, new dresses, and sometimes new shoes, but those items that were not totally necessary to replace were not replaced until the throes of the Depression had passed. Some items in the closet, like the fox stole, were never worn after the early 1930s. Perhaps they had gone out of style. Perhaps to wear them would belittle those who had never had such expensive luxuries in the first place. Perhaps the thought of what had once been and never again would be was too painful. Whatever the reason, the story the closet told was a story never allowed out of the house.

At the time Grandpa and Grandma moved onto the farm, prices of farm commodities were high. The price of potatoes was especially high. Grandpa produced as many as possible, and in less time than even he could believe he had paid for his farm, had built its complement of buildings, and was debt free. During the years of World War I and into the early and mid 1920s, the farmers of mid-Michigan prospered. Grandpa, and later Dad, could afford to keep the buildings in top condition.

Though neighbor Pluger was the first in the community to own and operate a car, Grandpa bought one a short year later, and, from then on, needed a new car every few years. A fancy pump organ stood in the dining room. An Atwater Kent battery-powered radio pulled in news and music from Detroit and Philadelphia in the evening.

Plain milk cows were not good enough for the Vredevoogd farm. Our cows were registered Holsteins. The farm machinery Grandpa and his boys purchased had to be the top of the line, not just a tool which would do the job. A riding plow supplemented the two walking plows. Three walking cultivators were not good enough, Grandpa needed a riding cultivator. The grain drill was the best International Harvester produced. The binder was the newest thing McCormick Deering patented. Each of the boys had his own Model T.

When my father took over the farm, he bought with it its full complement of cattle, tools, and machinery; he set his goals high. He could afford to. He decided the carbide system of

lighting was neither good enough nor modern enough for him and his bride. Besides, the generator smelled. So, he invested in a Delco electrical system. The heart of the apparatus was in a room in the southeast corner of the barn, henceforth and forever after called the engine room in honor of the three-horse, single-cylinder, water-cooled gasoline engine mounted in the center of the room. A belt connected its pulley with two pieces of equipment, the thirty-two-volt electrical generator and the cream separator.

Every morning and every evening, the gasoline engine huffed and puffed to produce the electrical current required to run the farm. Highest on the list of priorities in the use of the current was the De Laval milking machine, with its two shiny stainless-steel pails, each topped with a set of four teat-cups at the end of foot-long segments of rubber hose. An electric motor mounted on the west wall at the far end of the cow stable ran the vacuum pump for the milking machines. Surplus electricity produced during the running of the gasoline engine for an hour and a half each morning and evening was stored in the row of sixteen glass case batteries along the east wall of the engine room for lighting both the barn and the house.

Above and beyond electrical lighting, our house boasted of an electric toaster, an electric iron, and an electric washing machine. Monday was washday. On Monday morning, during the hours when the wash machine was in use, the engine ran to keep up with the machine's demand for electricity.

When the Delco plant was new, and when money was plentiful, all of the above were used at will. During the late twenties, about the time my memory began recording information, the Depression slammed its crushing force across the nation. The use of electricity for the toaster and the iron became history. Even before I was able to help with the milking of the cows, the use of the milking machine became history. Money had become tight. There were many things even the Vredevoogds no longer could afford.

Our barn boasted a litter carrier. Half of the neighbors also had litter carriers, but many others had never been able to afford such a luxury. A litter carrier was a device to take the drudgery out of the cleaning of the gutters in the cow stables. Its shape was that of a barrel cut in two vertically, rounded side down, and hung from an up-right metal beam on both ends. A metal beam connected the top ends of the uprights. Metal wheels with their axles through the ends of this connecting beam rolled on a metal cable or rod which began at the innermost end of the stables and ran to a post a hundred feet outside the stable door.

A block arrangement held the cable in a small hole above the stable door when the carrier was not in use. When in use, the door was opened, the block taken out, and the carrier ran freely through the doorway. Manure was forked and shoveled from the gutter into the tank

of the litter carrier. When the tank was filled, it was rolled out through the door and as far down the cable as desired. Once the site for the emptying of the carrier was determined, a quick flip of the locking mechanism freed the tank to turn over and drop its load on the storage pile where it remained until loaded in a spreader and brought to the fields as fertilizer.

Our litter carrier did not survive the depression. One by one pieces of the carrier broke.

Time came when the cost of replacement parts was more than we could afford. The litter carrier ceased to function. A wheelbarrow was cheaper. Cleaning stables took longer with a wheelbarrow. The work was more difficult, and the hazards more plentiful, but when there are no dollars for luxuries, even a litter carrier must go.

Before I was a year old, I was treated to a travel experience the like of which I would not equal for decades. The trip itself was an indication of the financial condition of the family. Grandpa had just bought another new car, a 1927 Chevrolet sedan, and thought the occasion a fine opportunity to take Grandma, my parents, and me to see his married sister in Hills, Minnesota. Since I was too young to have any memories of the trip, I must rely on what I have been told to pass its highlight on to you. First, on the way to Hills, something went wrong with the car, and it was necessary to drive into a Chevrolet sales somewhere in Illinois to have it repaired. While my folks were sitting in the waiting room, the owner of the establishment came in, introduced himself, and proceeded to take me out of my mother's arms and promptly disappeared into the rear of the building. He stayed out of sight long enough for my father to become a bit perturbed and for my mother to become frantic. Finally, he came back, accompanied by his wife.

The two of them apparently had become rather enamored with me and approached my parents with a business proposition. Since they had for many years wanted children, and since, according to the doctors, there was no way they could ever produce children, they made my parents the offer of any car in the showroom in exchange for me. Who knows how sincere the offer was, but my parents were horrified. My grandparents thought it was quite the joke. My father did make a tour of the showroom. The man sold cars much more valuable than Chevrolets. No doubt there was a mild degree of temptation involved, by my parents did the right thing. They rejected the offer. As soon as the Chevrolet was repaired, we drove off into the brilliant prairie sunlight toward Hills, Minnesota.

A second thing about the trip has been told me so often that I shall never be able to forget it. Apparently, after our arrival at the Haan farm, I rebelled at the idea of going to sleep when it was time for sleep. Was I afraid I might miss something important? Who knows? But by the time we had traveled through all of the hours and miles to Haan’s, I had become

so used to the noise and motion of the car that to make me fall asleep, my parents had to take me for a ride in the car.

Once I was in the car and the car was in motion, I dropped off within the first mile. Better a quick trip to nowhere than a bawling baby!

Because of the Depression and the financial crunch into which it squeezed the family, that long trip to Hills, Minnesota, was a memory to be recounted with more than simple nostalgia. It became in the minds of my parents a symbol of what had once been and what would never be again.

We lived in a tiny rural community. Everyone knew everyone else. Everyone evaluated everyone else. There was a pecking order invisible to strangers but keenly felt by the members of the community. Long years after the community had so changed that the pecking order was a forgotten piece of ancient history, and after most of those who had grown up in the community had moved from it into other communities, one of the boys I had grown up with remarked to me, “You don't realize how miserable you Vredevoogds made us when we were young. My father used your Grandpa and your Pa as the Joneses that we had to keep up with. You made us so mad!”

That statement would have made Grandpa angry and Dad laugh. Grandpa took pride in having things nice. He liked nothing better than to survey what he owned with the legitimate pride of accomplishment but without the necessity of comparing it with those around him, some of whom were more affluent than he, some less. My father knew that he didn't have the kind of money to in any way outdo his neighbors. Neither man had any desire to stand above his peers.

Our Religious Practices

The life of our family, like the lives of almost all of the Dutch families in our community, centered around our church to an extent that we did not realize at the time. Our practice of the Christian religion, particularly in accord with its Calvinistic limb and its Reformed branch, has been a vital part of the life of every member of the Nick Vredevoogd family. Calvinism may not be as tangible as the cows we milked or the potatoes we raised, but its workings have been thoroughly intertwined with the entire life of our families on the hills and in the hollows of Highland.

The practice of faith within a family or community is never a static thing. Thus, the way we practiced our faith during the early years of my memory was different from how we practiced it in the later years, but the substance has remained constant throughout the years. People today tend to believe that the place and function of religion is or ought to be bound up within the four walls of any given church building. Our faith blended what happened in church with the happenings in every aspect of life.

We were members of the Highland Christian Reformed Church, one congregation in a small denomination, headquartered in Grand Rapids, Michigan. For the most part, we followed the prescriptions of the denomination. This included infant baptism, the first step in our inclusion in our congregation and denomination. While I can't recall my own baptism, I do recall those of some of my younger brothers and sisters. If I am not mistaken, the same long white dress in which I was presented at the baptismal font was used for many of my siblings. While baptism was our official introduction to church, the fact of the importance of prayer and Bible reading within our home, taught us by our parents, was much more pertinent to our lives than Sunday worship. Each day began, as soon as we were old enough to be responsible, with a morning prayer offered from a kneeling position at the side of the bed before we dressed. Dad offered a prayer at the table before and after each of the three meals of the day. According to the teachings and traditions of the church, the father was the priest of the family, and therefore responsible for the religious welfare of the family, so it was his duty and privilege to lead the family in these six prayers.

The last prayer of the day was another prayer offered kneeling at the side of the bed before crawling between the blankets.

Children must be taught prayer. Getting the younger members of the family out of bed in the morning and putting them back into bed at night was Ma's business. Teaching them to memorize and recite their morning and evening prayers was one part of Dad's priestly responsibility which he gladly delegated to Ma. “Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray thee, Lord, my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray thee, Lord, my soul to take. For

Jesus sake, Amen," was the bed-time prayer of all the ten offspring of my parents, and it probably became the bed-time prayer of most of their children.

I was granted the privilege of privacy in prayer at an early age, a privilege I very much appreciated. As soon as I was old enough to pray a spontaneous prayer, I was expected to do so without saying it out loud to be monitored and edited before it was presented at the throne of grace. Nobody ever had opportunity to make fun of what I included in my prayers, nor did my mother ever relate to Grandma or to anyone else the contents of my prayers, be they ridiculous or sublime.

Bible reading was another given in our lives. Under normal circumstances, Dad read a chapter from the Bible three times a day, at the close of every meal (though for supper he substituted a story from a Bible Story book for a Bible chapter). Life on the family farm in the 30s and 40s allowed the entire family to be at home for at least two of those three meals, breakfast and supper. School age children were in school at dinner time. Even there, the Bible was read at noon devotions.

Dad was very conscientious. He determined to read the Bible from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation at mealtimes. A bookmark indicated how far he had progressed. Though the laws of Leviticus might not be of interest to anyone around the table, Dad read them chapter after chapter. Though the genealogies of the descendants of Abraham might be irrelevant to the lives of either reader or listener, Dad read faithfully the recorded names, either accurately or mangled beyond recognition. The proscribed reading of a-chapter-a-meal was seldom abridged.

There was that July morning he couldn't. We were eating breakfast when uncle Jerry drove in to personally relate the sad news that Aunt Jenny had died in childbirth in Holland during the previous night. That meal was not concluded with a Bible reading. In fact, though Dad tried valiantly to lead us in the Lord's Prayer rather than in his customary prayer at the conclusion of breakfast, he could not utter the petition, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." After minutes of sob-filled silence we scraped our chairs away from the table and tried to go about the morning rituals as best we could.

Sometimes less serious occasions called for a temporary suspension of the Bible reading routine, times when it was more important to get to the lake to fish than to have Bible reading. There were a few baseball games we had to see or play, and the chores had taken a bit longer than they were supposed to, so the only option was to drop the Bible reading from the agenda. Never the prayer, you understand, just the Bible reading.

There were other times when some drastic domestic conflict had put distance between my parents. An icy chill had descended on the household throughout the meal. Those times

Dad announced, “You kids pray by yourselves,” and bow his head. A long silence prevailed while we peeked through half shut eyes at each other, apprehensively wondering what was going to happen next and to whom. Sometimes there was not even an announcement, only a head-bowed, eyes-closed silence, broken when Dad slid his chair away from the table and disappeared noisily and hurriedly through the back door of the kitchen and Mom was left to deal with the questioning looks or the spoken questions we were stupid enough to raise.

Sunday was the most important of all the days of the week for the Vredevoogds. Sunday began on Saturday, the day of preparation. On Saturday, the entire house was given a considerable cleaning. The process began in the upstairs bedrooms, worked its way down the stairs and through the two downstairs bedrooms, the front-room parlor (only during the warmer months when the room was used), the dining room, the kitchen, and finally the back kitchen. All the floors were swept and dusted. The kitchen floor was mopped. The furniture was dusted, the black cast-iron range in the kitchen was blackened until it shone. The kitchen sink was scrubbed. The ivory keys of the pump organ in the dining room were washed clean of a week's accumulation of finger smudges.

Sunday shoes for each member of the family were taken from their respective closets, polished, and lined up along the wall near the kitchen sink for each person to return to his or her closet where he or she could easily find them in the morning. Clothing in need of patching and sewing was brought out and either mended properly or put away for future mending.

Sunday meant church services. It also meant fellowship, which always meant “company.” So, Saturday meant baking bread for the family and baking cake and cookies for company besides. The aroma of Saturday was a beautiful blending of the clean and the appetizing.

Because Sunday was to be a day of limited culinary activity, enough potatoes had to be peeled Saturday to tide the family over Sunday. Meat for Sunday had to be prepared as far as was possible on Saturday. Chicken was often on the menu for Sunday dinner. That broke the monotony of the home canned beef and pork we ate almost every weekday. Dad made the selection from one of the several roosters in the coop, a broody hen which had stopped laying, or of a hen with a crooked breastbone which would not bring a good price when it eventually was sold. He chopped off the bird's head, plucked it, and cleaned it. Grandma Westmaas considered Ma to be extremely spoiled in that department. Sunday chicken had always been her chore from coop to chopping block to pan. But Dad was only doing what he had seen his father do. Not all families did everything the same. To cook a chicken on Sunday would have been considered a breach of the purpose of Sunday. Besides it was impractical. The family would be in church Sunday morning, and to leave a chicken

simmering on the back of the wood-burning stove during church was decidedly not in the best interest of an assured dinner. Hence the aroma of chicken filled our kitchen on Saturday afternoons, working in each of us a drooling hunger which made the chicken taste twice as good as it had a right to taste come Sunday noon.

The Saturday chicken cooking process provided an added bonus. Late in the day, Ma lifted the cooked bird out of its juices and stored it in the coolest possible place until the morrow. Then she began the process of turning those juices into the best chicken soup in Michigan. A little rice, a few diced potatoes, a few slices of onion, a few noodles, and a pinch of this and a shake of that, add a little water, and the juices turned into a soup to rival Campbell's best.

From September to May, Saturday included yet another preparation for the Lord's Day. The young members of the congregation from the third grade through the age of fourteen were expected to attend Saturday afternoon catechism classes in the church basement. The classes were divided according to age brackets, three or four forty-five-minute sessions per afternoon, beginning at two o'clock with the youngest, and all taught by the minister.

Catechism is a method of instruction developed, so historians inform us, by Martin Luther, the noted Protestant reformer. It consisted of a summarization of Bible History and the basic doctrines of Christianity within the framework of questions and answers, published in booklets and distributed one to each student. The questions increased in difficulty to fit the increasing age of the student. During each class, the questions were asked by the minister, the answers provided from memory by the catechists. At least that was the theory.

In our home, we were subjected to the rigors of the memorization, to their extreme, by parents who were sufficiently interested in the spiritual welfare of their children to see to it that the answers were firmly embedded in the minds of their offspring before they were allowed to leave for class. Most of the time. There were parents in our congregation who were not as insistent as ours. We were allowed to take our catechism books (small and fragile paperbacks) to class with us, and more than one boy or girl who had not learned the lesson well got by, time and again, by reading the answers out of a hat or cap perched expertly on a knee. Sometimes, the delinquent one was caught in the act and had to stay after class until he or she had learned the answers. More often, the matter of the failure was brought up at the annual session of *huis bezoek* (family visiting), that annual occasion when an elder and the minister spent an hour or more with each family in the congregation in sequence to determine its spiritual wholeness.

Rev. Betten, the minister who taught me most of my catechism, insisted that besides the catechism book answers, we memorize a verse from one of the Psalms in the *Psalter*

Hymnal, the name given to the song book we used in our church. He liked music, though he could sing but poorly. He also insisted that the older catechism classes not only learn the words of a verse from a song, but that we sing it as part of the opening exercises of the class. This required accompaniment at the piano. A few of us could play, though our expertise was limited to only the easier of the tunes, and Rev. Betten's selection for memorization did not take into consideration the simplicity of the tune. There were times when we who played tried valiantly to learn to play the song we had to memorize, but its range of difficulty was beyond us. We did the best we could. We blushed with shame at the result. Rev. Betten never noticed nor understood our agony.

Catechism always meant an offering. During the years of the Depression, a nickel to put in the collection plate was the extreme of generosity. Many a nickel never made it to church.

Ouwinga's store was across the road. The store sold a variety of candies. Many items were priced at a penny a piece. Candy bars cost a whole nickel. The daring, the deprived, the less than one-hundred-per-cent truthful, often managed to split nickels on the way to catechism, leaving one or two pennies of it in the Ouwinga till. With sweet fingers and satisfied lips, we blessed the collection plate with what was left. Sometimes the whole nickel stayed in the store and the *Babe Ruth*, *Butterfinger*, *Milky Way*, or *Red Sails* candy bar went to catechism in the stomach of a catechist.

For us boys, catechism included the use of the horse barns, built as shelter for the horses used to transport members of the congregation to church before the advent of the auto. When I was young, few people relied on horses for transportation except during winter, when roads were impassable for cars. They were always empty of animals on Saturday.

Girls were never tolerated inside the sliding doors of the horse barns. Boys tried to get to catechism fifteen or twenty minutes before class was called to session to spend time in their upper reaches, playing a game of tag on the wooden cross-pinnings under the roof of the barn. A person was in the game only so long as he was either walking on the one-by-fours or traversing them hand over hand. To drop to the floor was to have called a personal time-out. A person came to be “it” if, when he came through the door, everyone inside called out, “He's it!” Mob psychology ruled. There was no recourse. Once you were pronounced “it,” you had to get up on those flimsy beams and chase the others until you tagged one, and the “it” was transferred to him, or until a fresh candidate slid through the opening of the sliding doors and some pseudo leader called “He’s it!”

The beams were rough. Slivers were common, but we knew we had time to pick them out of callused fingers during class. The game was brutal for those who had a fear of heights, though the eight feet from the beam to the ground could never be considered a significant

height. Perhaps there was more a fear of falling than of injury in landing. The game was demanding. On the coldest winter day, we who played came out of the barn soaked with sweat.

Sunday was officially ushered in at six o'clock Saturday night, when the church bell was rung for a full minute to give everyone within its range opportunity to check their clocks against “church time.” Though Saturday supper had yet to be eaten, and though the cows had yet to be milked after supper, the stage was set at six o'clock for the peace of Sunday morning.

Saturday night chores, in so far as was possible, were doubled. Twice as much hay as usual was thrown from the mow, twice as much straw was slid down for bedding, twice as much silage was dropped into the chute, all to make the amount of work done on Sunday as little as possible.

The dawn of Sunday spread a special glow of peace over the hills and hollows of Highland. Barn chores were done as usual. Breakfast was served at the usual hour, but it was different. Nobody was in a hurry. Church didn't begin until nine, so there was plenty time to get ready. On the table, in honor of the day, boxes of Corn Flakes and Bran Flakes replaced the steaming kettle of hot oatmeal or wheat cereal. A boiled egg for each was a part of the Sunday breakfast menu, and Dad and Mom both enjoyed a second cup of coffee. After breakfast, Dad occasionally helped with dishes. When they were done, everybody changed into Sunday clothes, the best clothes we had at the time. When Ma put on her Sunday hat, the family was totally ready for the church service.

Our family was never early to church. Some were there at the eight-thirty bell, but we never arrived before ten to nine, often later. Roads permitting, we took our car to church. It was always one of the last ones in the parking lot. The pew we sat in was near the front, always on the left, outside aisle. Dad led the family to its pew. Since I was the oldest child in the family, I followed him, then came whoever of my brothers and sisters were to worship with us on any given day, and finally my mother. Dad stood along side and ahead of the end of the pew into which he ushered us, until all of us were seated then he sat down. All the while he was leading us down the aisle and waiting for us to take our respective places on the bench, he held his hat in his right hand at chest height. As soon as he sat down he placed his hat on the floor of the aisle, leaning it on one edge of its brim, the other edge of the brim against the side of the bench. Jackets and overcoats might be left hanging on the hooks in the basement or draped over the railing at the basement steps, but a man's hat was too precious to leave unattended.

Our worship services always lasted at least an hour and a half. They began with a five-minute organ prelude at five minutes to nine, minutes not included in the hour and a half. Though our church was comparatively small, it did have an excellent, though small, Moller pipe organ, built in 1927, boasting pneumatic rather than mechanical controls. Not all of the organists of our congregation were able to do the organ justice, though some played very well indeed. The organ was, and is today, a jewel of an instrument.

As I recall, there was not much variation within the framework of our worship services. They officially began when the minister entered the sanctuary from the rear and walked the length of the center aisle, followed by the four elders and the four deacons who sat in the reserved pew next to the very front pew on the left side of the sanctuary. As this consistory filed into their pew, the minister stood at floor level, below the four steps of the platform, bowed his head, and silently asked God to bless the service. Upon finishing the prayer, he mounted the few steps to the platform, took his place behind the pulpit, opened the large pulpit Bible, then sat in the large straight-back padded chair to wait for the organist to finish the prelude.

In our church, as in most churches of the day, the console of the organ was located behind the pulpit on the rear of the platform. Thus, the only way the organist could see the minister on the platform was by way of the mirror on the organ above the organist's head, slanted to provide a rear view of the minister's head. Once the man sat down the organist could not see that he was there. More than once an organist failed to notice the minister's presence and the prelude continued until the understanding minister cleared his throat or quietly coughed to notify the organist that he had indeed arrived.

The minister announced the praise hymn, the audience rose to join in singing, led by the organ. Our congregation sang well. The hard plastered walls reverberated the vocalizations of the singers exceptionally well, producing warm harmonics and overtones which blended to make a maximum product from a minimum number of singers.

No other person in the congregation had a voice which approached in volume or in quality that of Uncle Adam Westmaas' voice. He knew music quite well, and he had the gift of a resonant tonal quality which was both unique and pleasant. The congregation depended on him to lead in the singing from whatever pew he occupied. Not that others couldn't or didn't sing well. They did! But Uncle Adam was the leader of the singing school, from which weekly exercises a choir would eventually come, and people simply him to lead the congregational singing.

After the conclusion of the song, while the congregation still stood, the minister pronounced God's greeting and blessing, then the congregation sat. Next, the minister read

the ten commandments. Not a week went by that the ten commandments were not read. And always by the minister. No one questioned that the ten commandments ought to be read weekly. It was good for us to hear them! A song of confession followed, usually a somber song, and if the last verse of the song contained something of the joy of the forgiveness of sins committed, the minister would usually announce that we would sing all the verses except the last verse. Confession, it seemed, was not a time for joy!

Announcements of important information followed that somber song. They told of illness, births, deaths, professions of faith, marriages, and of church functions to be held in the near future. These were the oral church bulletins before the days of the prolific use of paper and print. The congregation paid avid attention to the minister as he read and spoke these communications affecting the lives of our people, closer attention than they paid to the sermon which would shortly follow.

The congregational prayer led by the minister followed. He began by praising God for his being and his goodness, spoke of his greatness and his holiness, then spoke of the sins of the people in the congregation, the sins of the community, the sins of the denomination, the sins of the nation, and then went on to ask a blessing on each of the above mentioned. During this ten-minute prayer session, the consistory members in the second pew from the front stood. This is the way things were done in the Christian Reformed Church. No one knew why the consistory should stand during the “long prayer,” but it had always been done that way.

Another song followed the long prayer, during which the deacons passed the collection plate back and forth through the pews. As part of our instruction in the art of Christian giving, each child had been given money to put into the plate when it passed us. During the depression years, the offerings were noisy. The pennies and nickels dropped into wooden plates echoed. As financial conditions improved, the offerings became more silent.

The offering was followed by the sermon, based on a passage from the Bible, augmented by a question and answer from the Heidelberg Catechism. Customarily, the sermon had three points. What always amazed me was that the first point was certain to be much longer than the second, which was still considerably longer than the third. One could be assured that the sermon was all but concluded when the minister began his third point. Since that third point was the application of the sermon, we usually were shortchanged in that department. Perhaps the practice of a short application was an overreaction to the lengthy altar calls concluding the sermons of our fundamentalist friends, a practice frowned upon by our denomination.

During the sermons, we were allowed to eat peppermints. Never did we go to church without them. When I was very young, my tender mouth would tolerate only pink or brown peppermints. The white ones had too much zing. It wasn't until I got out of knickers and into long pants that my tastes changed. Peppermints were part of our weekly grocery purchases. Ma stored them in a little brown paper sack on the third shelf of the first door of the kitchen cupboards. Only on Sunday, before church, were each of us allowed to take three. One peppermint per sermon point was the approved rate of consumption.

The conclusion of the service seemed always to be hurried. After the *Amen* of the sermon, the minister offered an Applicatory prayer, then announced the closing song. How good it felt to stand and to sing. After the song, the minister pronounced the Benediction. The congregation then automatically and enthusiastically joined in singing Old Hundredth, the morning doxology. The minister moved from behind the pulpit, stepped down the steps of the platform, and stood while the organ played softly. Meanwhile the consistory members filed out of their pew, walked to the minister and shook his hand as they moved toward the exit at the front of the church. That is, they shook his hand if in all good conscience they agreed with what the minister had said in his sermon. It was rare that this ritual was not automatic.

I do recall one Sunday morning when an elder did not agree with the minister and refused to shake his hand. A cold chill rippled down the pews from the front to the back of the sanctuary. The organ kept playing softly, the people resumed their seats. Parents pushed puzzled children back down on the pews, children began asking questions but received only curt, quiet non-answers in reply. The minister, the offended elder, and the entire consistory filed out and into the basement consistory room, where the disagreement was verbalized, discussed, and in this case, resolved. The five minutes necessary for resolution seemed an eternity. Finally, the vice president of the consistory walked in through the front door and dismissed the congregation. The organist immediately broke into the postlude, and the suspended life of the congregation resumed animation. Later, if the consistory should deem it wise, the details of the difference would be announced.

After the Sunday morning services, the congregation loitered at the bottom of the cement steps outside the south and main entrance to the sanctuary. The men caught up on the smoking they had been denied for nearly two hours, and everyone caught up on the happenings of the long week. The weather determined how many smokes were enjoyed and how many happenings were recounted and in what detail. Cold and rain drove people to their cars early. Balmy summer weather invited lengthy conversations.

Adolescents chose the long hours of Sunday noon to socialize. Our custom was to invite friends over for Sunday noon dinner or to be invited over by friends. Hardly a Sunday noon went by during my last four years in grade school and beyond that I did not either have one of my fellow students over or go to one of their homes. As my younger siblings grew up, they continued the practice. Some Sunday noons, our table was crowded. On others, there were vacant chairs. Though, for nine months out of the year, we saw our friends six days out of seven, there was an added dimension of friendship experienced by having them in our home and by being invited to their homes.

For the Vredevoogd family, Sundays were never Sabbaths. Some Christian parents place severe limitations on the activities allowed their families on Sundays. For them, Sundays were days of prohibitions; stiff days, so filled with Bible reading and meditation that the joys of the Day of Rest all but disappeared. A few Highland families imposed more restrictions on their offspring than those my parents placed on us, but not many. We enjoyed our Sundays. When we had company over for Sunday dinner, we had fun. There were animals, crops, buildings, and machinery on our farm to compare with what the company had on theirs. In winter, there was sliding and skiing and tobogganing. Company never took clothes other than their Sunday best which they wore to church, so if we decided to go sliding down the hill behind the house, we shared our outdoor clothing with the company. There was always another overall and shirt, always another sweater and barn coat, and usually there was a pair of boots or “rubbers” to slip on, even if borrowed from some other member of the family. The hours between our eleven o'clock return from the morning service and the two o'clock afternoon service were crammed with things to do.

During the warmer months of summer, ball playing was the most frequent Sunday noon activity. If there were only two or three of us boys around, old enough and big enough to hustle a softball or baseball, we shared gloves and played catch or batted flies. If we had enough boy power, we indulged in a game of “work-up” with a batter, a pitcher, perhaps a catcher, and one, two or three people in the field. We made a ball diamond in the open areas between the house and the barn and invented rules as necessity demanded, but we played ball and we had fun.

My sister Gert had her friends over on Sunday noon, too, but girls were included in boys' activities only when bodies were needed to make up a game of work-up. They never went to the barn to see the cows. They might possibly go sliding in the winter, but most of the time they simply said it was too cold and found a bedroom which provided a sheltered haven for their “girl talk” or in the warmer months they sat on the sunny steps of the front porch, holding private conversations between hand-shielded mouths, conversations punctuated

by the kinds of giggles with which adolescent females have made adolescent males nervous since day one.

Church services at two o'clock on Sunday afternoon were largely a repeat performance of the morning service, though the sermon set a different tone. The minister was free to pick and choose his own topic, whatever he decided was good for the congregation at the time, usually less doctrinal and more applicable to life as it was lived in Highland. Parishioners tended to nap during the afternoon service more often than in the morning service for two reasons. The first was the fact of Sunday dinner. The second was the confines of a building. The latter bothered the men more than the women. How difficult it was for a man who spent almost all day, every day, out of doors in the "fresh air" to sit inside for any length of time without becoming sleepy. To passively listen to a man speak was an invitation to doze, though the subject was ever so important and though the speaker was a respected minister. The strongest white peppermints could not prevent weak flesh from overcoming willing spirits.

Down the pew from controlling parents, where a young family member sat with the friend invited over for Sunday dinner, much went on which was not worshipful. Though whispering was taboo, other forms of communication were substituted freely and effectively. A poorly concealed snicker sometimes divulged what was intended to be secretive dialogue, followed by a sharp elbow in the ribs passed down in wave motion from an adult at the end of the pew to the offenders. If the offense was serious enough, a parent reached across a body or two and pinched the offending offspring. The result was usually a temporary cessation of the disturbance, without regrets, without repentance.

After the afternoon service, Sunday School was held, but only in the summer when there was neither catechism nor day school, when children's brains weren't already being loaded to the point of overflow. The amount we learned was determined not by competitive demands on our brain power as much as by other factors. The heat inside the building in the middle of a summer afternoon took its toll, and the environment was an extremely poor learning environment. Classes were determined by ages. The rooms in the basement of the church were reserved for the two youngest classes. The plywood divider which made two rooms out of one large room did nothing to keep the sound of the one class from invading the other. The sanctuary itself was divided into six sections without benefit of partitions. Two classes met in the back comers on either side of the aisle, two half-way from the back to the front on either side, and two in the front corners in short pews which faced each other across the platform. Adolescent boys sat in the pews on the west side, adolescent girls on the east, facing each other across the no man's land of the platform.

Students in the various parts of the sanctuary were expected to learn from their own teacher, while their ear drums were being assaulted by the voices of five teachers other than their own, as each tried to capture the attention of the students in his or her own class. Facing each other across the platform were two groups of adolescents beginning to develop an interest in each other of a nature they had never before experienced in their lives. Verbal communication between the two groups was impossible, but eye contact worked marvels. Such biologically impelled diversion was more than most teachers could overcome no matter how interesting or important the subject matter.

Add to those complications the facts that most of the students had sat through two sermons, had eaten a dinner half again as large as they ate any other day of the week, had played their hearts out during the noon hour, and were now confronted with farmers or housewives with wonderful intentions, but whose teaching skills were limited to whatever native ability they were born with, the marvel is that we learned anything in Sunday School. But we did. We may have caught flies, enticing them to walk on the tips of a finger and a thumb wetted with peppermint juice until a little squeeze brought their feet into the trap and eventually brought them to their death. We may have lost ourselves in the recesses of a pair of eyes of the opposite sex on the other side of the platform, we may have had the "wiggle-itis" caused by round bottoms planted on flat wooden pew seats, but we did learn. The sincerity of those plain people who tried to teach us communicated to us plain "kids" a distinct variety of truth that professional teachers seldom could have communicated.

Since our Sundays were designed to be different from other days of the week, whenever possible, the Sunday School students were given a most welcome ride home, quite a contrast to the six-day-a-week walk down the same roads. Parents either waited, chatting in the shade of the trees on two sides of the parking lot or returned to the church to chauffeur their youngsters home.

While we young Vredevoogds were in Sunday School during the summer months, and after church in the afternoon during the rest of the year, tea time was observed at our home, the time reserved for Grandpa and Grandma Vredevoogd. Our home boasted a "carpeted" living room or parlor used only for special occasions. Tea time on Sunday was a special occasion. Grandpa sat and smoked a cigar in the rocker in the northeast comer of the room, and Grandma sat in the rocker in the southeast comer of the room. Dad sat and smoked his cigar on a straight chair across from Grandpa, Ma sat on either a straight chair or on the sofa across from Grandma.

The relationship between my parents and my father's parents had never been wonderful. As time passed, that relationship deteriorated, but never to the degree that they could not smoke and drink tea together on a Sunday afternoon. Knowing what I now know about the

intricacies of their strained relationship, I conclude it took a remarkable exercise in diplomacy on the part of both parties to make the weekly tea time possible. Looking back on those afternoons, I can now pick out unusual aspects of the practice. For instance, all other men who came to visit during the growing season were given a tour of the barn and farm, weather permitting. We boys always trailed along on all tours given the visitors. I have no recollection of ever walking the two-track into the fields with Grandpa and Dad at any time. I do not recall that my father ever invited him on such a tour.

Grandma was never invited farther into the house than the kitchen, dining room, and living room. Though this had been her house for many years, its recesses were no longer available to her. Perhaps all this was for the good. Perhaps these limitations spared my grandparents the pain of seeing what the ravages of time, the presence of young children, and the penury of the Depression had done and was doing to the buildings and land they had taken such care of and had such pride in. Perhaps there were less honorable reasons for the restrictions.

After tea time came chores and supper. Chores allowed few deviations from those of the other six days of the week. We had thrown down extra hay and extra silage on Saturday. We used that instead of throwing down fresh on Sunday. If something broke and the fixing could wait until Monday, well and good. If it had to be fixed, the better the day the better the deed. Supper was slim on Sunday nights. Dinner had been too big. Cake, cookies and tea had been served in the afternoon, so it was canned fruit and sandwiches for supper.

Sunday was not yet over when the sun went down, the supper table cleared, the dishes washed, and the milking done. Sunday nights were reserved for visiting. Ma had made the arrangements either by phone earlier in the week or at church after the services. Visiting involved whole families of relatives or of selected fellow members of our church whose families were close to ours in age. Those Sunday night visits were riots. Eight o'clock was the appointed hour for the company to arrive. Immediately the two sets of offspring were off to play their games, outdoors when the season and weather permitted, inside both house and barn at all other times. Hide and Seek and a variety of tag games were a must. “Tricks” like “Lightning Through a Coat Sleeve,” in which one unfortunate brother or sister member was the “fall guy,” were the expected, though not on the approved, list. “Hide the Thimble” was an indoor favorite. Shouts of, “You're hot,” or “you're cold,” indicated that the seekers of the hidden thimble were either close to it or far from it. Oh, the screams when the thimble was finally discovered!

When interest in games diminished, there were other activities to take their place. The old generator from a wall telephone gone wrong provided exciting entertainment as long as there was a gullible soul to grab one hand on each wire from the terminals and test how much electricity a body could tolerate. At the head of the stairs, was the door of the dark, scary attic from which to jump out at unsuspecting traipsers of the steps. How the scared ones ever scrambled safely down the steep stairs is a mystery.

When the level of noise in the house rose above adult tolerance, there was the hay mow to climb up, and from which to slide down onto a mound of hay on the barn floor. And there was the barn floor itself, on which to wrestle or just raise whoopy. What rare, wild times we had when Harry Ellens, his wife Minnie, and their family came over, or Ed and Winnie Dracht with their brood, or the Harry Heukers, or the Abe Kuipers.

Such evenings were brought to a slow but certain conclusion at nine-thirty, the scheduled hour for another round of food and drink. There were cake and cookies, baked for the occasion with coffee or tea for the adults, and Kool Aid for the kids. Youngsters with sweat matted hair horned in on the call from all points of the compass. The process of the lunch took at least a half hour and usually ended when the visiting mother looked at the clock, apologized for leaving before the coffee or tea cups were cold, but insisted that tomorrow was coming and that since it was either school or work in which she and hers would be involved early in the morning, it was now high time to go home.

What had the mature foursome in the living room been doing all the while their offspring indulged in the romantics of childhood and youth? An objective observer would have reported that they had spent the evening talking, which was the truth. However, the term “talking” begs definition. Their talking covered every iota of the more or less current personal information concerning those people known to the foursome, running the gamut from pregnancies to punctiliousness. As a matter of course, the two sermons of the day were commented on and/or discussed at length, depending upon how hard they had struck upon the consciousness of the four gathered people. The ministry of the current pastor and that of neighboring pastors were evaluated in depth. The new articles of clothing observed within the last month worn by the members of the congregation were duly noted. Any purchase of a new or used auto, farm equipment, or household appliance within the congregation or their relatives was discussed. If the visit was within the nine months of the school year, the two members of the faculty of the local Christian School were provided with detailed verbal evaluations in absentia. Crops and markets were discussed at length, particularly the prices of cream, milk, eggs, and potatoes. An evaluation of state and national politics was good for fifteen minutes of conversation on any Sunday evening, and, with the advent of the radio, solutions to international problems were offered to the

Secretary of State presently in office, also in absentia. And when the foursome ran out of actualities, if time permitted, deeper and more speculative topics were broached.

Sixteen years was the cut-off age for participation in the Sunday evening visiting. The Young People's Society at church admitted into its membership all of the youth of the church between sixteen and when they either married or moved out of the community. It met on Sunday night at eight in the church basement. At sixteen, we were all licensed drivers, so whether we walked to Young Peoples or drove the car was a matter of the availability of the vehicle. If the family car was needed for a visiting date, young people either walked or make arrangements for riding with someone who did have the privilege of a family car.

The Young People's Society meeting was led by the minister of the congregation. There was singing and a Bible lesson, usually something of a mini-sermon. There were special reports, known to us as “essays,” presented by a scheduled member on a scheduled topic which might or might not be of interest to the members in general. There was a collection, and there was the closing prayer. Then there was the exodus.

After the exodus, groups of girls began walking the roads, either toward their own or someone else's home. After a long five minutes the young men, singly or in pairs, started the engines of their cars and began a casual pursuit of the young ladies. The purpose of the pursuit was to give the young man in his car opportunity to invite the girl of his choice to accept a ride to her home in the young man's car, though the ride would never be direct. The couple or couples thus paired in the car might decide to find some lonely place to park and chat for a while. Thus, the young men were able to enjoy the company of the young ladies for a couple of hours, after which the young ladies would eventually be brought home and the good nights said.

The custom had begun before the days of the telephone, when it would have been impossible to arrange dates by electronic communication, and long before the days of the auto. Horses and buggies were much better suited than cars to this “Dutch Parade,” as the procession down the road was called, but we did the best we could with what we had. It was important to us that a custom begun by parents be passed on to the next generations in as close to the original condition as was possible.

Often young men rode in the Dutch Parade two to a car. This presented an awkward situation when one of the fellows would ask a girl for the honor of her presence for the evening and she agreed, but when the second swain asked his choice, she turned him down. Not daunted, they would drive on and ask another and probably still another, but it happened that those asked on the second and third attempts sensed that they were

playing second or third fiddle. Even though, under other circumstances, she might have agreed to the ride, pride insisted she now decline.

When all of the possibilities had been eliminated in the Highland Dutch Parade, there were still other options open. The Lucas Dutch Parade usually began at least ten minutes later than did the Highland Parade. Rev. Betten in Highland always let his Young People's Society out on time. He had two or three of his own offspring in the Society and they would not tolerate overtime. Rev. Schaver in Lucas also had a couple of his offspring in his Young People's Society, but his philosophy insisted that, regardless of their desires, he was master not only of the Society but of his own domicile. Therefore, we could depend on it that, when we had run the gamut of the Highland girls, there would still be time to rush to Lucas and get in on at least a part of their Dutch Parade. Besides, the girls of Lucas had an attraction for us that the Highland girls did not have, an attraction known as “the grass on the other side of the fence.”

Of course, the prospect of one girl between two swains was neither proper nor desired. Usually, the girl would insist on being taken home immediately, or the unlucky guy would offer to be let off at his doorstep, though it did happen that the trio endured the evening hours under shared but strained circumstances.

Not every Sunday was exactly the same. Nor did every family practice a routine exactly as did ours. But, in our community, more things were alike than different. For instance, not everyone always went to church twice a Sunday. A pregnant woman was never seen in church (or anywhere else, for that matter) after four or five months, when her body began to advertise her pregnancy, a fact which might distract people from their worship or cause innocent children to ask embarrassing questions. After a child was born, he or she was taken to church for baptism, but did not go to church again until taught proper decorum. This might take six months for some children, or it might take six years for others. Since a child could not stay at home alone, some member (or members) of the family were destined to stay home with the child until the child would sit still and be quiet in church.

This often meant that a young couple did not worship together in church for a period of several years, since one or the other had to (or chose to) stay home and take care of the series of babies born into the family. In most families, the older children, as soon as they could be trusted, played the role of pseudo-parent. In our family, we older children often fought over whose tum it was to stay home to take care of the younger ones, especially after we became old enough to recognize how tedious the sermons and the service had become to us. Sometimes, we lost out to Dad, who decided that, on this particular Sunday afternoon, it was his tum to sit the baby.

During the hottest of the summer months, we had a baby-sitting arrangement built around the fact of Sunday School. On those Sunday afternoons, we packed the entire family, including the baby, a couple of blankets, the diaper bag, and a baby bottle or two, into the car. Dad saw to it that we got there early enough to park under one of the several trees on the parking lot. The lucky one whose tum it was to sit the baby could do so in the great out of doors on the grass under the shade trees. Since the windows of the church were always open in a summer Sunday service, we could hear parts of the service, especially the congregational singing. Usually, there was more than one baby being sat at a time, so we sitters could visit while we sat. When the service was over, Ma took charge of the baby and whoever sat was free to join the Sunday School session.

During the winters prior to 1940, our roads were not plowed on a regular basis, often not at all. If our roads were blocked, we either walked to church or rode in a cutter or sleigh. Before the advent of the auto, two church barns had been a most important part of the church property. Each team had its reserved stall. Part of the duties of the janitor of the church included the removing of the manure from the stables during the course of the week. For the privilege, he could apply the manure to his own garden.

By the time I came on the scene, the larger of the two barns had been boarded up and the smaller of the two was used only during the winter months. Since not every family needed or desired to take a team and sleigh, only about fifteen teams were lodged in the small barn. Our family was among those who chose to walk to church during the winter. The distance to church was a scant mile and a half. All of us, including my mother, when she was not pregnant enough to have to stay home, were capable of walking. If the weather turned stormy or too cold to walk, it was always possible to catch a sleigh ride with one of the neighbors who lived farther from church than we did.

No one who has not had the experience can explain how cozy comfortable is the inside of the box of a sleigh when the winds are whipping the snow into a white frenzy. The straw in the bottom of the box provided a soft seat. The blankets stretched tight over the top of the box kept the snow out. The combined body heat of those inside the box brought the temperature at least five degrees higher than the temperature outside. As accompaniment to the drama of the ride was the constant light jingle of sleigh bells attached to the harnesses of the horses only in winter. The Dutch term for such luxury and comfort is *gezellig*, and we who rode the sleighs knew the meaning of the word firsthand.

Other aspects of our church life included such important institutions as the Men's Society, which met every Tuesday, from the first of November to the last of March. Faithfully at two o'clock the men of our congregation met to be instructed by our pastor in things theologically deep enough to exclude women from their consideration. A publication

known as the Federation Messenger was the approved study material. It was an in-depth study of one of the books of the Bible, so infinitesimally dissected that the study of any of the smallest of the books of the Bible would last a year. Several years were required for a book such as Romans. The lesson was introduced either by the pastor of by a worthy member of the Society, after which a discussion was held by those who wished to contribute or to ask a question. Often the discussions became heated, particularly when they involved the favorite topics of the Reformed community, such as election and reprobation, grace versus works, common grace versus special grace, and of course, the millennium.

Since Men's Society kept until 4 o'clock, and since school kept until the same hour, it was quite usual for us who were in grade school to walk home with the men from Men's Society, including our own fathers. Many such walks provided a continuation of the discussions begun within the walls of the church basement. On one such occasion I received my introduction into the minutely discerned differences between infra- and supra-lapsarianism. My admiration of the intelligence of my own father, grandfather, and men such as Corneal Bos and Abe Kuiper who tossed those formidable terms back and forth with the same ease as they would handle a sixty-pound crate of potatoes grew with each walk after a session of Men's Society.

The ladies had their tum to meet on Wednesday afternoons, but their meetings were not limited to the fraction of the year the men met. Ladies Aid was held from the middle of September until the end of May. The pastor led the portion of the meeting given to the study of the Bible, though the mental challenge for him must not have been nearly as great as was the lesson for the men. The women's lessons seldom attained more difficulty than a study of the three missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. At the conclusion of the lesson, the pastor left, and the ladies occupied themselves with a light lunch and the manufacture of articles of cloth and clothing to be auctioned off after the last session to the entire congregation. The ladies of Highland embroidered pillowcases, knitted mittens, caps, and stockings, crocheted and tatted doilies and other fancy products, and in some years made a quilt or two. While the ladies worked, they discussed the consequential happenings of the community, and happenings not so consequential. Attendance was kept high by the fear of what the ladies present might say about ladies absent. However, pregnant women who no longer attended worship services on Sunday were not expected to go to Ladies Aid. My mother was not often in attendance at the Highland Ladies Aid. An auction concluded the Ladies Aid season. The sales were held in the afternoon. We got out of school early so we could entertain the people present with a song or two and earn a piece of cake and then stay for the rest of the sale. Barney Vander Veen was the auctioneer. Barney had a humorous bent with a magnificent memory of the jokes he heard or read. After Barney had

harangued the last nickel out of a series of items, he would simply have to stop a minute and tell a story. Barney had one problem. His sense of whether a story was appropriate for a church basement or a cattle barn was less than sharp. Since the volume of laughter at the conclusion of any story did not depend on its propriety, he never learned which kind of story to use where. He never realized that the laughter in the one case said, “Barney, that was a right good story,” and in the other case, “Barney, Barney, you should have kept that story in the barn.” Through the years, Barney helped the Ladies Aid to take in a lot of money, money sent to the denominational headquarters to be used for foreign missions. Perhaps in this case the end justified many means.

As a denomination, with the exception of a few congregations in the west whose origins were more German, the language of worship from its inception was the Holland language, better known as Dutch. When my grandparents left Grand Rapids for the north woods, they worshipped with the Lucas congregation. All of the worship services were conducted in Dutch. In 1914, my grandfather and others who lived on the southern fringe of the Lucas congregation decided that, in the best interest of themselves and their posterity, a new congregation be formed south of the Osceola-Missaukee County line. A site was chosen on the intersection of what is now known as the Park Lake Road and 90th Ave. and called Highland Comers. Services were conducted in Dutch until 1924 when the congregation reluctantly allowed one or two English services a month. Slowly, English was allowed to take over. By the time I was fifteen and playing the organ for worship services, there remained only two Dutch services per month. Though I understood little of the language, it was my responsibility to play for those services. I did make a few errors, particularly when our own minister was away and we had a visiting pastor, and I was not provided with the *Psalter* song numbers in advance.

Our parents insisted that we children attend all of the services, even though we could not understand Dutch. Our appreciation for the language was certainly not enhanced by the mandatory church attendance of the day, and I'm certain that there were some who gained a permanent dislike for church in general through the practice. Some who endured did retain a fond and sentimental feeling for the Dutch Psalms and the extremely slow meter in which they were sung. Those who babysat out of doors were the more ready to volunteer their services when Dutch services were scheduled. The Psalms sounded even better from the distance of the trees along the road.

As infants, we had been baptized and thus were listed on our church rolls. Full and active membership came about only when a baptized member made his or her Profession of Faith before the consistory. Traditionally, this happened when a person was in their late teens and before marriage. Regrettably, too many such professions were but formalities

necessary that an adult might participate in the business of the congregation, that is, the establishment of the annual budget (to which the full member was expected and all but required to pay his or her fair share) and the selection of elders, deacons, and pastors.

At the time I became of “the age of discretion,” most young people left Highland to work in Grand Rapids. This parting was especially poignant for the parents who were left behind, parents who were in the process losing direct control of the lives of their kids. How comforting for them to hear the profession of their sons and daughters before they left home!

Truthfully, the seriousness of leaving home was incentive enough for many a maturing youth to think seriously enough about life to make a dedicated commitment to the faith in which they had been born and baptized. Too often, Profession of Faith was but a ritual. The actual grasping of salvation offered didn't come until later. Sometimes it failed to come, and the faith of the matured person withered and died.

The profession itself was conducted by either the minister or by the vice-president of the consistory. The professions were often preceded by pre-profession classes, refresher courses in the catechism, to make sure that the young adult actually knew what he or she was professing. Singly, or in mass with the pre-confession class, the individuals met with the elders and deacons. Their knowledge of the catechism was assured by the questions asked by the man in charge. The sincerity of the confession was judged by the questions asked by other members of the body. If the person did not answer to the satisfaction of the questioners, the profession was disallowed and the applicant was asked to study more intensely or to think more seriously about what the profession meant. This seldom happened, though some ministers were stricter than others about the knowledge of the church doctrine of the applicant. Usually, after the questioning was finished, the applicant was asked to leave the room while the consistory evaluated the answers given and approved the profession, whereupon the applicant was called back to the session and told of the approval. A date was then set for the public Profession of Faith to be conducted within a worship service in the near future, done according to a prescribed form found in the back of the denominational hymnal. Before the applicant was allowed to leave the consistory room, he or she was thoroughly admonished not to indulge in the three specific activities banned by the denomination: card playing, movie attendance, and dancing.

Applicants were usually more nervous than they ought to have been when they came before the consistory, especially the young ladies. The fact that a single female, or perhaps two or three, were seated in a room with eight or nine males, all older than she or her parents, all figures of wisdom, knowledge, and authority, was cause enough for nervousness. What none of the young people realized at the time of their profession was

that all of the men present were eager to have the applicants give a good account of themselves and their faith, that they were rooting for them, and that they were not only willing to, but often did give them whatever help they needed to pass the test.

Such was the practice of the religious-spiritual background of our lives. Surely there was much in our histories which could have been improved upon. Much which went for spiritual was no more than social. On the other hand, much which we saw as social had spiritual undertones. The religious views and practices of our parents and grandparents were always in process, and if we should ever think that we have evolved to the point where our views and practices have arrived, we should think again. What is important to those of us who were raised on the hills and in the hollows of Highland during the years of the family farm is the fact that, with few exceptions, we do yet walk in the faith of our fathers and mothers, and that faith, though certainly far from perfect, is important enough to us that we are purposefully passing it down to the next generations.

Transition

Transitions are usually painful and often unintentional. For the Vredevoogd family, the transition from horse power to mechanical power just happened, though by slow and painful stages.

I was twelve when the change began. While I, a normal growing boy, couldn't wait for another year to come and go so I would finally grow up, each passing year was another loss in the battle against time for our three Percherons. Poor old Prince, his black coat sprinkled with white hairs, had colic so often and so severely that we felt sorry for him, especially during winter when he wasn't asked to work enough to do to keep his digestive system working properly. When his system did plug, Dad mixed a heavy dose of Epson Salts, the same medication he took when in similar straits, poured a pint of it into an old brown beer bottle, climbed into the stall beside Prince, put one foot on the manger and the other on the side of the stall, and wedged his toes into the gaps between the boards. From that position he raised Prince's nose above his ears, slipped the neck of the beer bottle into his mouth, and let the liquid gurgle down his throat. Usually, the results were evident within twenty-four hours.

Mae, brown of coat and on the small side, was a year or two older than Prince. She had never been strong except in the power of her will, but, in her dotage, even her stubbornness was wearing out. She did have a mean side. Old as she was, she loved to take a wee nip out of the bare skin of a forearm of anyone foolish enough to present her with the opportunity.

Our third horse was Troy, a middle-size white creature who had never been totally broken. In his prime, he would and could do things no one expected from a work horse. Fences merely entertained him. He could take them or leave them at will. Usually, he was content to stay within their confines, but if something on the other side of the fence was overwhelmingly compelling, he simply sprinted in the general direction of the spot he liked and lifted his body over the fence in a single graceful leap. He returned to his assigned confines by the same method if and when he felt so inclined.

Time bad robbed him of such entertaining capabilities. He spent most of his hours doing nothing more challenging than eating the choicest grass in the woodlot, seldom bothering to come home for a drink of water for fear that, if he did, he might be brought into the barn, harnessed, and made to work alongside of Prince and Mae. Recently he had run into a tree branch and had damaged his left eye to the point where he could no longer see from it.

Dad often talked about going to an auction sale and buying other horses, or calling Harry Vander Jagt to have him come over with a selection of prize horseflesh, but we were still suffering the ravages of the Depression, and he couldn't see spending the little money he

had on horses. The one time he had bought a bargain of a horse from a man he thought he could trust, he had been so badly beaten in the deal he no longer trusted any seller of horse flesh.

More than once he had gone to the McBain State Bank to discuss borrowing some money from MacGregor, the banker, but the man was a progressive spirit, willing to loan him plenty of money for a tractor, but not a cent for horses.

Every month increased the urgency of the situation. Came the spring day when I was using all three horses to harrow the field halfway up the west line fence, preparing it for potatoes. The field east of the house was waiting for a final harrowing before planting a bean crop. The calendar proclaimed it to be high time to get beans planted and the deadline for potato planting was fast closing in on us. Dad became increasingly impatient. If only he had another team, he'd hook onto the “quack drag” and work over the bean field!

The quack drag differed from the harrow I was using in that it was a narrower single-section toothed implement with a couple of steel fourteen-inch wheels mounted near the back row of teeth to give it more digging capability than the three-section spring-tooth harrow I was using. It required fewer foot-pounds of energy to pull than the big harrow.

The more he thought, the more impatient Dad became. Finally, he dared himself to try something desperate, different enough that if any neighbor happened to drive by and see what was going on, he might quickly conclude that my father had totally flipped his lid. But desperate situations demand desperate solutions! He backed the '27 Chevy--the only car we owned, a battered vehicle, blessed with a super abundance of miles, and boasting of only four cylinders--he backed that car along the south side of the barn and hooked the “quack drag” to its trailer hitch. He drove that car up the sandy trail between the barn and the chicken coop, up the grade toward the back fields, then to the right, behind the orchard to the western boundary of the bean field. The field was on a significant slope from north to south, though when traversed across its east-west latitude a third way from its northern boundary it could boast of being all but level.

He stopped the car, got out, adjusted the lever of the harrow to the depth he thought sufficient to do the job but not so deep as to make the car work too hard, climbed back into the car, slid it into low gear, let out the clutch and hoped. The vehicle chugged across to the east side of the field. To return to the west end of the field, he had no choice but to go south a half dozen harrow widths, and cross the field at that point. The car obeyed his wishes. He got back to the west side, got out, checked the car, the harrow, the tilled soil, determined all was well, and climbed back into the car to continue the procedure.

The longer he worked, the more satisfied he became. The soil was readied for planting, and the car did not heat up to the point of presenting a threat to its future. The beans would be planted on time!

That morning, a more important but less obvious event than the preparation of a field for planting had taken place. Dad had convinced himself that mechanized power on rubber tires was the future of the family farm, though he was not yet convinced to the point of being willing to go to the bank and borrow the money to buy a tractor. His mind toyed with one remaining stop-gap measure that might be a financially practical solution to his situation.

Some mechanically-minded farmers had created home-made tractors, known as Doodlebugs.

Those mechanical wizards had taken parts from old trucks, an engine from this one, a transmission from that one, a differential from that one, a radiator from yet another, and had put them together to make of them a workable farm machine. The cost of such a creation was minimal. Junk yards abounded and parts were Depression cheap. It took a bit of planning, a bit of welding, and a lot of mechanical savvy, but the expenditure in dollars and cents was not much.

The more Dad looked, the more he convinced himself that he had the mechanical skill to make a Doodlebug. On his way to buy parts at the junk yard in Lake City he happened on a Doodlebug parked along the driveway of a farm on M-66 north of McBain with a “For Sale” sign on it. He stopped, drove up the driveway and looked the machine over, judged that it was a mighty good-looking piece of equipment, then drove on to the house to ask the price. The seventy-five dollars the man was asking was far less than Dad planned to spend to make his own masterpiece. By pedigree, the machine was forty-five percent Dodge truck and forty-five percent White truck, with the other ten percent unidentified miscellaneous. The front wheels and tires were off a small truck, the rear wheels and tires from a rather large truck. Since truck tires are not made with the cleats as were farm tractor tires, a set of tire chains graced the rear wheels to provide the needed traction.

The owner gladly started up the engine and allowed Dad to take the machine for a spin. It performed wondrously well. What power it had compared to the old '27 Chevy! It did puff a small cloud of blue smoke now and then, but what could a person expect? So did the Chevy. If the Chevy could drag a field, this “Doodlebug” could do it far better. Dad paid the man the seventy-five dollars without trying to “Jew him down.” With a light heart, he went home and told us what he had done. Ma wasn't happy. We were. She would have been pleased if he had bought a new team. All of us boys were pushing for a tractor.

Now to get the Doodlebug home. We loaded a logging chain into the car, took along a five gallon can in which to pick up some gasoline at the White Rose station in McBain, and headed north on M-66. The Doodlebug was where he had left it. We hooked it behind the Chevy with the logging chain. Dad drove the Chevy, I drove the Doodlebug. It had barely enough brakes to keep me from banging into the back bumper of the Chevy when Dad slowed down while going down hills. Luckily there were no stop signs on the route to worry about.

Truth is, that Doodlebug did an enormous amount of work for us that year. We were so proud of it that we re-named it. The fluttering vibration created by the tire chains on the big rear wheels while traveling the dirt road into the fields set our teeth to chattering. We said it gave us the jitters. Hence the name Jitterbug.

In creeper gear, the ersatz tractor was capable of pulling a two-section harrow over most of the hills of the farm. We bought a single-bottom sixteen-inch plow it handled well. Later in the year, we trained it to pull the mowing machine. We shortened the tongue of the mower and attached a pulley and rope to its seat so the driver could raise the cutting bar from the seat on the tractor. We taught ourselves to swing around a left-hand cloverleaf to make a desired ninety degree right-hand corner with the mower.

Raking hay was a speed-crazed riot, though it required two people, one to drive the Jitterbug, the other to ride the dump rake. The windrows produced were not the straight lines across the field of which Grandpa might approve. Whoever rode the rake had all he could do to hang on, much less to accurately gauge the split-second trip of the foot lever to make perfectly straight windrows!

Throughout the growing season, we found the Jitterbug a most satisfactory investment, but it was not perfect. One of its frustrations was its habit of once or twice a day refusing to shift gears as directed, the frequency of its insubordination depending upon how much in a hurry we were. The bottom end of the gear-shift lever, the end down in the grease of the transmission, would without warning slip out of its assigned slot. Regardless how one manipulated the lever, it would not catch on the fork that slid the gears on their shafts to select a desired gear ratio or to change direction of travel. Each time it pulled this frustrating caper there was but one thing to do--fix it! Remove the floor board. Remove the bolts holding down the transmission cover. Lift the errant shift lever and the attached cover from the hot grease. Position the square end of the lever into the neutral setting of the gears. Slide the lever and cover back into place in its bath of oil.

Replace the eight bolts that tied down the cover. Only three minutes of precious time lost, if everything went according to Hoyle.

Though I drove the Jitterbug many hours during the year-and-a-half we owned the machine, I was not its only driver. Young brother Marv learned how to drive it in a remarkably short time and gave me a considerable competition, which was not at all bad. It freed me at times to work for other farmers for a day or two, which brought in dollars and cents, though not yet for me. The family coffers needed filling more urgently than did my pockets.

The Jitterbug had its limitations. We could not cultivate row crops with it. Since it lacked the individual wheel braking real tractors had, one needed a considerable space in which to turn a corner. The longer we had it, the more exasperating its limitations seemed, especially when we knew that real tractors could “turn on a dime.” The critter was also a gas guzzler. Its six cylinders drank more deeply than Dad admitted. Gasoline cost all of ten cents per gallon, but those were ten cents we often didn't have. Nor did it provide a source of belt power as did real tractors.

Argument piled upon argument, and eventually the force of their sum total drove Dad back to Mac at the McBain State Bank with the intention of getting permission to buy a Farmall H at an auction sale to be held on a farm south of town that very afternoon. Mac knew the tractor on the sale bill, and he knew how worn it was. He refused to loan Dad the money, but suggested he go straight to the Vander Woude Allis Chalmers agency and buy a brand-new tractor. For that he would loan him all the money he needed.

Dad had visited the agency often of late. Andrew and Siegel were well aware that the chances of him becoming a customer were increasing with every passing day. And they knew all about our Jitterbug. The coincidence of their having taken in an almost new Allis Chalmers Model B with Dad’s coming into town that very day brought matters to a head. When Siegel offered Dad seventy-five dollars in trade for his Jitter Bug, Dad walked the long block of Main Street back to the bank, got permission to buy the slightly used Allis, came back with a check to cover the price, and ordered the tractor delivered that afternoon. With that act, we had completed the transition from oat burners to hay burners.

Before the day was out, we put the machine through its paces. We learned many of its strengths but also some of its weaknesses. Yes, it would pull the plow we had bought for the Jitterbug. Yes, it would cultivate corn and potatoes, though only one row at a time. Yes, it would execute a ninety-degree corner. The individual back wheel brakes performed admirably.

It also scared us half to death. To find out for sure how well it could climb hills, Dad and I agreed that I should ask it to pull a harrow up the hill of the field in the southeast corner of the farm. I was to go north along the east side of the field, tum west at the northeast corner

and up the short distance to the crest of the hill. Where I chose to go from there Dad didn't care. Everything from that point was downhill.

Dad was to ride the drawbar. That is, he stood with his feet on the drawbar and steadied himself with one hand on the backrest of the seat, the other on the fender. We were off.

Allis climbed to the north corner of the field in fine shape. We turned to the west. The slope steepened. The front wheels of the tractor lifted off the ground. Dad gave a scream of some kind, jumped off the drawbar, and said something about stopping. My mind played back the horror tales planted in it by anecdotes about the Fordson tractor my father had once owned. Fordsons were widow makers. They could, and did, flip over backwards, crushing their operators, and so quickly there was no way of stopping them once they decided to go. And the front wheels of Allis were lifting higher and higher. Beads of sweat oozed out of my forehead. Cold chills ran down my spine. I could feel my hair rising to stand on end.

I slammed in the clutch. The front end whumped down onto the ground and bounced a bit on its pneumatic tires, and before I could think what to do, the machine began rolling back with full intentions of running over the drag it had been pulling. I grabbed one of the hand brakes and pulled the tractor to a stop as the first cleat touched the front of the drag. Without waiting for fatherly advice, I again let out the clutch. The back wheels dug into the sandy soil, took hold, and began moving forward, but again the front tires were airborne. Again, I slammed the clutch in and again the wheels bounced on the ground. This time I grabbed the brake before the machine began a reverse motion. Slowly I let out the clutch, forgot about the steering wheel, all the while tickling both brakes, hunting for and finally finding that happy medium where the tractor kept inching ahead, its back wheels spitting out gravel stones and sand, its front wheels suspended a foot off the ground, but pulling, pulling, pulling the drag on up the slope.

We did it! We got to the top, and we proved that this tractor would not flip over and kill us should we ask it to do more than it was intended to do. In short, we fell in love with Allis before that first day was over.

There were aspects of farming with horses that we lost when we made the transition to gasoline power. Most noticeable was the art of resting. Since horses are animals, not machines, they require periodic opportunities to rest while working. The number of rests needed and the duration of the rests depend on the difficulty of the work being done and the stamina of the horses. Pulling a heavily loaded hay wagon up a steep hill demanded a short stop or two while on the way to the top, rests just a long enough for the horses to catch their breath. Plowing or harrowing were not easy for horses, therefore every half hour or so they needed and were given a five-minute break. If and when neighbors were working

with horses in adjoining fields, their rests were arranged to coincide, giving the teamsters a time to visit over the line fence while the animals recovered their strength. Sometimes talk became more important than work and the horses got longer rests than even they anticipated. If chatting with a neighbor was not possible, there were other ways to while away resting time. Horses liked to be petted a bit around their noses and necks, and they didn't mind being talked to, though they weren't much for carrying on their end of the conversation. If there was absolutely nothing to actively accomplish, a person could always stretch out on the grass of the fence row, pull out a stalk of timothy hay or June grass, nibble off short, soft bits, and lay back to appreciate the fluffy white clouds and the blue background of space against which they floated. Tractors didn't need resting periods, they had no desire to have their noses rubbed, and they had no interest in being talked to.

Tractors, even the best of them, had their shortcomings. Yes, even Allis Chalmers tractors. Our little B had no starter. It had to be cranked, which was no problem so long as it started as it ought to have started. When it did, a quick half turn was enough to get the machine off and running. Difficulties began when the dews of the night infiltrated everything, including Allis. She had a magneto cap that failed to seal out moisture, no matter what we or factory trouble-shooters tried. The gaskets were properly in place, all of the bushings and bearings were tight and coated with lubricants. Yet moisture got into the mag. We knew on the second turn of the crank that the engine was dead. There was no alternative but to take loose the four thin bolts holding the cap onto the magneto and wipe the inside dry with a clean, dry handkerchief and try the crank again. Usually, one wipe was all that was needed. If one didn't do it, there was trouble, for that meant that even a clean dry handkerchief wasn't dry enough to do the trick. Nothing left to do but to go to the house, get a cleaner, drier rag, or better still a wad of dry cotton batting, and work at drying out the cap and the parts the cap shielded. That took time. Always, when Allis balked, it was when we needed time desperately, which added to our frustration level. It happened on such mornings that Allis was spoken to, though not very kindly, and sorry to say, sometimes not in printable language. Sometimes she even absorbed a frustrated pounding of the fist on her hood, which did her little harm, but no good, either.

Allis also had the habit of allowing her piston rings and cylinder walls to wear out. The process usually took a year or more, depending on how hard we had used her. She first advertised her condition by an occasional belch of blue smoke. Eventually her spark plugs fouled. We took them out, cleaned them with a piece of thin wire kept in the tool compartment inside the round door under the far end of her steering column. Sometimes one was too fouled to run even after it was cleaned, so we had to put in a new one. We carried spares in the same toolbox because we hated to walk all the way from the back of

the farm to the barn to get just a little spark plug. Finally, Allis would begin to lose power. At that point the only thing left to do was to overhaul her.

Time was money. Dad hated to lose even a single day's work for the repair job, so we planned that either Dad or I drove the tractor all day, after which we worked on the overhaul through as many hours of the night as it took to get it back in shape and running. We scheduled Marv to work with it the next morning while we caught up on a little sleep once we had the chores finished.

We did our mechanical work on the barn floor, using the same fence stretcher and the same beam just inside the barn doors that we used for butchering cows. Screw drivers, pliers, and wrenches flew as fast as we could make them fly as we took off the hood, the cowlings, the radiator, the gas tank, and everything else necessary to get at the engine itself. That process didn't take long. By eight o'clock, when daylight faded and we had to use trouble lights, we had the engine apart.

The Allis Chalmers company sold overhaul kits that included every new part required for the overhaul and the directions for putting the pieces together. The process of overhaul involved an endless amount of cleaning, scraping, aligning, checking and double checking to get everything just right, all of which took time. How glad we were when, somewhere between one and three in the morning, we had the machine back together. We poured a new supply of gas in her tank, filled her radiator with fresh water, and, with a twist of the crank, had her running again. A kind of a numb but happy feeling radiated from our shoe soles to the buttons on the top of our grease-smeared caps when we finished that long, complicated project and knew that everything worked. The smell of gasoline and motor oil that the Old Dutch Cleanser didn't remove when we scrubbed our hands wasn't strong enough to keep us wake in the total silence of the dead of night as we climbed into our waiting beds.

How wrong I would be to leave you with the impression that, as quickly as we got wrenches in our hands, everything worked the way the instruction book said it would work. Far from it. One of the important lessons I learned in my hours helping Dad rebuild the tractor engine is that every mechanic must also be part engineer, ready and able to improvise when the practical situation went beyond the printed instructions.

For instance, the rebuilding kit contained a set of sleeves to replace the cylinder walls. The instructions took for granted that the person installing the kit had all the tools of a modern repair shop. So, when the instruction sheet read, “Step one, remove the old sleeve with a wheel puller,” Dad looked at me, and I at him, and we both said, “What is a wheel puller?”

One close look at the sleeve, another at the block of the engine, a measurement here, a measurement there, and we imagined how the wheel puller had to function and how it was made. We went to the engine room, found a pair of pulleys of approximately the right diameter with small holes in it in the appropriate places, a long bolt, and three or four short bolts, and brought them back to the tractor. After a few trials and a few errors, and a few words which Dad had not learned in church, we had all four of the sleeves removed and the new ones in place, proud that our ingenuity had pulled us through once again.

Sometimes we had to work for an hour on something as small and insignificant as a rusty bolt that had broken off instead of turning out. It took precious minutes to drill a hole in the stub of the bolt, to insert into the hole the threaded bolt remover Dad had bought at some long-forgotten auction sale and stored in one of the cubby holes in the engine room, hardly knowing what the thing was or what it could be used for. But now, when we needed it, the thing was there. By experimenting, we learned the art of making it perform the deed it was manufactured to perform. But how the process taxed our frustration levels!

Seldom did we overhaul the tractor without losing some skin off our fingers. Wrenches are designed to slip at the most crucial times. If the damage was severe, it required a quick rinse in gasoline to get the grease off the area plus a trip to the house for a few drops of Tincture of Iodine, a few square inches of the remains of a cotton bed sheet stored in the drawer under the bread box for the promotion of healing, and finally a length of adhesive tape long enough to hold the “sore rag” on the wound.

Since the lights we used to work in the dark were trouble lights on the end of extension cords, one of us often had to hold the light in the position where it provided the best possible lighting for the other to work. The holder of the light and the person operating the wrench did not always see eye to eye as to the best angle, and sometimes there were moments of daydreaming, or, at least, a meandering of the attention allowing the shadows of the hands of the worker to obscure the area of the work. When Dad was doing the work, and I was holding the light, such unfortunate happenings brought out of him verbal recriminations that still echo in my ears. There were times when I was tempted to throw down the light, retreat to the house, and storm up the stairs to the peace and quiet of my bed, but I never did. We always managed to forget all about such irritations when, in the morning, we heard Allis purring perfectly in the fields behind the barn while we rested our weary heads against the bellies of the cows as we groggily milked them come morning.

Would we ever go back to horse power? Not in a million years! We retained an admiration for good horseflesh. Never would we ridicule a neighbor for choosing to continue to do his farm work with horses. Never would we try to convince a horse farmer to switch to a tractor.

But we would talk for hours on end about how much we liked what our little Allis was doing for us.

The Crops We Raised

Hay

I was standing near the back end of the hay wagon, with my three-tine pitchfork poised for action, looking up toward the top of the hay loader. Brother Marv was at the front of the ten-by-eighteen-foot hay rack, nervously leaning ahead into the ladder part of the rack, the lines to the team of horses firmly wrapped around both his hands. His job was to keep the team straddling the windrows of dried hay. If all went well, the serpentine masses of hay would today become several tons of hay stored safely in the hay mow.

Thirty seconds ago, he had called out as commanding a “Giddap” as his immature vocal cords could produce, and he had shaken the lines authoritatively. Begrudgingly, the team obeyed and began their plodding walk down the windrow.

Dad stood on the wagon where I usually stood, his back against the front rack of the wagon, a stalk of timothy hay clenched between his teeth, his pitchfork planted a sixteenth of an inch into the board floor of the hay wagon. No matter where he stood, he was boss of the hay loading operation. His was the right to tell Marv and me what to do and how to do it, a right which he would exercise repeatedly before this load was completed.

Today was a first for our family. I was being initiated as number one in the firing line of the heaps of hay about to billow over the head of the tall hay loader and land at my feet on the floor of the wagon. As usual, Dad was thinking ahead. We boys were growing up, and the time was coming when he wouldn't be available to load hay. Other demands were being made on his time. I had better be prepared to master the art of controlling the rear end of the wagon as well as the front end.

I looked up toward the top of the loader and studied the mass of green as it climbed the last two feet against the cerulean blue of the July sky. I saw it reach the point where the ropes and slats turned down from their upward climb to return to the bottom of the loader. The first swirl of green tumbled down at my feet. I stabbed it with my fork and slid it to the left back corner of the rack. Before I had it in place the second billowy mass had dropped. My pitchfork found its heart. and I shoved it to the right corner of the rack, but not before the next billow tumbled down, landing directly on my head, shoulders. and back. Too many of its dried leaves scratched down inside my shirt. I pushed the offending forkful to the right rear corner, jumped on top of it to flatten it as quickly as I could, then slid the two newest clumps of hay between the two corners.

Creaking, groaning, squeaking, clacking, the hay loader lifted hay, more hay, and still more hay from the windrow to the wagon. My fork flicked in, through, over, under, and alongside

each clump, moving it where I thought best for it to be. No matter how hard or fast I worked, I was not keeping up. The morning was still cool, but already my shirt was soaked through with sweat. Finally, the mound of hay under the loader head grew higher than I. The top of it bent out from the back of the wagon rack to arch over my head, then tumbled down, completely burying me.

“Whoa,” Dad hollered. The horses obeyed. The wagon stopped. Everything was quiet except the sentinel crow on the highest branch of the elm at the corner of the fence row who laughed out, “Caw, haw, haw!”

I struggled out from under the hay and brushed most of the dry, scratchy leaves out of my hair neck, and the bib of my overall. Marv released himself from the tension of his job to look around. He didn't actually laugh, though he had every right to. Dad wasn't laughing.

One of the most difficult tasks of parenting is to teach one's offspring to do things the parent can do better, more quickly, and with far less effort. The easiest thing in the world for Dad to do was to shove me out of the way, attack the heap of hay piled high on the rear of the wagon, and distribute it properly over the rack. He resisted, though his sharp tongue voiced his irritation as he enumerated my errors. They all boiled down to the fact that I had not used my head. I had flailed bits and pieces of forkfuls of hay all over the place in my frustration instead of waiting until each forkful was a real forkful. I had not been critical enough of my handiwork to see that the hay landed where it ought. I had acted as if I was scared of the edge of the load, scared of falling off should a wagon wheel run over a stone or drop into a wash out. The load I was building would never ride all way to the barn. It needed to be shoved out at the edges, tramped down more tightly all way around, and filled in more evenly in the middle. And if I thought I was being swamped, why in the sam hill didn't I call out for Marv to stop the horses before I had really got swamped!

Angry, I attacked that mountain of loose hay. I pulled the fullest forkfuls I could collect from the heap and placed them where I thought they ought to be. Dad's critical eye caught my mistakes before I had them half made. “Out farther!” “Tramp it down, tramp it down!” “Don't be such a chicken. You ain't gonna fall, and if you do, the ground ain't that far down. Ya ain't gonna get hurt if ya do fall!” Finally, I satisfied Dad that every heap of hay was where it ought to be. Again, we proceeded down the windrow.

The windrows were thick and full that year. The loader fed the hay onto the wagon in such huge quantities that there was no way to keep up with it, but I had learned to call for respite when I needed it. Finally, the top of the load was even with the top of the loader. Dad called a loud “Whoa” to the horses and ordered Marv to climb down the ladder and pull the trip

that unhooked the loader from the wagon, I had built my first load, and it was going to make it all the way to the barn!

Handling loose hay was all work. In the last half of the decade of the 1930s, there was no other method of hay handling practiced in our mid-Michigan area. We valued the hay loader as the most modern of the conveniences for handling hay. Anyone who had handled loose hay, pitching forkful after forkful from the windrow onto the wagon knew that hay loaders were wonderful!

Though raising and harvesting a crop of hay appeared simple, since hay required no cultivating or weed pulling, in reality, it was quite involved. Each year, we planted a new field of hay, using a crop of oats as cover crop. The grain drill used to seed the oat fields had two hoppers, a large one for oats and a much smaller one, located on the back and bottom of the large hopper, for hay seed. Usually ours was a mix, nearly half alfalfa, a quarter red clover, and a quarter alsike clover (which we pronounced alsack), the rest timothy and brome grass.

Embedded in our soil were enough quack grass roots to ensure that no matter what we planted, some of the hay mixture would be quack grass.

This mixture sprouted and began its growth sheltered by the oats that provided a fine cover for the hay, grown only inches tall at the time the oats was a fully mature eighteen inches in a good year. After the oats had been harvested, the hay came into its own, but it was never cut. The next year we expected the first and the best of several years of harvest from the field.

By tradition, we began our annual hay harvest on the morning of the Fourth of July. Mowing the hay was an interesting experience. The mowing machine consisted of a set of two steel wheels nearly three feet in diameter, one of which had a gear mounted on its axle (enclosed in a gear box) which turned other gears that turned a shaft on the end of which was mounted an eccentric wheel. A wooden pitman nearly four feet long attached to this wheel to the cutting bar. This bar was a five- or six-foot strap of metal onto which were riveted four-inch triangular blades. The eccentric pitman reciprocated the row of knives between a series of guards several times per second, clipping off the stalks of hay as the horses moved the machine ahead.

Readying the machine for use each summer usually took Dad a day or two. Each of the triangular knife blades on the cutting bar needed sharpening on an emery wheel or grindstone. The rivets by which they were fastened to the bar bad to be inspected and replaced if they indicated anything less than a perfect bond between the two. Every guard had to be checked and replaced if it showed excessive wear or if it was cracked. We hoped

the machine would run the season with no more than an occasional sharpening of the cutting bar knives or some on-location repair of damages.

Mowing machines were dangerous. During damp morning operations the hay tended to wad between the guards, preventing the knives from cutting the stalks. When that happened, the operator stopped the horses, kicked the machine out of gear, raised the cutting bar by its levered arm, and reached cautious fingers into the wad, pulling out the hay and clearing the knives to again slide back and forth between the guards. That done, he remounted his seat, lowered the cutting bar, kicked the lever on the gear box into gear, picked up the lines of the horses, and called out his “Giddap.” However, there was always Murphy's law. On occasion, what had really stopped the cutting was not the wad of wet hay but a little stone, or bit of fence wire, or a strayed nail, lodged firmly in the opening of the guard. In event the removal of the wet wad had not freed the cutting bar, the operator again had to get off his seat to find out why. At that point, concern over the why and wherefore of the failure of the machine shut out of mind safety precautions, and the operator could fail to kick the lever out of gear.

Again, he placed his fingers between the guards and the knives, hopefully removing the source of the trouble. When freed, any amount of tension on the cutting bar moved it so quickly he had no time to get his fingers out of the way before the sharp knife sliced into them, often amputating one or more of them.

Sometimes during such a cleaning operation, a nervous horse took an unexpected step forward or switched his tail at an irritating fly, moving forward ever so slightly, but enough to turn the wheels, energizing the cutting bar for one quick motion back or forth between the guards, snipping off the tip of a finger.

As dangerous as mowing was, the unique clicking of the reciprocating cutting bar mingled with the fragrance of newly cut hay created mental images never to be forgotten. Nostalgia can be so sweet.

The mowed hay was allowed several hours of drying, then was raked into windrows and allowed still more time to dry sufficiently for safe storage in the hay mow. Impatient farmers learned, to their regret, that to store hay with high moisture content was disastrous. In the mow, it heated spontaneously, sometimes to the point of bursting into flames, sometimes turning into useless ash. I can still see Dad, pitchfork leaning against his shoulder, pinching in his hands a sample forked from the windrow, trying to make up his mind whether to haul in the hay or to let it dry another half day. The vision of the flaming barns of neighbors who had been too much in a hurry could not be dismissed easily.

Once the hay had been loaded onto the wagon and taken into the barn, the hottest work of haying began. Each wagon load of hay was driven onto the barn floor where the team was unhitched from the wagon, walked out through the door and hitched to the end of the inch-thick harpoon rope. This rope went through a pulley at the exterior base of the wall where it met the barn floor and extended upward into a “hay cart” mounted on a metal track running the length of the barn under the peak of the roof.

Looping down from the “hay cart” was a continuation of the same harpoon rope, running through a set of pulleys attached to a set of harpoon forks. These forks were shaped like inverted “U's,” nearly two feet wide and three feet long. At the upper end of the “U” each had a ring into which was hooked one of the pulleys on the rope. The open ends of the “U” contained prongs activated by a set of levers set within the bends at the closed upper ends of the “U's.” To set the forks into the hay, one would stand on the top of the load, grasp the top of each of the forks in tum by both hands, force it down into the packed hay as far as it would go, then pull up the levers. The pair of forks were spaced four or five feet apart. The upward motion of the rope in the pulleys pulled them toward each other, thus binding a considerable quantity of the packed hay on each trip.

Once the forks were set, the person working the load stepped to the far end of the wagon, called out to the teamster to do drive the team ahead, and the forkfuls began their ascent. When they had gotten as far up as was necessary to clear the hay already in the mow, the operator called out and the horses stopped. A trigger in the hay cart mechanism kept the forks from dropping back onto the wagon. At this point, whoever was closest would grab hold of a second rope, this one running through a pulley in the far corner in the peak of the mow into which the hay would be dropped and attached to the end of the hay cart facing that mow. Pulling the rope moved the hay cart and its loads as far into the mow as desired. Once it was in place, the person on the load dropped it by pulling the light trip rope, releasing the levers in the top of the forks, freeing the load to drop into the mow.

If all went well, four such harpoon loads emptied all but the bottom eighteen-inch layer on the rack. A set of slings completed the job. Slings were made of strands of half-inch rope and bars of wood an inch-and-a-quarter square by seven feet long, put together something like a hammock. One sling covered the front half of the bare wagon rack, the other the back. The two were attached to each other by means of a ring and a snap that had a short length of light rope attached to it. The opposite ends of the ropes of each sling were tied to a metal ring which was tied to the wagon rack. Naturally the slings were put in place before any hay was loaded in the field.

After the harpoons had unloaded their share of the load, they were unhooked from the pulleys at the end of the harpoon rope, the rings at either end of the wagon were loosed

from the rack on which they had been tied and hooked into the pulleys. The trip rope that had been attached to the harpoon forks was attached to the length of rope leading to the snap that held the two slings together. When everything was in order, the horses pulled this final load to its necessary height, the load was maneuvered along the metal track to its appointed resting place, and the trip rope pulled, dropping the last of that load in a heap in the center part of the mow.

Moving the hay from the central area of the mow to its farthest reaches was the hottest job of haying. The ten or fifteen minutes required for two people to distribute a load was long enough to drench them in sweat. What a blissful feeling it was to savor the cool breeze flowing through the open barn doors after working the hot mow!

Sometimes, we were so hurried by threatening skies we didn't mow away each load as it was unloaded, waiting until we had heaped several loads in the middle of the mow. We were too much in a hurry for our own good. We paid for it. To work a tangled, settled mow for an hour or more was thirst-making murder, though it had its rewards for those deemed old enough to partake. Dad usually made a batch or two of home brew each summer to quench the awful thirst created by working the hot haymow!

The change from horse power to tractor power brought with it changes in handling hay. We sawed off most of the tongue of the mower and bolted onto it a tractor hitch. At first, we mowed with two people, one to drive the tractor, one to ride the mower. Eventually we mounted a pulley on the seat of the mower and ran through it a rope to the long hand lever that raised and lowered the cutting bar.

Two people definitely were needed for raking hay by tractor power. The person riding the dump rake used a foot lever to lift the curved tines at precisely the right moment to make windrows straight and even. Though we tried, we never invented a way for the tractor operator to accurately trip the rake. Eventually we retired the dump rake and invested in a side delivery rake that required no rider.

A short tongue on the hay wagon accommodated the change from horses to tractor for loading the loose hay. One complication. Communication between the people working the load and the tractor driver was difficult because of engine noise or of the daydreaming of the monotonized tractor operator. Sometimes a well-placed forkful of hay from above and behind reminded the driver that his was not on a solo expedition.

We did experiment with one other method of handling loose hay. Western farmers, so said the magazines, used a tool known as a buck rake to put up their hay, though they stacked their hay instead of storing it inside barns. But, we reasoned, if a buck rake would bring hay to a stack, it could bring it to a barn as well.

The buck rake was a set of ten to fifteen wooden twelve-foot teeth that could be lowered or raised as desired, mounted on a set of wheels and hitched to a tractor. Some were mounted on the front of the tractor, some mounted on the back to be backed into the windrows.

In answer to a farm magazine ad of a company somewhere in the prairie states, we sent in a couple of dollars and received in exchange a set of blueprints for the simplest workable buck rake possible. The ten twelve-foot-long teeth were common fir two-by-fours available at the local lumber company. The two wheels and the axle between them could be found in almost any junk yard, though they would have to be remodeled with an acetylene torch. The winch to raise and lower the teeth was not expensive, and the rest was mostly chain, nuts and bolts.

We began work on the buck rake two months before the haying season, which was wise. There were bugs in the plan that needed to be worked out before we could use the tool to an advantage, bugs which the magazine had failed to mention. But with some improvisation and modification we got the rake to perform. We found its most serious weakness to be its wooden teeth, which broke when they rammed a solid rock under a windrow. We learned to pre-form several extra teeth so we had them on hand, ready to make a quick replacement when required.

To work the rake, the tractor operator swung the machine around so the back of it faced the windrows, lowered the ends of the teeth, and backed into the windrow. As the teeth slid under the windrow, the hay piled on them until the load was heavy enough to make the wheels of the tractor spin on the sod. At that point the operator raised the ends of the teeth, shifted the tractor into the fastest possible forward speed and made for the barn floor. Once there, all he needed to do was to drop the end of the teeth and run the device forward. The hay slid off the rake onto the floor, and he was free to return to the field.

The buck rake held only a fourth of a wagon load of hay, but it made trips back and forth far faster than a could a wagon. The driver worked alone, and his work was much easier than was the loading of wagon racks. The harpoon forks that we had used for loaded loose hay did not work well with the looser hay brought in by the buck rake. We switched to grapple forks, a set of which consisted of two pairs of a few metal bars shaped somewhat like an “L” and facing each other, connected to the hooks on the pulleys at the top end of the “L.” By setting each fork on the opposite end of the heap of hay on the floor with the lower end of the “L” pointing at the floor, the action of pulling them up brought them into the hay and close enough together to pick up of an entire load in one shot. Since we still kept horses about the farm, we used them to pull up the light loads. It seemed to me they relished the idea of pulling up a load every ten minutes or so, if only to break the monotony of the day.

Dad had ideas of making and marketing buck rakes for friends and neighbors when he created his masterpiece, but his plans never materialized. Instead, within a few years, small hay balers pulled down the windrows by tractors permanently and efficiently replaced the hayloader.

Hay was our most important crop. The welfare of our cattle and horses depended on it, and our welfare as a family depended on their welfare. When the rains didn't come and the hay did not produce, we hurt. When the rains came and hay was plentiful, we had reason to be happy.

Oats

Oats were an essential part of the diet of the cows and horses, as well as that of the chickens on our farm. The crop required a minimum of expended effort and energy. We prepared our soil for oats the same as for rest of our crops. We first layered the field with a coat of cow manure. We plowed, harrowed, picked the stones off the fields, and harrowed them again. Then we drilled in the oat seed and packed the soil down with the cultipacker.

The grain drill was a tool some eight feet wide, mounted on a pair of five-foot wheels with an axle between them and a wooden tongue perpendicular to the axle midway from wheel to wheel. Two horses pulled it easily. A tapering wooden hopper atop the axle carried the seed oats. The wooden, hinged cover protected the seed and provided the seat for the driver. A sprocket chain ran from a gear mounted on the axle turned a metering mechanism at the bottom of the hopper that controlled the number of grains of oat seed allowed out of the hopper. The grains fell down through flexible tubes of a tapering spiral of metal which ended alongside a disk two feet below the bottom of the hopper. The set of eighteen disks was suspended on a yoke mounted on a frame supported on one end by the tongue and the other by the axle. Each disk made a miniature furrow in the ground into which the grains dropped. Behind each disk a short chain of metal rings two and a half inches in diameter dragged soil into the opened furrow to cover the grain. The drilling process began at the outside perimeter of the field and worked toward the middle.

Oat plants invite a malady known as “rust” in which a fungus coats the oat plant with a layer of reddish-brown spores, draining moisture and nutrition from the plants, cutting the yield significantly, and releasing a choking dust to plague those who worked with the ripe grain. To prevent rust, we treated our seed. From last year's crop, we bagged the bushels of seed needed to sow our acres, swept clean an area of the cement of the barn floor and heaped the seed onto it. Onto the heap we poured a few quarts of a vile smelling formaldehyde solution, then scooped the oats over and over and over until the poison had been evenly distributed through the heap.

We planted in late April or early May and harvested in the middle of August. Ours was the age of the grain binder, that marvelous harvest instrument engineered by Cyrus McCormick.

Ours bore his name coupled with that of a man named Deering on the canvas windshield at the rear of its canvas bed. A reel made of wooden slats gently steered the stalks to fall as straight as possible onto that bed after the cutting bar had clipped them from their roots. Its moving canvas carried the grain to an elevator bed made up of two sets of canvases, squeezing the stalks gently as they rode the incline to the apex of the machine. A set of three curved metal arms, one of which was a needle in disguise, pummeled them against a fixed block until the many stalks created a bundle which the knotter quickly tied and ejected from the machine onto the bundle carrier.

The operator of the binder allowed four or five bundles accumulate on the carrier, then tripped the carrier to drop the bundles onto the ground. These bundles would later be set up in a “shock” of ten or twelve bundles.

The shocked grain was given time to dry thoroughly before being hauled from the field.

We pitched the oats onto the rack of the hay wagon bundle by bundle, each forked into its proper place, heads to the inside, butts to the outside, the butts sticking a few inches outside the rack on the first layer, an inch further the second layer, an inch further the third layer, and on up until the load was completed. Skillfully built, such a load was guaranteed to survive any of the perils of transportation.

One of our well-built loads failed to make it to the barn floor. That load was the last load ever loaded on the old “handy wagon.” Its wooden wheels were built of solid wood standing two feet in diameter and all of eight inches wide, finished by a half inch thick steel tire. The axle was mounted in a hole through the middle of the wheel. The day of the demise of that wagon came when we were in a hurry. Naturally. The first drops of rain from a huge black cloud dropped into our necks as we capped the load. The road from the field to the barn traversed the side of a hill, the one Grandpa had terraced to create the road. The team of horses was in their “homeward-bound” mode, racing the wagon through the sandy ruts dead center of this terrace when the front outside wheel of the wagon, the side toward the bottom of the hill, collapsed.

One moment we were sitting on the top of the load of bundles, listening to the thunder roll, thrilled that we were so close to the barn. The next moment we were sitting on a confusion of oat bundles six feet below the level of the road on which the askew wagon wheels rested. As quickly as we were dumped to the ground the rains came.

Fortunately for us, the horses were experienced enough not to try to run away. The rain soaked us long before we got the horses unhitched and to the barn. It also soaked the bundles of grain strewn down the slope of the terrace. In fact, the rains came so often for so long, that load of grain never did dry out. Some of the bundles were still visible two and three years later, mixed in with the burdocks growing on that slope. We pulled the remains of the wagon from under the twisted rack to an area behind the barn where it joined the retired Oliver 99 plow, the spike-toothed harrow, and an ancient hand cultivator, and a worn-out potato sprayer, to weather, rust, and rot.

No farm in our community was large enough to boast its own threshing machine to separate the grains of oats from the stalks. Enterprising individuals invested in threshers, a source of power to run them, and the necessary support vehicles to maintain them, and contracted to thresh the grain of the farmers around them. Which meant there was a waiting period between the time the oats were hindered and when they were threshed, during which the oats had to be protected from the weather.

The size of the hay crop on our farm in a given year determined how we protected our oat crop. A slim hay crop meant we had room to store the oat bundles in the mows of our barn.

When our hay crop filled the mow, we built a stack of the bundles just outside the south barn doors.

One can only imagine how impossibly thick with dust the air inside in the barn became when oat bundles were forked out of one mow into a threshing machine that blew the threshed straw into the opposite mow. More than one neighbor angrily turned his back on the barn, flipped his pitchfork handle over his shoulder, and angrily strode down the driveway when the quantity of dust was more than he could tolerate.

Oat bundles stacked outside the barn produced much less dust for those pitching the bundles into the maw of the threshing machine. Only two people had to work in the dust inside the barn, the man who occasionally forked the straw farther to the back of the mow than the threshing machine could blow it and the person who shoveled the threshed oats into the corners of the oat bin.

To keep the stacked oat bundles off the damp ground, we built the stacks on platforms created of old fence posts covered over with an assortment of used lumber. Rats moved into the space under our oat stacks as soon as they were built. What grain they ate from the bottom side of the stack was worth the hilarity we had at threshing time when the stack was down to its last layer of bundles and the rats ran for their lives. The cats and the dogs of the farm knew the rats were there. The shorter the stack became, the closer they edged to it, waiting for the exodus.

Every free man and boy joined the circle with pitchfork poised as the bundle pitchers lifted the last inches of protection off the rats. The moment came when the most fearful of the rats decided it was time to leave and the entire colony followed. The running, scurrying, jabbing, whacking, and yelling that followed was ludicrous beyond description. In Highlandese: It was funny as a crutch! While not all the rats in the rout were killed, whatever increase in population had taken place under the protection of the oat stack was nullified within the few minutes after the first rat decided to run.

Threshing machines always came to our farm from the east. The lay of the land decreed it.

The two steep sand hills on our two miles of road could be negotiated only from east to west by any kind of heavy machinery. From our earliest remembrances the annual coming of the thresher down the sandy hill from the Van Houtens and up the little stony hill in front of our house, and finally into our driveway was one of the most captivating events of the entire year.

The first entourage of threshing machinery I can recall was led by a huge black steam engine, mounted on enormous steel wheels. The machine puffed quietly and efficiently, hissed and sucked as the piston slid back and forth, and from time to time poured out its soul through its piercing whistle.

The steam engine pulled the monstrous threshing machine. Behind the thresher came a team of horses pulling a wagon loaded with wood and coal to fuel the boiler of the steam engine, an extra belt, a five gallon can of oil to supply the many, many oil cups on the bearings of the thresher, and an assortment of nuts and bolts and strange bars of grooved metal replacement parts for some of the mysterious interior machinery of the thresher. Behind the entourage walked the neighboring men and boys of the farms to the east of us, each shouldering a pitchfork.

Somewhere in that group was Dad, who had helped to thresh out the Veldsmas and the Van Houtens.

As soon as the engine had pulled the thresher into our driveway, the operator pulled the whistle cord three times, announcing to the neighbors to the west that if they intended to help pitch bundles at our farm, the time to pitch had come.

The steam engine pulled the thresher around to the south side of the barn, unhitched, pulled free from it, turned around, and then drove up to the short tongue from which it had just been loosed to be hitched to it again, this time by the front of the engine, positioned so that the driver of the engine could see to push the thresher onto the barn floor. With the thresher in place on the barn floor, the engine was unhitched and backed as straight as possible down the slope from the barn. While the driver was backing up, the second

member of the thresher crew unlimbered the coiled belt from its bracket on the side of the thresher, threw it onto the ground, and rolled it out toward the engine, kicking the coil until it was totally unrolled. He turned, faced the threshing machine, picked up the end of the fourteen-inch-wide belt, leaned back to pull the belt as straight and as taut as his muscles would pull, then dropped it onto the ground. The driver of the steam engine then sighted the pulley on the side of the engine and to his right as he stood on the platform behind the steering wheel of the machine, jockeyed the machine ahead and back, ahead and back, ahead and back, all the while cranking the steering wheel furiously until the pulley was directly over the end of the belt, though somewhat closer to the thresher than that end. That accomplished, his partner stepped to the belt, lifted it, and slipped the end of it onto the pulley. With extreme care the driver of the steam engine backed his engine until the entire length of the belt was slowly lifted off the ground and formed a straight double line between the engine and the thresher. Once there, he set the brakes of the engine. His partner lifted off the platform, on which the driver stood, two split chunks of firewood, and threw one in front of each huge hind wheels to guarantee that the engine would not move.

The two men now turned their attention to the thresher. One climbed to its top on the steel ladder on the rear of the machine, clumped loudly over the length of the tin roof to the control wheels on the movable stack, and cranked the stack from its prone horizontal position on the top of the thresher to the height and direction needed to blow the straw into the mow.

His partner released the jointed bundle carrier table which formed the maw of the machine from a folded position necessary to its transportation, extended it, raised its end to operational height, and locked it into place, rigid enough to support a dozen or so bundles as it eased them into the grasping, slashing, hungry teeth which fed the stalks of grain into the insatiable innards of the thresher.

Finally, one of the men pulled down the end of a six-inch sheet metal pipe from the elevator on the side of the machine and stuck it through the open door of the granary. Then he climbed the few metal steps on the side of the machine to set at zero the counter on the elevator to count how many half-bushels of grain the dump mechanism on the elevator emptied through the pipe into the granary. His charge for the threshing job would be based on that tally.

A quick blast on the whistle of the engine announced it was time to stop talking and smoking and get on with the work. Slowly and gently the engineer turned knobs and pulled levers. Slowly and gently the belt turned the pulleys that turned the machinery. With each turn of the belt the tempo increased until the machine attained a dizzying speed and a volume of noise never otherwise seen or heard on the farm. The family kids who had

crowded as close to the action as they dared venture backed away, the smaller ones so scared they dare not stop until they were on the cement side porch of the house.

Three men, pitch forks in hand, filed up the home-made ladder propped against the oat stack almost as high as the hip of the barn roof and began pulling from it oat bundles, one at a time, tossing them onto the carrier, aiming each with its head toward to the greedy, flailing knives which cut loose the binder twine and spread the stalks across the width of the bars which would knock the grains from them. Bundle upon bundle was swallowed by the machine, coming out of its bowels as oats in the bin and straw in the mow, plus a cloud of dust so thick it drove out of the barn even the sparrows and doves incubating eggs in their nests.

A few hours was all the time it took to thresh each crop of oats on each farm in a given year. The neighbor women planned by phone the three scheduled stops of the day, a mid-morning coffee time stop, a noon dinner stop of a full hour, and a mid-afternoon break. For each, the ladies lined up dishpans of water on an outdoor porch close to the kitchen, saucers with bars of soap, wash cloths, and towels. The height of the porch was perfect for the men to dip their dusty faces or heads into the pans of water, lather them with a bar of soap, dip into the rinse pan, grab a towel, and dry the face, neck, hair, and finally the hands. Getting rid of the sticking, prickling dust and chaff of threshing was a wondrous prelude to the plentiful food piled high on the kitchen table.

When the schedule worked out for Ma to feed the crew at noon she enlisted the help of Grandma Westmaas, an aunt or two, and sometimes one of the neighbor women. They worked for hours to prepare the feast. The hungry men at the table always consumed it all, including the traditional piece of pie for dessert. But no member of the crew so much in a hurry to eat or to get back to work after eating that there was not time for a prayer before the meal, the reading of a chapter from the Bible and a concluding prayer after the meal. Sometimes the men who owned and operated the threshing machine were not from our church, sometimes not even from our denomination, and some were not even Dutch, but that made no difference. They were at our table; they participated in our devotions.

In time, the steam engine gave way to the more versatile gasoline powered tractors. We did miss the whistle of the steam engines. Now we had to phone our neighbors to tell that the threshing crew had arrived. The exhaust of the tractors made far more noise than did the smooth operating steam engines, but the fuel supply took far less room.

When we kids grew old enough to overcome our fears of the machinery and get close enough to see what was happening, we were pestered by the operators who had little to do during the hours the bundles were being threshed. They got bored. So, they picked our caps

off our heads and threw them into the spokes of the pulleys of the tractor where they had to stay until the machine shut down and they could be rescued. They made believe they were going to squirt us with oil from the squirt guns with which they kept filled the multitude of oil cups that kept the bearings of the machine lubricated. But they saw to it that we kept far enough from any real danger, and they did make our day a bit more interesting.

How proud I was when finally I was old enough to take my place as a member of the threshing crew. My first job was to scoop the oats into the corners of the granary. It was lonely in that room, and rather dark, and very dusty. I did have fears about what would happen if the grain just kept coming, and my head would bump onto the ceiling and nobody could hear me if I did try to call for help, but the privilege of eating at the table with the men instead of having to wait and eat a second shift with the women and kids kept me shoveling for all I was worth.

Potatoes

We lavished more care and concern on our crop of potatoes than on any other crop. We depended on the cash income from potatoes for so much. The cows and chickens brought in a steady trickle of cash used for running expenses. It paid the taxes, the gasoline, and the mortgage, but we depended on potato money for those necessities we could get along without if push came to shove.

The eight, ten, or twelve-acre potato field was selected by a combination of expeditious crop rotation and an evaluation of the various soils of our fields. Potato ground had to be a rich loam, not too stony, and if possible, not too hilly. We began preparing the sod of the designated field by loading it with twice the coating of manure we gave any other crop. Manure was the only fertilizer we used. Commercial fertilizers cost money. We plowed under the sod and manure, harrowed the field, picked the stones from it, harrowed it again, marked it, and then planted it.

Our seed potatoes usually came from our own root cellar. Most years we used at random seconds (potatoes legally too small to sell) from last year's crop. Only if Dad felt that our crops showed signs of running down did we buy seed potatoes.

For years we raised Russet Rurals, a dark-skinned potato with snow white pulp, but gradually those who bought potatoes began asking for light skinned tubers. One spring early in the 40s we changed from Russets to Katahdins to meet the demand. We felt like spendthrifts, buying seed potatoes as our Russet seconds went to waste.

A couple of weeks before planting, time enough for the potatoes to “get used to” the warm outdoors after being preserved in the cool of the root cellar, we scooped seconds into

bushel crates. Since potatoes grow from their “eyes,” and only a single eye was required on each piece of seed, we cut the larger seconds into two pieces lengthwise. Cutting potatoes was a rainy-day job. Michigan has plenty of such days, sometimes three of them in a row, miserable, cold enough to force us to wear jackets and gloves while we worked. In spite of them our toes and fingers all but froze and our noses dripped with the “sap” of spring. Maintaining a decent humor within the family circle on the floor of the tool shed in potato cutting days was impossible. The gloom of the weather got to us. The immensity of the job, the miserable weather in which we worked, the decision making involved in the work, and the natural family bickering that went along with our project has left an ugly taste in the mouths of each of us who sat in that tool shed cutting potatoes!

Until the mid-1930s, we planted potatoes by hand. The job was grueling. After the field had been marked, the job of jabbing each piece of seed into the ground at each intersection began. We who planted wore a peck sized white canvas cloth bag slung by a wide strap over our right shoulders so as to hang on our left hips.

In our right hand we held the planter, an inch-thick four-foot wooden dowel at the bottom of which was mounted a two-piece metal jaw, open at the top where the halves were hinged by a rivet on each side and tapered down to a pointed end. Attached to the top of the front half of this jaw was a curved foot. To use the planter one followed six steps: 1) raise the jaws knee high, 2) drop into them a piece of seed, 3) drop the jaws into the soil at the marked intersection, 4) step the jaws as deeply as they would go into the soil, 5) tip the handle ahead to open the jaws, 6) quickly raise the planter knee high for the next piece of seed, 7) shuffle ahead to the next marked intersection while covering the newly planted seed by a heavy right foot.

How many marked intersections are there in an acre of potatoes? How many times did we repeat the six-step sequence? We planted our rows of potatoes two feet apart, burying each seed a foot and a half apart in the row. That means there were nearly 12,000 “hills” of potatoes in every acre. Hand planting ten acres of potatoes kept us monotonously busy for days each spring.

Mechanical potato planters were available either to buy or to rent. The first year we rented a one-man horse drawn planter didn't satisfy us. The planter was not accurate, leaving too many empty spaces where there should have been hills. The next year we rented a simple but more accurate machine that required two people to operate. On the top and front of the hopper in which the seed was stored was the seat for the teamster. He had the easy job, that of guiding the team to follow the mark that the machine had made on its previous pass across the field, and to refill the hopper with seed with each round the machine made. The person who sat on the seat at the rear of the machine did the actual planting.

A small plow opened a furrow under the machine, a set of disks closed the furrow behind it. A continuous chain driven by gears mounted on the axle of the machine fashioned into a series of “cups” carried piece after piece of seed up a short slope, then dropped them down the chute into the open furrow. From supply trays at the bottom of the hopper adjoining the conveyor on both its sides the person who rode the rear seat picked up pieces of seed potatoes and dropped them into the conveyor “cups” as they made their endless orbit before him at a rate of two to three pieces per second, depending on how fast the teamster pushed the horses.

Planting potatoes was a monotonous and tedious job with that little machine, but it was accurate, and oh so much better than planting potatoes by hand.

As soon as the new potato plants broke through the ground, we began our fight against weeds in the field, using either a horsedrawn spike-toothed harrow or a weeder to stir the top inch of soil, killing the millions of tiny freshly germinated weeds.

After the plants were six inches tall, we used a riding cultivator to kill a second crop of weeds and to bury the growing plants under enough soil to cover the soon to develop tubers as deeply as possible so they would not be exposed to the sun and tum green.

One constant threat to the potato crop was the potato bug, known more scientifically as the Colorado Beetle. When the plants were only inches tall, the striped matriarchs who had wintered in the soil crawled out, found the new plants, climbed their stems, and laid her orange eggs on the undersides of a leaf Within a week the eggs hatched into hundreds of hungry nearly round, black dotted orange insects that ate twenty-four hours a day the leaves on which they had been hatched as well as the rest of the leaves on the plant.

I do recall one summer when I was very young that I helped Grandpa Westmaas and a few of my aunts perform a more ancient method of potato bug control. We each carried an eight-quart bucket with an inch of smelly kerosene sloshing around its bottom and a three-inch-wide wooden shingle. As we walked through his acres, we swatted bugs off the plants into our buckets. When we had finished with the field, Grandpa lit a match to each of our buckets in turn, burning the kerosene and the bugs. Grandpa's method, though cheap, was not effective. Too many bugs remained hidden on the plants. Too many plants still got eaten.

Our method was more productive. Twice a week during the height of the bug season we sprayed our potatoes with a poison solution that killed most of the beetles. Paris Green solution was most effective, but it was expensive and so toxic it was dangerous to use. The one who applied it had to wear a rubber apron lest the spray wet through his clothes and

attack the skin of his legs. Arsenic of Lead was an effective second choice, but a cheaper Calcium Arsenic was the one we most often.

Our first sprayers were very like the pressurized garden sprayers marketed today. We strapped the tank to our backs and walked through the rows, spraying the plants with the poison fed through a handheld nozzle on a short hose. The work was slow and many bugs were missed.

Shortly before the depression, Dad had bought a very sophisticated horse-drawn, wheel-mounted sprayer with a 500-gallon tank and a pump activated by the wheels on which it rode. It was second hand and very used. After only a year or two of service it broke down. Dad priced the repair parts, but they were more than he could afford. He parked the machine behind the barn where it rotted.

The cheaper, simpler machine that took its place was not as effective, but good enough to kill most of the potato bugs. It was homemade, a fifty-gallon drum mounted horizontally on a two-wheel rubber-tired “trailer” and pulled by a team of horses. A hand pump mounted in the threaded bung hole forced the poison through a hose to a pipe mounted across the front of the bed of the trailer into which four sets of nozzles had been arranged. Each set of nozzles pointed from two directions at the row of potatoes that passed between them as the trailer moved across the field.

The operator of the sprayer had to be something of a contortionist. From his stand on the platform alongside the barrel with one hand he controlled the horses, with the other hand he continuously worked the pump as the trailer bumped over every stone and irregularity in the space between the rows. All the while he fought to keep his balance as the trailer bumped its way across the field.

Though the water we used in the sprayer was filtered through a screen, foreign matter occasionally found its way into the pipes and nozzles, clogging them. The operator then had to stop the horses, close the valve which controlled the flow of fluid from the tank to the pipes, remove the nozzle, and scrape the screen with a jack knife. With a bit of luck, when he put everything back together and opened the valve the nozzle would again spray.

In retrospect, we can all be most thankful we did not poison ourselves as we killed the potato bugs. We handled the poisons carelessly. After hitching the sprayer to the team, we drove it to the north side of the barn and the cattle watering tank. There, we unscrewed the pump from the barrel and dumped into the barrel the contents of paper bag of calcium arsenic through a funnel inserted in the bung hole, being sure to crumple the bag to get from it every particle of poison. Poison dust coated our hands, and no doubt we breathed our share of it.

Into the barrel we poured bucket after bucket of water, strained through a metal funnel with a screen built into it at the top of the spout. When the tank was half full, we used a yard long stick stored on the cement ledge of the water tank next to the wood siding of the barn, inserted into the barrel stir the help dissolve the poison, then finished filling the tank.

As we sprayed, some of the poison mist wafted up from the potato vines. We never took particular precautions to wash our hands thoroughly when we stopped for "coffee time" and meals. To tell the truth, we treated the skull and crossbones printed on the bags of poison as interesting decorations, nothing more.

Potato production in Michigan underwent a radical change during the years that closed the decade of the thirties and opened that of the forties. It was during those years that potato blight invaded our part of the state. One summer night blight struck our potatoes. That warm, sultry day the vines were healthy, green, and thriving. The next morning the vines were brown, wilted, and stinking. Only a small percentage of the tubers had grown to salable size. The rot crept into many of the tubers, spreading through them fine lines of a gold color that broke down their cellular structure, causing them to rot in storage.

That year we had no income from the potato fields. We harvested what there was, hoping to be able to salvage enough for seed for the next year, wondering all the while whether we should even plant potatoes the next year. Was this the end of the most profitable cash crop we knew?

The state's Department of Agriculture advised us that to continue to grow potatoes we had to learn how to dust or spray to control the blight. We were told that dusting with copper sulfate was the most effective control measure known. Dad wasted no time. So we had to dust, we had better learn how and we had better get the necessary equipment. The coincidence of the need to dust and the change from horse power to tractor power helped to get us in the forefront of the battle against blight. Before spring Dad read an ad in the Press for a used potato duster. It was on a farm near Hamilton, Michigan. The car we owned at the time was in no shape to make the trip to Hamilton, and Dad had no desire to make a solo bus trip from Cadillac to Hamilton, so he invited Fred Pluger, our friend and neighbor across the fields to the north, to go with him. The two decided the machine was worth the buying, so Dad hired Ralph Van Houten, our local cattle trucker, to swing through Hamilton on his next trip south with a load of cattle and take the machine home for him.

Dad mounted the duster on a rubber-tired trailer he bought from Harry Ellens. He found the parts and pieces needed to build a power take off connection from the tractor to the blower in an auto "junk yard" in Lake City. He built a frame for the trailer of channel iron left over from the remodeling of the floor of the garage. On that chassis and frame he mounted the

hopper, the blower, and the serpentine flared ended pipes. What a storm of dust that blower created as it whined at the peak of its RPMs!

Since we had one of the few tractors in the community, and since the speed of a tractor and its ability to run a blower made for a fast dust job, many of the neighbors hired Dad to dust their fields each time we dusted ours. The job had to be done in the early morning or late evenings when the plants were wet with dew and when the breeze was either absent or negligible. Those two times of day were also milking time. Dad earned money with the duster. We boys took over the chores.

The little Allis Chalmers zipped the duster six rows at a time through our ten acres and the acres of several of our neighbors at least once a week, twice a week during the critical period when the vines were at the peak of their growth and the weather was hot and humid. Dad came home from each dusting job coated with the poisons. He wore an overall and jacket reserved for dusting, and sometimes he did wear a mask. He always washed his head, hands, and arms most thoroughly after each run, but that was the extent of the protection he used. By today's standards he used no protection from the poisons. At ninety he looked back on those days and marveled at his longevity.

Pulling weeds in the potatoes was a necessary job two or three times each summer, always during its hottest days, and usually during the afternoons of the days we had already bent our backs all morning picking pickles. We hated the job, but it had to be done. To relieve our boredom, we mixed the work with a bit of fun. It is amazing how accurate a projectile a two-foot-tall pig weed with a full complement of soil hanging onto its roots can be. Nearly as amazing is the amount of attention one can divert from the job of pulling such weeds when one aims such a projectile at a fellow weed puller, particularly when the target is bending over to pull a weed! The amount of time which should have been dedicated to the pulling of the weeds but which instead was channeled into weed wars was beyond our imagination, though not beyond the imagination of our father who somehow thought we should put more time and effort into the eradication of weeds from potatoes than in pugilistic diversions. All of us boys are witness to the fact that the one thing that produced more pain on the stretched rear of the anatomy than did a flying pig weed was the toe of the shoe of an angry father who happened upon the scene of a weed war!

Our potato crop reached maturity during the last weeks of September. The vines began to die, filling the air with a musty aroma, to our nostrils an aroma of promise. Potato digging began as close to the first day of October as possible. All schools in the area closed during the first two weeks of October so all hands could help harvest the crop. Each year we prayed for frost before we began the digging. Frost would kill the vines totally. Potatoes fell

off dead vines as the hills were dug out of the ground but clung to green vines, making the job of picking potatoes slow and more difficult.

The first year of potato digging I recall was a particularly cold, wet year when we dug the potatoes “by hand” with five-tined forks. Dad hired people to help since his family was too young to do it alone. Four people dug, Dad, two uncles, and a neighbor boy. Each digger dug two rows, forking the dug potatoes into a single row. Each picker picked one such row, teamed with another picker, to toss the two rows into wooden bushel crates. The two best pickers were the Pluger girls from across the line fence to our north, each able to pick two hundred bushels per day for which they were paid a penny a bushel.

That year the earliest snow fell before the potatoes were all out. It didn't stay, of course, but we dug and picked, snow or no snow. Our fingers were wet and cold through the gloves we wore. We complained. We young ones cried. The hired help winced but kept on working. The potatoes had to get out.

Visiting relatives from the State of Washington had decided that year to take a trip to their native Michigan to see what they had left behind in their move to the West. They drove their car to the potato field and parked under the basswood tree growing out of the stone pile in the northeast corner field of the farm. They watched us pick potatoes out of the snow. They never came back to see more. That wet, cold potato field did not invite anyone to farm in the state of Michigan.

The next year we got our first potato digger. It was used, well used, and it needed repairs often, but it was capable of lifting the potatoes out of the ground, running them up and over an elevator made of metal rods with ends bent in such a way that each rod became a link in a continuous chain. The chain was propelled in its circuit by gears mounted on the wheels on which the machine was mounted. As the chain made its way from the front, bottom end of the digger, it ran over eccentric cog wheels that shook the dirt off the potatoes it had lifted from the soil with its triangular blade. The machine at one time had a shaker mechanism behind the elevator intended to separate potatoes from vines, but that had long since been discarded, so when the tubers came to the upper end of the elevator they were unceremoniously dumped back onto the dirt in which they had grown.

As the family grew, potato picking became the job for us kids. As soon as we boys were old enough and big enough, we graduated from picking to being Dad's part-time helpers in the loading the wagon with filled crates to be taken to the root cellar. Though we helped to load the crates, Dad always unloaded them alone. While he did so, we had to go back to picking. The job of unloading was not easy, but one person could handle it. A chute led from an opening on the south side of the top of the root cellar down into its dark recesses. Dad

simply slid crate after sixty-pound crate across grains of sand on the wooden bed of the wagon and dumped each into the top of the chute, packing the empty crates in nested stacks of three to be redistributed across the potato field when he returned.

While he was gone, we were expected to pick as many bushels as we could. It never worked that way except when we thought there was a chance we would be able to fill all the empty crates before he got back, giving us a legitimate excuse to sit and do nothing until he finally did arrive. It seldom if ever worked. Most of the time we didn't bother trying. We did throw potatoes at each other--not big ones, you know. They would hurt too much. The little ones were better. They didn't hurt, they just stung. When “the cat was away,” we mice did have our moments of diversion.

The best part of the day of potato picking was lunch time in the field. For dinner at noon, the main meal of the day, we went home, but about ten in the morning and again at two thirty in the afternoon, Ma and whoever was the lucky one to help in the house, usually sister Gert but sometimes a hired girl, came to the field with a basket or two in which there was coffee to drink in the morning, tea in the afternoon, and sandwiches and cookies or a piece of cake. We made a circle of empty crates, set a couple more empties in the center of the circle to use as a table, and went to work on the food and drink. The privilege of sitting down was cause for celebration in itself. The food and drink was a bonus.

Each potato picking day concluded at sundown. By that time we were tired through and through, and hungry besides. Supper was ready, but before we could eat, we had to put the cows in the barn because it would be dark by the time we got through eating. While the rest of the crew went home riding on the last wagon load of potatoes, one or two of us went to the pasture and brought the cows to the barn. Only after they were properly chained in their stalls were we allowed to think about our own food.

Tiredness stung the soles of our feet after a day of potato digging. Our leg and back muscles cried from fatigue. How pleasant it would have been to clean up, eat, and drop into a chair and call it a day. That wasn't the way it was. We cleaned up and ate, and while the women and the young ones did the dishes, we men and boys went to the barn and milked the cows.

When we were finally finished, we dragged ourselves back to the house. Not long after chores we were in bed.

Potato digging lasted only two weeks, but it seemed like forever, and the feeling of the total tiredness experienced in those two weeks is the standard of tiredness by which we who endured potato digging vacation can today evaluate exactly how tired being tired actually is.

Pickles

Pickles ranked second in importance as a cash crop after potatoes for the Vredevoogd family until the early 1940s when string beans outranked them, and then only over Dad's protests. We planted our half-acre of pickles late in the planting season. We prepared the field with the usual procedures except for marking, which was different in that the pickle rows were always six feet apart. Often, we planted pickles in “hills” of six seeds on the six-foot square, though sometimes we experimented by planting the rows six feet apart, then randomly planting fewer of the plants some two feet apart from each other.

Once the field had been marked, the hard, back-breaking work peculiar to the pickle patch began. The first step was fertilizing and planting. We reserved manure from the “box stalls,” that part of the stables reserved for untied young cattle, taken to the field one wagon load at a time for pickles. That particular manure was “ripe,” tramped down by the feet of the heifers throughout the winter season and kept warm. It underwent a type of fermenting or maturing so that it would no longer support or encourage the growth of cut worms, the larva of a caterpillar which often devastated sprouting seeds and young plants by eating through the stem directly above the root. We still lost pickles to the cut worms, but “box stall” manure was our most effective ounce of prevention.

At each cross mark, the first member of our planting crew dug with a spade a generous cubic foot hole. The second crew member chucked into the hole a forkful of manure and covered it lightly, the third crew member placed on the top of the manure ten or twelve pickle seeds from the box of seeds furnished by the pickle company, and covered them with a thin inch of soil, tamping it down as he moved on to the next hill. The process was slow, though not particularly tedious when carried out by a crew of three. We pitied those who had to plant pickles alone!

Pickle seeds sprouted quickly and the plants grew rapidly, but so did the weeds. When the plants were about two inches tall, we went through the patch, first with horse drawn hand cultivators, then with hoes. In the process, we removed all the little weeds and thinned each hill of pickles to its limit of six plants. We gave the patch a second cultivating and weeding before the vines were a foot long. By that time, they were blossoming and the bees were busy pollinating.

We limited our pickle picking to three forenoons a week, Monday, Wednesday, and either Friday or Saturday. On those mornings we hustled through chores to get to the field early, while it was still as cool as a mid-summer morning was going to be. We drove the car back to the patch to transport the bags of pickles to the buildings and eventually to McBain.

Our goal was to finish picking by noon. We hated even to think about the pain of going back to pick more pickles after eating a hefty noon dinner. Dad hated the thought most of all. Pickle picking brought out his back trouble, and at least once a summer he went to Dr. Morgan in Cadillac to have his errant vertebrae snapped back into place.

Pickle picking was a miserable job on several counts. Pickles grow on the underside of the vines. The only way to find all of them was to bend down, grasp the vine near its end, lift it up (which meant that one had to at least partially stand up) and while holding the end of the vine in one hand, snap the pickles off it with the other. The stem holding the pickle to the vine had to be pushed off the pickle by thumb pressure while holding the pickle in the palm of the hand. A single vine often produced up to twenty pickles per picking. The vines were just long enough so a person picking the pickles from it remained in a semi-crouched position that induced back strain. From four to eight vines stretched out from each hill of pickles.

Pickles are prickly by nature, the smaller ones more so than the large ones. Pickle-picking hands gather layers of greenish-yellowish cells from the skins of the pickles. Morning dews increase the rate of accumulation. After a half hour of picking, our hands became so coated with a thick layer of cells that the prickers of the pickles could no longer penetrate it, but when we finished the day's work the harshest soap would not remove the pickle coating. We resorted to chore balls and steel wool, but even that did not do the job completely. For several weeks we pickle pickers went to church with yellow hands. We could have protected our hands by wearing gloves, but gloves slowed a picker down to almost half of his potential production, so for us, gloves were out. We were always too much in a hurry.

The pickle company paid for pickles by the pound. Since it was more interested in small pickles than in the large ones, it paid accordingly. The price for gherkin sized pickles was the highest per pound, the price for large dill sized was much less per pound. Those too large for any use were thrown out to rot. We took some back home to feed to the pigs, but even pigs can tolerate only so many cucumbers. Which means we focused our attention on getting all the small pickles off the vines before they had a chance to become large pickles.

We picked the pickles into pails ranging in size from twelve-quart milk pails (those which leaked and were no longer useful in the barn) to five-gallon buckets. We emptied each filled pail into a burlap bag. How many bags did we fill in a picking? That depended on the rainfall, the temperature, and how hard the bees had worked a couple of weeks previously. Six bags, eight bags, sometimes ten bags, each bag was money in the family coffers. Dad never paid us for picking pickles though he did for picking potatoes. He expected us to work for our room and board in the pickle patch. Eventually my younger brothers pushed for

growing beans instead of pickles because “everybody else paid their kids for picking beans.”

Taking the pickles to McBain was the only redeeming part of the pickle harvest. We removed the back seat of the car and filled its place with bags of pickles. If the picking had been specially rewarding, we also propped a sack on the fender on each side of the engine, squeezed between the hood of the car and the headlight. Since there was room for only two of us to squeeze into the front seat of the car besides Dad, we had to take turns going along to the pickle station. We usually made the trip after supper and chores.

Six or eight cars were usually lined up, waiting at the dock for a tum to unload their bags of pickles onto an open space on the dock. After each car was unloaded, its driver pulled away and parked on the other side of the drive to make room for more cars to come and unload. We who rode along had free range of the station while Dad chaperoned the bags he had unloaded through the sorting process, making sure that everything was done properly and above board.

The station itself consisted of a loading dock, and an area in which two, three, and sometimes four grading machines worked, each powered by an electric motor that vibrated the slats that made up the heart of the machine. One man emptied the bags onto the high end of the machine. Vibrations shunted the pickles toward the low end. Cucumbers were the only pickles to reach the bottom, since the space between the slats tapered so that first the smallest, then the next size, then the next, and finally the largest rode the tops of the slats. Sloping trays under the slats accepted the various sized pickles as they dropped through, channeling them into bushel sized baskets. Filled baskets were stashed beside a scale. When all the bags of one producer's pickles had been run through the grader, the baskets of each size were weighed, the weight noted on a tally card. After the weighing, the baskets were loaded on a four-wheel hand truck. When the truck was filled, a worker pulled it down the ramp and dumped it into one of the huge brine tanks making up the two rows of tanks that, except for a tiny office, made up the rest of the station.

While Dad attended the day's production of pickles, we chased our friends back and forth on the ramp during those young years when we were still part of the chasing generation. When we got older, we sat on the end of the ramp, dangling our legs and talking with whoever happened to be there at the time. When we grew still a little older, we boys left the station and walked the three blocks down the highway to Main Street in hopes of finding girls to talk to somewhere downtown. Tired as we were from picking pickles, pulling weeds, and doing chores, there was always enough energy left in us to walk the couple of blocks of the main streets of McBain.

It was a good thing that Dad paid close attention to those who sorted and weighed the pickles. One evening he was convinced that what was written on the tally card did not match what he had seen and he had insisted on a second weighing. The office manager protested, but Dad insisted. The more careful weighing proved Dad right and increased the size of the check he had coming by enough to make the hassle worthwhile.

Pickles were a profitable pain. We hated picking pickles, and we complained loud and long on those days when they were at the peak of their production, but pickles were a big help in keeping the wolf from the Vredevoogd door.

Radish Seed

Nineteen forty-two was the year we experimented with radish seeds. “Make dollars by growing radishes for seed” was the inviting ad in the farm magazine. The seed company promised free seed. The farmer had only to provide the land, the labor, and the know-how. The company promised to buy the seed produced at a pre-arranged price, the only restriction being that the seed contain less than a certain percentage of weed seed. There were no hidden clauses, and the interested farmer had little to lose in the venture.

Though the threat of our country's involvement in war had ended the Depression, money was still scarce. Radish seed promised money. The more Dad thought about it, the more appealing the proposition became. But we needed all the land of our farm for our current operation. There was no five to ten acres of land we could afford to switch to the production of radish seed.

Dad had the answer. Grandpa Vredevoogd had decided he would rather buy the wheat he needed for his chickens than to try to grow it himself. So, if Dad wanted to rent the land for a third of the profit from the radish seeds, he would gladly comply. The deal was on. We mailed the order to the seed company somewhere in Pennsylvania and within two weeks we had the bags of radish seed to sow.

Soil preparation for radishes was quite the same as for corn or beans. The rows of radishes, however, were to be grown only 20 inches apart, much closer than the twenty-four inches for potatoes and the thirty-six inches for corn. The seed had to be sown, not planted on the square like corn or beans. Dad had thought the grain drill could be adapted for the job by plugging up three out of four of the tubes that delivered the seeds from the hopper down to the planting discs below. A short experiment proved the idea to be ill-founded. The grain drill was out.

The only other option was the hand-pushed garden seeder, a monotonously painful and slow method of sowing one row of seed at a time. Its hopper held a few quarts of seeds. A

fifteen-inch wheel at the front of the machine provided the required power to tum the cog under the hopper to mete out the seed into a trench made by a miniature plow on the front underside of the tool. A double wheel at the rear of the machine returned the disturbed soil to its place, covering the sown seeds. An arm on one side of the machine marked a line in the soil twenty inches from the row being planted, marking the next row.

The seeder did not take a mountain of muscle to operate, but the drain of strength and stamina required to push it row after row, hour after hour, across the field was enormous. I was the oldest, the biggest, and the most durable, so it was I who got the job of planting the radishes. I worked longer than a week to plant the six acres.

To fulfill the demands of the contract, we had to pull the weeds that were growing with the radishes to keep them from going to seed. To hand weed six acres of radishes was the last thing we wanted to do, so we tried to invent a simpler, easier way. We tried the hand cultivators we used for our other row crops. There was one problem. We usually used horses to pull our hand cultivators, but no horse could walk between the twenty-inch rows of radishes without trampling too many. There was a solution. The tractor had narrow wheels that could be adjusted to fit the rows. We fashioned an extension bar to the drawbar to accommodate four hand cultivators at a time. We removed the two outside shovels of each from the cultivators to make them narrow enough to fit inside a twenty-inch row.

The operation required five people, one to drive the tractor and four to man the cultivators. We had only four males, counting brother Jack who was just now old enough to drive the tractor, so we hired a neighbor boy to handle the fourth cultivator. The plan worked. We cleaned the six-acre patch in half a day. Three times that summer we went through the radishes with the cultivators. Still some weeds grew within the rows of the radishes themselves. There was no other way but for us to walk through the field, row after row, and pull them. Us, of course, was us kids. We hated the job and went at it with a vengeance. We got through in no time at all, but, when Dad inspected the field, he sent us back through it again. This time the weeding took somewhat longer but passed inspection.

When a radish goes to seed, it grows a stem a foot to a foot and a half tall, graced with a few small leaves at inch and a half or two inch intervals, and near its top several pointed seed pods resembling miniature chili peppers, the thickness of a pencil and about two inches long. Seeds in the pods are spaced about a quarter inch apart. Though the stem and pod grow quickly and fill with seed in a very short time, their maturing process is slow. It takes forever for the pith inside the pod to become firm and eventually to dry and release the seeds for threshing.

The seed company suggested two possible methods of harvesting. The first was to mow the dried stalks, rake them into windrows, load them onto a wagon or truck and bring them to a small threshing machine that would separate the seeds from the pods. We thought the process too wasteful. Too many pods would break off and be lost on the way to threshing. The second method was the use of a combine to thresh the stems as they stood on their roots. Dad rented an International combine to do the job. To his dismay, the machine cracked almost all the fragile shells of the pinhead sized seeds, splitting them into their two halves, destroying them. No matter how he adjusted the machine it simply refused to do differently.

In desperation he called the seed company. They advised him to try an Allis Chalmers combine. It had rubber bars instead of the steel bars the International machine used, and it was known to be effective. So, we towed the International to the McBain Hardware, went down the street to the Vander Woude Allis Chalmers Dealership and rented a machine matching the orange color of our tractor. The combine performed very well. Rarely did it split a seed, and it was well within the power range of our small tractor. We worked over the six acres, bagged the seed, loaded the bags on the back of the truck we owned at the time, and shipped it by rail from the McBain depot to the company in Pennsylvania. We did make a decent profit that year, enough to make us willing to try a second year.

Profit was less second year, but we were game and tried it a third time. That crop was a disaster. The rains came at the wrong time and only weeds produced seeds. We didn't bother to harvest the crop. We never tried to grow radish seed again. We did admit that the experiment had been interesting and we weren't sorry we had tried it, but never would we try it again!

Bits and Pieces

Frozen Pipes

Winters in our part of Michigan are usually quite mild. Statistically, they were nothing spectacular. Statistics can be misleading. Our winters often had balmy, sun flooded days and weeks. How we enjoyed our January thaws, especially when they stretched into February. We also had our blizzards, and often days and weeks when the thermometer hovered around the zero. Winter weather came in batches.

Given time, cold penetrates, that is, it goes down into everything. Grandpa had built a tight Michigan cellar under our home, but it had lost its pristine tightness. Case in point: The pipe that supplied us with well water entered the west end of the north basement wall at a level six feet below the surface of the ground, giving plenty of frost protection. From that point it traveled up to and between the floor joists, far too close to the outside wall. The faucet above the kitchen sink was the pipe's terminus. When cold stayed a week or more, that pipe froze nearly every night. The longer the cold, the more certain the frost.

On cold winter mornings Dad got up to cold rooms. His first chore was to go down the cellar beneath the dining room and stoke the furnace that he had banked to hold glowing embers throughout the night, but which no longer produced a noticeable amount of heat. Dad's second chore was to kindle a fire in the kitchen cook stove. That accomplished, he turned on the faucet over the kitchen sink. If water came out, he was in luck. If not, before he went to the barn and the milking he had to thaw that pipe. For the thawing he kept a blow torch in the cupboard in the back kitchen.

A blow torch is a quart sized brass gasoline tank with a horizontal pipe-shaped burner mounted on its top. On the side of the tank's top is a built-in pump. The pressurized gas-air mixture hissed as it entered the burning chamber. A lighted match touched off the mixture to bum like a miniature jet aircraft engine, hot enough to heat a soldering iron to white heat.

Dad pumped the torch and lighted it in the kitchen, opened the trap door into the “fruit cellar” and poured the hot flame along the area of the pipe closest to the floor joists. Five minutes produced a trickle of water from the faucet of the sink, and Dad was free to go to the barn.

Thawing frozen water pipes with a torch carried with it the danger of heating to its kindling point the wood close to the thawing pipe was all too real. Many were the Michigan farm homes that had gone up in smoke on frigid mornings because the person thawing the pipes was not careful enough. Dad was extremely careful.

Jack Frost

Winter cold also brought Jack Frost, the artist. In the days of the family farm, walls of buildings were not insulated to keep out the cold. Cook stoves and furnaces, amply supplied with wood from the wood lot and supplemented with an occasional ton or two of coal from the Co-ops or Grain Company, battled the cold. When cold intensified, we threw more wood in the fires and opened the drafts a little farther. The walls were drafty. The windows were even more drafty. We had storm windows on every window in the house, but none of them were tight enough to be very effective.

The ever-present tea kettle of water on the hot cook stove top spouted out its constant column of steam into the kitchen. On the end of the stove opposite its fire box was a reservoir holding about ten gallons of water. When the stove was roaring in full force, all but dancing on the kitchen floor, the water in the reservoir was warm enough to contribute generously to the humidity in the air. The furnace down cellar had a special two-gallon humidity chamber built into its side filled with water that would be evaporated dry during a day's heating. Our heated rooms were often nearly tropical.

The moist, warm air of the room met the cold glass of the window where it froze in layers. It never froze in a smooth, even frosting. Jack Frost, the artist, was more creative than to produce a mundane product. The patterns on the windows were intricately beautiful white on white, reminding one of branches and leaves of trees, or the swirling mare's tails clouds in the high blue of the summer sky. We often put our mouths close enough to the window and blew holes through the frost, clearing a circle a couple of inches across, then stepped back to watch Jack flick his cold brush over that hole again and again until he had created a new pattern, different from the original, but blended perfectly with his previous work.

Watching Cows

Much family farm work was neither pleasant nor inviting. No task was deemed more distasteful than watching cows. How thankful we were we didn't have to do it often.

The mid-thirties were dry years. Spring brought enough rain for a promising first burst of hay and grass, but, when the rains stopped early in June, the hay and grass quit growing. The hay we mowed and brought into the mows was hardly a foot tall and the mows were less than half full. The pastures had turned brown. The cows cropped them as close to the ground as their single set of teeth would crop. Still, they were hungry. Milk production plummeted.

To provide the herd with as much food as possible we looked for pasture in places we would never have dreamed under normal situations. The first place we tried was the

roadway. Native June grass, probably a variety of Kentucky Blue Grass, had grown to nearly a foot in the spring on the roadside. Now it was hay on the root, edible, but with little food value. How to keep the cows on that part of the roadway adjacent to our farm and out of our neighbors' fields and gardens was the problem solved by watching cows.

No days were as long as were the days that we watched cows. As soon as breakfast was finished, we and the cows were turned out and onto the road. When they pushed too far west, we gently stole through and beyond them, and turned them to graze toward the east. I was nearly ten years old, and Gert was a good year younger than I. We had to control a herd of a dozen or so animals much larger and much more ornery than we were. We armed ourselves with but a maple switch some six feet long and three quarters of an inch thick at its base. Should the animals decide they wanted to disobey two miniature humans, they could have done so. Occasionally it happened that an obstinate animal temporarily wanted her head, often enough to instill in the two of us raw fear. Each time we stole through the herd to change its direction cold chills ran down our spines.

The Michigan sun during the summer months is hot, especially so during those dry years.

Trees grew along the road. We thoroughly appreciated their shade, but the cows seemed always to demand our attention in places where there was no shade, places such as our own driveway that had no gate, but which did have alongside it our garden with tasty corn and beans. Farther to the east was an opening in the fence into the bean field. Pathetic as the crop of beans was, the cows had to be kept out of the beans! We got tired. We got thirsty. We got bored. The job had to be done, and we were told over and over that we were the ones to do it, come what may.

Eventually the cows cropped off the meager roadside pasture. Still the rains did not come. Now where? Up the hill and to the west of our farm was Uncle John Bos's sandy forty acres that he no longer bothered trying to farm since he now worked in an auto factory in Flint, coming home only on weekends. He allowed us to graze our herd on his land provided we kept the cows out of his wife's garden.

Since this pasture was farther from the house than the roadside, the days seemed even longer and drearier. We took turns going home for long drinks of water. We took turns going home for dinner at noon. When other less important necessities of life such as a call of nature came, there was neither time nor desire to go all way home. At our ages we had no secrets nor need for secrecy about the differences of our respective anatomies or their functions. When necessary, we used the leaves of weeds as toilet paper. They worked as well as the Sears catalog in our toilet at home anyway. We learned by painful experience never to use the leaves of the nettles that grew in fence rows or around stone piles.

One of the days when the cows pastured on Uncle John's grass is permanently fixed in my memory. Gert didn't go with me that day because Wilmer Bos, my cousin, was going to be home, and his cousin Lou Bos was coming to spend the day with him. Certainly, the three of us could take care of the cows without Gert's help. To the best of my recollection this was the summer of 1937 when I was eleven and had a new BB gun. I had begged for and had been given permission to take the gun with me, with the warning not to get so busy with my gun that I should forget my job.

Alas, the warning fell on deaf ears. Certainly, I did have good reason for forgetting.

Wilmer and Lou were both at least five years older than I, and they had .22's. Early in the afternoon the three of us began some serious target shooting I considered it an honor to be included in the play of those older boys. They even let me shoot their rifles now and then! For hours we plunked and plinked at the targets we scratched into the rust of a few old car bodies in a hollow behind Uncle John's barn.

The sight of a string of cows plodding over the crest of the distant south hill I interrupted our play. Cows walk in single file only when prompted by some authority figure. Puzzled, we three waited and watched the animals coming toward us. Suddenly we recognized the animals as our herd, the one I was supposed to be watching. Behind them a man, walking stick in hand, plodded purposefully, driving the animals toward us. Long before we could see the man's face, we recognized his gait. He was Barney Vander Veen whose farm lay across the fields a half mile to our south. But why? Why was Barney driving our cows?

Slowly the truth penetrated. While we had been shooting at targets, the cows had crossed Uncle John's land, crossed the road, and got into Barney's land. Without being told the details, we knew the animals had gotten into the garden of Gertie, Barney's wife. It was her anger and irritation that had prompted Barney to drop whatever important task he had been at to drive the herd back to their rightful territory.

Barney returned the oversight of the herd to me along with the pointed information that he never, never, ever wanted to see our cows in Gerties' garden again. Ominously, he turned his footsteps down the hill toward our farm and my parents.

That afternoon I wished I was Joshua so I could keep the sun from going down. Too soon the time came to chase the cows home and face the music. Wilmer and Lou didn't offer to come with me to share the blame. They were older. They should have known what was happening.

But I was the responsible one, and I alone would have to answer for my misdeed.

Answer I did. The cows were still milling around the stock tank, pushing each other out of the way to get a few more long draughts of water when Dad came out of the barn, crate lath in hand. He stopped halfway down the cement ramp off the west barn door, set his hands on his hips and ordered, “Bring me that BB gun!” I did. He took it and propped it against the barn door he had closed behind him, then he again turned to me. “Ya won't see that gun again!” he stated with a voice totally flattened out to hide his boiling rage.

“Now, come here!” he almost shouted as he grabbed me by my upper arm, jerked me around, and flipped me over one knee as he knelt on the other. Several years had come and gone since I had received any kind of spanking. To get the crate lath treatment at my age was a thing I had certainly not dreamed possible. I was hurt. I was humiliated. I was too big for such juvenile treatment, though I did have it coming, and I knew it. Supper that night was very quiet. For me to sit for supper that night was downright painful.

I did not see that BB gun again until spring. I had looked for it in every conceivable hiding place in every building on the farm but had not found it. Dad had hidden it effectively by sliding it as far as his arm could thrust it onto the wooden floor of the straw mow under the straw. Only when the straw was so far gone that I might have accidentally had the pleasure of discovering gun on my own did Dad pull it out after chores one night and hand it to me with the warning, “Next time you let that gun get between you and doing what you are supposed to do, I'll take it over my knee and smash it.” I knew he would.

Remedies and Such

We got hurt and we got sick. When we did, we tried to return to normalcy by any means short of visiting the doctor. Doctors cost money.

Colds were our most common ailment. Bottles of a variety of cold tablets, most of them limited in use to the adults in the family, cluttered the third shelf inside the west kitchen cupboard door. Quinine was the favorite, though no adult could tell exactly what the quinine did for a cold. Cough syrups were available and used generously. Cough drops were more desirable, especially the triangular Vicks mentholated drops. They had it hands down over the black Smith Brothers and were even farther ahead of the sickly-sweet Ludens. These remedies were for the ordinary one- or two-week cold, bad enough for sure, but not likely to keep one awake too many hours of the night. When the cough wouldn't let up and the fever came, and the eyes watered, and the nose ran the most unusual of all cold remedies was called upon: Lard and turpentine!

The combination of turpentine and lard produced a controlled heat when applied to human skin. The recipe for its use was: Take a piece of worn winter underwear (long johns) about ten inches wide and fourteen inches long, lay it on the oilcloth of the kitchen table rough

side up. With a table knife spread a generous layer of lard on the fabric. Work into it a tablespoon or two of turpentine. Apply to either our back of chest, pinning it in place on the inside of the long johns worn by the victim. When first slapped on, it felt icy cold! As soon as the four corners had been pinned to the inside of the underwear the turpentine began to do its work. All night long it kept working. All night long it kept smelling. The person wearing it had a cold. His nose was so stuffed he couldn't smell anything, but those who had to sleep with him smelled it. Small wonder we blessed the day the makers of Vicks Vap-O-Rub put the lard and turpentine remedy into history books.

Constipation was a serious wintertime plague, due mostly to the chill of the outhouse. There was little joy in sitting in the blustery “two holer” long enough to encourage production if production needed to be encouraged. But remedies were available. For the young, two tablespoons of Fletcher's Castoria did the trick. Since we were given a dose at least once a week a big bottle of the stuff didn't last long around our house. It had a pleasant taste, so we didn't mind.

As we grew, we either became immune to Castoria or it was not intended to work on larger bodies. We had a choice of either castor oil or Epsom salts. The blessing of castor oil was that the usual dose was a single tablespoon, though the taste was vulgar and lasting. Black coffee was allowed to be the only effective chaser. Epsom salts didn't taste all that bad, but one had to dissolve a couple of teaspoons in a glass of water and choke down the whole thing.

Twelve hours later the results were certain. Severe cramps heralded the necessary trip, regardless of the thermometer, but the sit was not long and one trip sufficed. Normal life resumed, and one could face the next week or two without concern.

Contagions of all varieties were an accepted facet of life. The question was never whether a person was going to get the measles, the mumps, or the chicken pox. The question was when. The usual answer was, “The sooner the better.”

We took measles for granted. Measles came in two varieties, German and red. German measles were a breeze. One broke out with a rash and felt miserable for a couple of days, but the rash faded, ambition returned, and again life was normal. At least, that was what we thought.

Later it was discovered that for some people German measles had belated effects which were nothing to be trifled with.

Red measles lasted a couple of weeks. Like other contagions, they began when some scholar visited a cousin or friend in a somewhat distant community and after a couple of weeks came down with the disease. From that point in time everyone in school waited only

to learn whether he came down with the measles in two weeks, the first wave of contagion, or whether it was going to be two more weeks when the second wave hit, or whether it would be still another two weeks down the road. A sore throat combined with a fever announced that something sinister was in the offing. The ensuing rash positively determined the measles had taken hold. The first week out of school was too miserable to be enjoyed. The second week, the time it took for the rash to disappear, was more like a vacation.

The year red measles caught up with our family, three of us entertained them at one and the same time. For the sake of convenience, we were allowed to spend our daytime hours on a leather covered couch (davenport) in the dining room. The couch was unusual in that the back flipped down to make a bed, a bit narrow for two adults perhaps, but not uncomfortable. During the miserable first week we lay in feverish sleep most of the day, waking up too often for a drink of water and possibly a bowl of very thin chicken soup.

The second week our demands on our nurse-mother became more rigorous, and our intolerance of each other's shortcomings increasingly vocal. Day fifteen saw us back in school, much to the relief of our harried parents.

We treated mumps in quite the same fashion. We first noticed a sore throat, then some localized swelling of the salivary glands under the jaw on either or both sides of the neck. Our parents used the dill pickle determiner to rule out fakery. Should any of us who had not yet had the mumps complain of a sore throat accompanied by that tell-tale swelling of the glands and ask to stay home from school, one of our parents would get a juicy dill pickle from the back kitchen ice box, and wave it under the nose of the ailing one. The aroma stimulated the salivary glands to full throttle. If the sore throat was caused by the mumps, such demanding salivation caused a pain sharp enough to stream tears down the cheeks and produce a fierce clenching of the teeth. The reaction could not be faked. The real thing gave leave to stay home from school until the mumps had run their course.

Some were unfortunate enough to get mumps only on one side of the face on first contagion, and had to endure another bout on the other side after the first side healed. Childhood mumps did have one bright side. Adults told how lucky we were to get mumps when we were young. We didn't totally understand their reasons, not until we were old enough to understand more fully the role of the human reproductive glands and their reaction to the mumps contagion. Those who avoided mumps in grade school considered themselves lucky, but so often they suffered them later in life, and that was not a laughing matter. The consequences for persons who got mumps “went down” later in life could be quite disastrous.

Smallpox was a contagion that we learned about only from the stories our parents and grandparents told. A scar on each of our left upper arms prove to the world that we had been immunized against smallpox and would not fall prey to the disease. Some scars were slight. Some were massive and ugly, the result of a youngster not being able to allow the scab on the immunization to heal. Each picking off the scab caused the site of the immunization to grow another larger than the one before.

The most dreaded contagions of our day were tuberculosis, scarlet fever, pneumonia, and whooping cough. No one in our community had tuberculosis, but the threat was still actual. We knew people who knew people who had it and were healing in sanitariums far from their homes. We knew we didn't want to catch it.

We regarded pneumonia as the result of a neglected cold. People who had colds and didn't get enough sleep or to didn't dress warmly enough when they went out into the wintry blasts of a January or February got pneumonia. When they did, the family called on Doc Masselink from McBain. He had the reputation of being able to cure pneumonia. The sad fact was that each year there were deaths from pneumonia in our larger community. The good doctor had his work cut out for him several times during a winter, sitting up through repeated nights with a sick child or youth, doing everything he could to hold down the fever, hoping and praying that the fever would break before the patient succumbed to the disease. Only later, after the discovery of the "wonder drugs" penicillin and sulfa, did we lose some of our fear of pneumonia.

Scarlet fever was by all odds our greatest fear. The lives of a stricken family were immediately and completely disrupted. As soon as the diagnosis had been made quarantine signs were posted on every door of the house and at the gate posts leading from the road into the driveway. The entire family was confined to its home. The cream the families' animals produced was poured down the drain. It could not be sold. The eggs the families' hens produced had to be destroyed. They could not be sold. No one was allowed to leave the house to shop for groceries. An order for the essentials was placed by phone with the local grocer who left them at the gateposts. Not even a letter or a post card was allowed to be picked up from the mailbox by the rural mail carrier.

Often the disease swept through the entire family once it had been contracted. Adults who had not had it when they were children were likely to catch it from their own children who had brought it home from school. The quarantine would not be lifted until two weeks after the last person recovered from the fevers. Quarantines resulted in a real financial loss. The emotional strain on a family forced to lean on its own resources during the period of suffering was severe to say the least. The fact that scarlet fever was sometimes fatal added stress. Nor was it uncommon for a hired girl or hired man from an area family to be caught

by the quarantine and forced to stay with the suffering family through their weeks of confinement, sometimes coming down with the disease themselves. What a relief for all concerned when the doctor or the health department lifted the quarantine and the family was free to take its place in the routines of life.

Our family never experienced a siege of scarlet fever. We do recall the weeks when every student in our school was examined by the teachers every morning to make certain that none had come to school with the kind of sore throat that produced a peculiarly recognizable tint associated with the disease. The teachers lined us up, ordered each in tum to open up, and shined a flashlight into our throats. If the teacher was suspicious of what he or she saw, the student had no choice but to walk back home and stay there until either the throat got better or the family was quarantined.

Our family was also spared the contagion of whooping cough, though many in our community and school did catch it. Even after they were over the illness and were allowed to return to school from the semi-quarantine imposed upon the family, they still whooped when they got a cold and a cough, usually until the warmth of spring knocked the remnants of the disease from their bodies.

Tooth problems were inevitable. We all had cavities. We all suffered toothaches. We read about brushing teeth in our hygiene books in school, but we seldom brushed. We used our fingernails to scrape off accumulations from the front surfaces of our incisors, especially after it began to turn yellow and ugly. Ma bawled us out for not brushing, made us dig out our toothbrushes, and set out the box of baking soda that we were to use as a brushing agent, but we never got the habit.

When cavities are allowed to increase in size millimeter by millimeter, the decay finally reaches into the inner depths of the tooth, where are the growing tissues, the blood vessels, and the nerves. Decay produces abscesses which produce the pain. Getting rid of the pain of a toothache becomes the highest priority of life for the afflicted.

Experienced friends and acquaintances are eager to provide an assortment of remedies.

The gentlest remedy was the use of a cup of salt tied into a cloth sugar sack, placed in the oven of the cook stove until hot but not hot enough to burn the skin, and held against the jaw adjacent to the source of the ache. Allow at least an hour (warming it occasionally as needed) before giving up on it.

Another possibility was toothache drops sold at all drug stores. The bottle and eyedropper were of one piece. A drop or two in the tooth cavity was the normal dose. Whatever was in the bottle (at that time labels were not required to list contents) would somewhat soothe the pain for a while.

If drops didn't work, try some cloves from the spice drawer of the cupboard. Break off the little knob clutched in the claw on the end of the spice and force the knob into the cavity. If the cavity is big, use two. Hold the clove in place with the tongue or pack it in with a bit of cotton batting, and give it plenty of time to work.

If none of the above served to quell the pain, there was one last treatment reserved only as a last resort for adults only: the carbolic acid treatment! One took a toothpick, twirled around its end a bit of cotton batting, wet it with carbolic acid from the little bottle hidden in the back of the medicine shelf in the cupboard, and with extreme care to avoid touching any tissue of the tongue or gums, plunged it into the cavity. The split second of searing pain was guaranteed to shock the entire upper torso, but it lasted only a split second, and it brought an instant end to the ache. Since the acid killed the tissue inside the hollow tooth including the nerve tissue, the tooth would not ache again until the decay spread even more deeply into the jaw.

There was one other half-way measure which alleviated a toothache for very short periods of time, one which was learned accidentally and experientially. That treatment was the art of so sucking on the painful cavity so as to extract from it enough of the “junk” of the abscess and thus to relieve the pressure and the pain for as long as it took the decaying process to refill the vacuum. The sucking was focused on the offending abscess by the tongue and cheek and intensified until the abscess popped. The popping produced a moment of exquisite pain followed immediately by a period of pleasant relief.

The toothache hurt. To suck the cavity hurt. The putrid pus one sucked out of the cavity stank. If a person made the mistake of swallowing it instead of spitting it out, it would likely tum his stomach. The hour or two of relief from pain was worth every bit of the unpleasantry!

We visited the dentist only when the pain of a toothache became so severe that there was no avoiding him. We went to have aching teeth pulled, never to have them filled.

We had no money for dentistry during the Depression. Had we been made to brush our teeth, we might have been spared the eventual dentures that we had been brought up to expect to be our lot, but our parents had neither learned nor practiced proper tooth care. Eventually our state government did arrange free dental care for those who couldn't pay the price of dentistry.

Centers were set up in the local high schools, staffed by dental students during the summer season when they had vacation from their med-school classes. We went to one such clinic in Marion. The dentist took one look at my teeth, shuddered, told Dad that my

teeth were hopeless, and that it was a waste of his time to even try to do anything with them. He pulled two which were aching at the time and sent me home.

When we eventually got money enough to visit a “real” dentist, I was told the man in the clinic had been wrong. There was nothing so wrong with my teeth that they couldn't be saved, but those that were gone were gone!

The Cows We Milked

I describe our cows in four seasonal segments beginning with summer, the season in which the cows were the most fun and least work. In summer, cows spent little time in the barn. The grasses in the pastures and woodlot were their basic food supply, supplemented at each milking with two quarts of ground oats.

On a typical summer morning, the cows were in the back woodlot. As the early morning mists cleared, some sleepy body walked the half-mile to the northwest corner of the farm, located the cows somewhere in the six-acre wooded area, rounded them up, and drove them down the fenced lane along the west side of the farm to the barn yard.

Our usual herd of twelve cows had a pecking order established by a never-ending series of head-to-head pushing contests to determine which cow led the herd down the lane and which poor critter ranked as last cow out. Twelve cows wear a total of forty-eight cloven hooves that easily cut through the grass carpet of the lane, but never in a straight trail. Nor did the winding trail remain constant. What today was the fifteen-inch-wide path for twelve cows, next month had shifted according to the whims of the lead critter. The old rut gradually grew new grass while in the new one the grass was trampled into the topsoil that had produced it.

When I was ten, Dad decided I was old enough to help with chores. Come summer, my first morning chore was to get the cows. Nobody went along with me on that half mile walk to the woods the first morning I got the cows. I don't recall it being a traumatic experience. I presume that I accepted the job as a part of growing up. I carried a five-foot maple sapling with its branches trimmed off in case one of the cows needed to be called to attention, but this was not unusual. We always carried such a switch when we went into a cow pasture. I recall only that by the time I got back to the barn with the cows, my feet were soaked with dew. I had worn my tennis shoes which was a mistake. The next day I wore my leather plow shoes. Three years later, I cheerfully handed that early morning chore assignment to young brother Marv.

At the barn, the cows stopped off at the cement water tank built near the west end of the north side of the barn for a drink of water. Their thirst quenched, they walked or fought their way through the open door to their two rows of stables, traversing the cement alley separating them. Each cow had her assigned stall, and each knew well which stall was hers. Not that she always went into it. Sometimes, when the humidity was high, or when there was a thunderstorm in the offing, or when we were in a terrible hurry and needed every minute of our time a critter or two proved difficult. I swear we could see it in their eyes when they decided to rebel. Usually all it took to return to them their sense of orientation

was a good yell from Dad, or if that didn't work, a swat over the back with a handy fork or shovel. Normally, each animal simply walked into her stall, stuck her head through the opening into the manger, and waited for one of us to come and tie her with the chrome plated chain hanging from a nail slightly above the level of her shoulders. These chains were in the shape of a “Y,” the bottom of which was securely fastened to the wood frame of the manger opening. The top end of one side of the Y ended in a ring about two inches in diameter, the other side of the Y ended in a bar that slipped through the ring, thus making a circle around the animal's neck. No doubt any of the cows in the barn, if she wanted to, could rear back and tear that chain out of its moorings or break a link in it, but to the best of my knowledge, none of our animals was ever malicious enough to do it.

Though the cows had walked a half mile in the open, where the deposit of manure on the grass and soil would be welcomed and unnoticed, there was never a morning in which a couple critters didn’t pollute the alley with manure. Gutters separating the alley from the stalls were built to hold their waste, but these animals would not wait until their rears were above the gutters. They spilled the manure magnificently over as long a stretch of the alley as they could. Naturally, we had to shovel and sweep the walk before we began every milking.

Ten cows stood in stalls facing the north wall of the stables, the other two were on the east end of the stable and faced south. The remaining area on that south side of the alley was taken up sometimes by a bull, sometimes by young cow (heifers) awaiting maturity, and sometimes by pens of calves, mostly by a combination of two of the above.

Once we had tied the cows in place, we carried in the milk pails from the barn floor. Until the early 1940s, we separated the cream from the milk by running it through the De Laval cream separator located in the engine room.

Each of us used a twelve-quart pail in which to milk. On the walk between the gutters were empties to exchange for filled pails until it was worth our while to carry them into the engine room and empty them into the supply tank of the separator.

Each of us had a wooden three-legged milk stool. The seat of the stool was two inches thick and roughly fourteen inches by ten inches with the back corners cut off to make an irregular hexagon. The legs were inch and a half dowels a foot long, one fixed into each of the front corners with a third in the center of the back. I never understood why we had such elaborate stools. Most of the neighbors had single legged stools, fashioned from two pieces of two by four, the seat slightly shorter than the upright upon which it was nailed perpendicularly. Those who sat on one-legged stools to milk had to work at keeping their balance. Our stools allowed for more relaxation.

Cows must always be approached properly. They are big enough to be dangerous when frightened or surprised. The milker learns to approach the animal from the rear, talking to her while taking the step across the gutter and onto the stall to the right of the animal. Continuing to talk, the milker makes physical contact with the cow with the back of the hand holding the handle of the pail, sets the milk stool on the ground, sits on it, placing his left foot just ahead of the cow's right back foot and under the animal's udder. He then locks the pail on an angle between his lower legs and feet, resting only the fore bottom edge of the pail on the straw strewn cement of the stall. All the while, a polite conversation with the animal is in order.

Protocol calls for milking the front two teats of the animal first. The process is simple. The teat is squeezed against the hand at the base of the thumb by each finger in tum, beginning with the index finger and ending with the small finger. The squeeze takes far less time to accomplish than to describe.

Cows have distinctly different udders. Some are tough milkers. That is, it takes solid pressure from the finger muscles to produce a stream of milk from the animal's teats. Some are such easy milkers they all but milk themselves. Some readily allow the milk to flow down into the udder and through the teat, some allow an initial flow, but then hold up on their milk and dare the milker to get the rest of it. Sometimes a conversation with bossy helps, sometimes a gentle massage of the udder helps, sometimes moving on to the back teats, fully realizing that their milk, too, will be held up after a minute or two, and sometimes only the patience of Job himself is needed before the flow of milk regains normality. Eventually it does.

Some of our cows, at the peak of their production, produced a twelve-quart pail full of milk or more per milking, some limited their gift to the world to eight or ten quarts. Those who did not produce as much as desired were eventually shipped to the slaughterhouse or became the canned beef which fed the family.

Each of our cows had a name. I recall only some of them and the reason for her name.

One was Spot. Her coat was a white background with small blotches of black, differing from the rest of the Holstein herd whose markings were more or less balanced between large black and white areas. One was Black-neck White Eye. The name was a product of the active imagination of Gert who coined the name at the time she was reading Indian novels. Another was Wallace, named for the matriarch of the farm family from which we bought her.

Other names had no histories. There was Bess. She was a terror. If there was cow trouble anywhere, Bess would be in the middle of it. She was the one who twice had brother Marv

pinned to the ground for doing nothing more than walking in her pasture. Another time when she pinned him, she had calved in the pasture and Marv was sent in to try to drive her calf to the barn. That was a mistake. Bess was protective. Dad rescued him from between Bess's front feet. The name Daisy comes to mind. She was the easiest milker of the herd, the one under which I had my first milking lesson. She produced well. I presume we finally ate her, though I can't remember any of the specifics.

The milking hour of a summer morning was never a time of peace and quiet. Birds in the barnyard sang with abandon. Year after year we were serenaded by the wrens who had their nest of twigs and horsehair in the top of the hollow fence post one post east of the gate on the north side of the cow yard. Their song was the most ambitious of all the birds in the area, the longest in the book, and the most often repeated. Starlings sat on the silo roof or on the lightning rod cable between the silo and the barn squealing and squeaking the stories of their adventures.

Always there was the flock of sparrows beyond numbering which populated the hay mows.

Their constant chirping came from any and every quarter of the barn and the yard around it.

Crows furnished the low tones of the symphony, their caws muscling in from the woods west of the barn yard or the hill north of it.

Noise was not the only distraction during the milking hour. There were the flies by the hundreds and thousands. They bred in the manure around the farm. When their numbers grew beyond toleration, we sprayed the backs of the cows with a liquid bought from the Watkins man or from Dan Cotter, the Standard Oil delivery man. The smell of the spray was stronger than its killing power, but it was effective enough to keep the flies off the backs of the cows through part of one milking, so their tails weren't constantly wrapped around our heads.

Cats helped to keep the milking hour interesting. We usually had a half dozen running around the barn. The only food we gave them was a little skimmed milk. We expected them to earn their keep by catching mice and an occasional sparrow or two. However, the cats had us wrapped around their little fingers, as cats are wont to do with the people they own. They were strictly forbidden to place their forepaws on the rims of the foamy, filled milk pails. All of them had learned that fact the hard way. When they were young and had tried to drink from the pails, Dad had picked them up by the loose skin at the top of their backs and had rolled them like bowling balls along the alley between the two gutters. To observe that treatment, one would swear the cat would be killed or at best limp away on four broken legs. Strangely enough, rolling didn't seem to hurt cats. At the end of the roll, the cat would pick himself up, shake his head a time or two, arch his back, stick his tail up in the air, and

depart for safer quarters. Two such rolls earned any cat her diploma. During milking she could lie down on the cement of the alley, snuggled close to a warm pail of milk, but would never lift a paw to disturb the head of foam on the pail nor the milk beneath the foam.

I said we spoiled those cats. From their position on the alley floor, they would look up at us with pleading eyes all the while we milked. After they had pierced our souls long enough, one of us would stop milking for a moment, gather the teat in hand closest to the cat, bend it so as to aim at the head of the cat, and squeeze. With perfect timing, the cat would snap from a relaxed, prone position to stand on her back feet, and with wide open mouth field the squirt from the first drop to the last, hardly wetting a whisker.

When the last cow had been milked and the last bucket of milk run through the De Laval Separator in the engine room, and the skim milk fed to the calves, pigs, or perhaps to one of the cows who enjoyed the drinking of it, the cows were unchained one by one and allowed out the barn doors. Again, we cleaned the walk. The cows were now free until late afternoon when they returned to the barn for a repeat performance. In the meantime, they were allowed to drink their fill from the cement water tank and from there to wander into whatever was the current daytime pasture. Seldom did the cows return to the woods during the day. There was usually better pasture available in one of the fields we had fenced off and opened for them. Young sweet clover pasture was their favorite, though alfalfa also ranked high in choice.

All pasture had a tendency to become wearisome to them as the summer progressed, usually because there wasn't quite enough of it. Too little rain and too much use plus overly mature plants rob pasture of its attraction. Across the fence from the pastures were corn or oat fields. Our pasture fences, from the time I was able to help with chores, were poor remnants of the impeccable fences Grandpa had built around every field on the farm. Time and the Depression had worn them down to the point where most of them could no longer keep the cows in a designated pasture, and we had no money to make effective repairs.

We tried to solve our problem inexpensively. One solution was to have the “the kids” watch the cows to prevent them from going through the fences into the crops. I did my share of it, and my younger siblings did theirs, but watching cows was not very practical. On Sundays, while we were in church, the cows took advantage of our absence and had themselves a feast on tender corn plants on the other side of the fence. While we celebrated the Fourth of July in the Lucas woods, they celebrated with a trip through oat fields, fully headed and only beginning to tum from blue green to amber. Dad grew more frustrated with each escapade of the animals until one evening after chores he read in either the Michigan Farmer or the Hoard's Dairyman, of a new concept of dairy herd containment, Electric Fencing!

Dad never allowed a new thought or idea to fester in his mind very long before doing something about it. We were still in the Depression, and there was no money to buy an electric fencer though they were soon available locally. The Co-Ops in McBain carried one brand, the Grain Company had another, and Ed De Young in the McBain Hardware had still another, but they were all as far out of our grasp as was a trip to Europe. However, clerks in each of these concerns eagerly explained how their product was constructed and what made it better than the competition. Dad listened very carefully, then went home and began to experiment with the materials at hand. He found an empty electrical switch box left over from the wiring of the house. Somewhere in the engine room of the barn, he found an old Model T coil. He scrounged some bits of strap iron and screws from some of the "pigeonholes" Grandpa had built above the workbench in the engine room. A bit of bending, a bit of cutting, a bit of soldering wires together and Dad had built himself an electric fencer. He powered it with a surplus six-volt car battery. It worked! The pendulum inside the box rose and fell with almost perfect regularity, its end clicking down on the top of the Model T coil fittings. Each time the gap in the fittings closed a charge of electricity made a potential circuit through whatever wire was hooked to it. Another wire ran from the other side of the coil to a rod driven into the ground. When an animal touched the wire charged by this fencer, a jolt of electricity went through it and into the ground through its hoofs, completing the circuit to the fencer at the speed of light. We were surprised by the wallop the fencer produced, wallop enough to discourage any but the most determined cow from crossing the fence.

A few bugs in the fencer called for a modification or two, and a few ideas were scrapped or replaced by better ideas. Dad's fencer was never totally reliable. By the same token, it was never finished. But it was used, and most of the time it did work. Eventually we had the money to buy a dependable fencer, one that operated by 110 volts instead of by a six-volt battery, but for the time being, we were in business.

We found some light-weight barbed wire Dad called pig-wire left over from a fencing project completed years earlier, still wound on a spool in the upstairs of the garage. The barbs on the wire were insignificant, but it was perfect for the new electric fence. We strung it on what old fence posts were in fairly good condition or on metal rods we drove into the ground.

A strand of electrified fence wire needs insulation from whatever posts support it.

Porcelain insulators were available, but these cost money. We had no money, but we did have a considerable collection of used rubber car tire inner tubes. These were pure rubber and rubber is a wonderful insulator. A scissors, a nail, and a bit of what Dad called "elbow grease" and we produced our own insulators at no expenditure of money. Our rubber

rectangles were never as efficient as the porcelain insulators. When the rains came, enough moisture clung to the rubber to allow the electricity in the wire to dribble down every wet post until there wasn't enough charge in the fence to be felt. Cows may have no knowledge of science, nor are they able to rationalize enough to conclude that rain meant the fence was no longer a threat to their enjoyment of forbidden pleasures, yet they knew. They used their knowledge to their enjoyment and our frustration.

We humans who touched the fence were sufficiently jolted to avoid the charge almost at any cost, though there were some farmers who firmly grasped the charged fence wire, allowing the electricity to pulse through their limbs because, so they said, “It was good for my arthritis.” The jolt we humans got from the fence was slight compared to what an animal got because the animal had more contact with the ground than we. Cows have four feet, and they wear no shoes. Hence the amount of electricity conducted through their bodies was considerable. Yet one of our cows had a tolerance for electricity beyond what any animal should ever have. You guessed it. It was Bess, and Bess was one determined animal.

For a few weeks one summer we pastured the cows in a field of foot tall succulent second cutting. Just over the fence was the corn field with juicy yard tall plants, green enough to make any healthy cow drool. One day as I was cultivating this field of corn with the one-horse cultivator, I found hoof prints between the rows and considerable evidence that cows had bit off some of the tender stalks. But there were no cows in the corn. My cultivating that day obliterated all the tracks the cows had made. That night I told Dad what I had discovered, and he immediately pronounced my observations the result of my taking in too much moonlight.

To make sure of my sanity, I went back to the field the next evening after chores. I found fresh cow tracks in the corn and more eaten stalks. A few leaves left behind on the newly turned ground seemed to prove the point. I went back home and convinced Dad to come back with me and take a look for himself. There was no denying the fact, but there was also no denying that the cows were no longer in the corn field. In fact, there was little reason to think the cows in our pasture had made the tracks except that it was impossible for any other cows to have been in the area.

The next day Dad assigned Jack and Den to spend their day on a hill across a hollow from the cornfield. Not a cow got out of line. Another day, another vigil with the same results. The next day the watchers begged a day off. That evening we checked the corn field and found fresh tracks, proof positive that some cows had again been into the corn The next day the watch was resumed. That day Bess got careless. She allowed herself to be seen committing a crime.

About the middle of the afternoon when her hunger pangs were dulled by the quantity of alfalfa she had eaten, but when a desire for a bit of gastronomic variety overpowered her better judgment, she walked up to the fence, looked around for a little moral and physical support, mooed a bit, and accepted the volunteer status of a few of the cows of her own young age, then scraped under the fence at its most slack point between two fence posts and stood, feet planted solidly apart. She took every surge of the electrical charge the fencer produced without flinching while her comrades filed painlessly under the fence into the com. For fifteen minutes Bess and her friends feasted, after which Bess again mooed and the contented cows re-entered the pasture as they had left it. We sent the chronicle of this event to the publishers of a few farm magazines but none of them put any stock in it. They didn't know Bess. We did.

I did say that many of the fences on the farm were in poor condition. One of the worst was the backline fence, the boundary between our farm and a forty-acre plot of ground owned by a Mr. Heeringa who lived in Lucas, five miles away. On several occasions our cows had broken out of the woods pasture bordering Mr. Heeringa's field and helped themselves to his crops. Each time this happened we chased our cows back into the pasture and fixed the fence as best we could, but it was never good enough. Mr. Heeringa had made it clear that be didn't appreciate our animals feeding on his crops, and Dad had made many promises that he had kept, but only as far as he was able.

Now that we had an electric fencer, we added a strand of wire on the insulated posts of the line fence without disturbing the existing fence. Within a few days Mr. Heeringa came to check on the well-being of his corn. He did find damage, and he did notice the cow tracks, though they were a bit stale, and he did determine that Mr. Vredevoogd should have another visit to be reminded of his obligations. To do so, he had to cross the fence and walk the half-mile to our buildings. However, in crossing the fence, he happened to grasp the newly placed electric wire with one hand while leaning one of his legs on the established fence, which thoroughly grounded him and just as thoroughly shocked him. He looked up and down the line fence, noting that something new had been added, smiled, and went back home. A month later he met Dad in McBain and complimented him on his modern ideas which “Ought to do the trick, you know.”

One of the perils to cows in the summer was the phenomena of bloating. Alfalfa hay is wonderful feed for cows. However, when cows eat sweet clover wet with dew or rain, the animals often bloat. Exactly of what the medical and scientific process of bloating consists, I have never investigated, but I do recall clearly the looks of a bloated animal. Her abdomen was so filled with gases that her hide was stretched shining tight from behind her front shoulder to high over her hips.

On wet mornings we closed the gate to any pasture containing sweet clover until it was dry enough for the cows to safely pasture on it. Sometimes we forgot. Sometimes we were too quick to let the cows return to the wet grass. Sometimes one or more of the animals bloated. That meant a phone call to the veterinarian. Bloating could kill an animal if it was not treated soon. Doc had but one method of treating a bloated animal. He used a metal tube the thickness of a pencil and nearly a foot long, having a strong, sharp knife blade mounted on one end. I presume this tool had been sterilized. With a deft punch he thrust the tool into the first of the seven stomachs of the animal, the one in which the offending grass and gas was trapped. The result was a whistling release of gas through the tube and an eternally grateful animal, to say nothing about a relieved farmer. The good doctor left this tube in the incision he had made for a few hours after which he retrieved it before he left for town, or we would take it into town on our next trip. He didn't bother to sew up the tiny incision because the wound would heal without the stitches. The animal went back to feeding minutes after the operation.

Evening chores in the summer were much a repeat of the morning theme with a few variations. Usually, the cows came home by themselves in late afternoon. It seemed they felt they had enough of eating and chewing their cuds and wanted a change of scenery. Filled, straining udders were a more likely reason for their early arrival. The door at the west end of the barn had to stay shut until we wanted the animals in or they would come in on their own accord and try other stalls than their own or find other non-productive variations on their drab lives.

Once the doors were open, one of us went into the barnyard and rounded up the animals, who, by that time, had lost some of their willingness to come in. They wanted to be coaxed a bit. The walking up the cement ramp to the door, the process of getting through the door (often made difficult when two or three animals tried to get through it at once), and the parade into the stalls was the routine which was a part of our every afternoon.

The flies were thicker and more obnoxious in the evening than in the morning. Cow tails constantly switched. We became expert at dodging flying tail hairs by a tip of the head, a squeezing shut of the eyes, or a quick raising of an elbow to shield our faces from damage. The story is told of a neighbor who thought to dissuade the animals from such constant switching by tying a brick on the end of a cow's tail only to find that the animal then swung not only the tail but the brick as well, knocking the gentleman unconscious and into the gutter. But that was only hearsay. When the switching became too much for us to bear, we found a length of binder twine, tied one end of it to the tail just above the hairy end, the other to the cow's leg just above the knee.

Sometimes, the evening milking process was impeded by the barbed wire cuts in a cow's teats made when she crossed a fence to graze greener grass. Though the wounds were painful, the animal had to be milked. She needed relief from a filled udder, and milking her was the only way to relief. We coated such teat wounds with an antiseptic ointment named Bag Balm that is packaged in small cubical green tin cans. It has wondrous healing powers, but it contains no anesthetic to dull the pain of the squeezing of the injured teat. No matter how gently we tried to squeeze the teat, the pain was enough to make the gentlest of animals kick. Some of the kicks were friendly admonitions to take it easy and be gentle. Sometimes they were vicious and well-aimed. We did have a pair of metal kickers which, when attached to a critter's hind legs, cuffed them so that the kick from one leg was absorbed by the other. Usually, the effect was to diffuse the power of the kick. Occasionally, a critter wearing a kicker kicked so viciously as to slide both legs from under her, setting her down atop the milker. We learned to use kickers with discretion.

Dad was not slow of temper on the occasions when an animal succeeded in kicking him. He usually hurt the animal back, sometimes with a pain limited to the eardrums, most often with a pain inflicted on the back of the animal with a solid milk stool. And if the animal did not have sense enough to stand still throughout the rest of the milking, the second onslaught of the stool was guaranteed to be more than doubly vicious. I am afraid that each of us who learned to milk in our stables also learned the art of retaliation as taught by our father's example.

After the animals had been milked, they were again turned out into the barnyard. They drank from the cement tank on the north side of the barn, then filed down the paths their own feet had created past the maple tree on the north side of the yard, down the grade and into the rye field, and into the lane which led them to the woodlot nearly a half mile to the north.

Cows in the fall were as different from cows in the summer as the seasons differ. With the cool of the season, the cows grew increasingly stubborn about what once had been routine.

Plodding animals suddenly became interested in things they had never before bothered to notice. They were restless, looking for they didn't know what. They didn't want to go into the stables at milking time. They didn't want to go into the stall they had been satisfied with throughout the summer. The heifers became particularly obnoxious. All summer, we had left them to pasture, never bringing them into the barn, but when the nights became cooler and the temperature dipped below the freezing mark, we insisted they enjoy the comforts of a warm barn. They would rather not.

The box stall allotted to them was in the southwest corner of the stable area, partitioned off from the milking stalls by stout two-by-fours and the set of mangers from which they fed. The door to their box stall was on south end of the west side of the barn. The tile silo between that door and the stable door helped us in separating the animals, but, in the fall, the heifers lost all sense of direction and recognition, confusing the door their mothers entered with theirs. Since they were young and rambunctious they bounded from one corner of the barnyard to the other with more speed than we cared to match, especially after we had put in a hard day's work in the fields. Many was the time we wished we had a good cow dog to help us get these critters into their place.

Since fall nights got too cold for the animals to be outside, we had to feed them to tide them over the night. The loose hay we stored in the mows during the summer we now had to throw down and drag into the mangers. By now it was packed tightly. We pulled it free, layer by layer, hauled it to the edge of the mow, and slid it down to the barn floor.

Late fall also marked the beginning of the feeding of silage. We had filled the silo with green corn stalks, ears and all, chopped up into one-inch lengths, and blown into the silo by the silo filler, where it was stored until it was cured by fermentation. Every afternoon one of us chore boys would climb up the ladder in the chute of the silo, loosen and throw down enough silage to twice feed the hungry animals. I had my own fears about throwing down silage. Thirty feet up a totally perpendicular wall was not my favorite exercise. The confined loneliness of the silo, its glazed tile walls echoing every sound, and the prospect of not getting the job done before darkness closed in left me with less than a sense of enjoyment.

I particularly recall one afternoon when chores were late. I was working alone, though I knew that later I would have help milking. The job of getting the animals into the barn had taken far longer than it should have. It was dark and I was frustrated by the time I was ready to climb up that silo. An electric light bulb hung by its cord from the roof of the structure, but it had not lit in years. We knew it didn't work. We had turned its rotary switch behind the wooden door of the silo chute time and again with no results. That night, breathing a silent prayer, I again reached up and turned that switch. The light went on! I climbed that silo chute faster than I had ever climbed it. I dug the silage loose and threw it down as fast as I could, and miraculously the light stayed on. When finished, I stuck the five-tine fork deep into the top layer of silage and scampered down the rungs with a heart filled with thankfulness. Back down to ground level I reached behind the silo chute door and turned the light switch off. I have turned that switch a hundred times since and it has never worked again for me. Some things don't make sense. They do make a person very grateful--and very humble.

Throughout the year we fed our milk cows some grain. Most of it was the oats we had grown and stored in the granary inside the barn. In the fall, when the room was filled to its capacity, we carefully removed the top boards from inside its door and reached in with an old bucket to pour the oats into burlap bags. As the supply decreased, we removed boards until we could climb into the granary on top the oats and scoop it out. By spring, we walked on the floor of the bin, scooping the oats into bags within the room itself.

We used a bag holder that enabled a single person to do the bagging. It consisted of a two-foot square platform on which a four-foot one-by-six upright was fixed. At the top of the upright and parallel to its base was an oval double metal loop the size of the mouth of a burlap bag. One loop was stationery, the other hinged and slightly larger than the stationery loop. The apparatus worked like an embroidery hoop. It was a bit of a trick to get the mouth of the burlap bag over the stationery loop properly and long enough to bring down on it the hinged loop to hold it during the filling, but with practice we learned. We tied the mouth of the filled bags with foot-long pieces of binder twine, using a knot which Dad assured us was a Miller's knot he had learned from his father who had learned it from his father who worked in a windmill in the “Old Country.”

A few times a month we took several bags of oats plus a few bags of corn ears to the McBain Grain Company and ordered it ground. A cow's stomach refuses to digest the meat of the oat grain inside its hull, therefore grains have to be ground so the animal can benefit from the nutrition locked inside the kernel. When I was young, we had no grinder on the farm. In later years, hammer mills mounted on the back of trucks visited the farm to do the grinding, but in the 1930s we transported our own grain. We owned a two-wheeled trailer that we pulled behind the car early in the 1930s, but that too suffered from the Depression. When we didn't have whole tires to put on it, we removed the back seat of the car and piled the bags of grain into it, draping another bag on each front fender of the car to make the trip worthwhile.

At the Grain Company, we threw the tied bags onto the dock. An employee untied each bag, throwing its contents into a hopper at ground level. When the last of the bags was emptied into the hopper, he slammed the lid closed and by pushing a button on one of the upright beams of the elevator, activated the grinder. During the grinding process, a high protein supplement of soybean oil meal, cotton seed meal, or linseed oil meal (from flax seed) was added, untouched by human hands. Naturally, we had to pay for the supplement, and there were times when the animals went without because couldn't afford it.

The grinding completed, the man poured the ground grain into the bags we had used to take it to town. Dust from the freshly ground contents filtered through the mesh of the burlap, so each trip coated the inside of the car with dust, *a la* oil meal flavor. After the grain was

unloaded, we replaced the seats we had removed and made an effort to rid the car of some of the dust. Sunday was coming, when we would ride the car to church, and we didn't really want our Sunday clothes to be polluted with cow feed dust.

No matter how dull, listless, and droopy the rows of animals might appear on a wintry afternoon, once the door to the silo was opened and the pungent smell of silage infiltrated the stable, every animal was on her feet. Her swinging head, flared nostrils, and drooling saliva gave evidence enough of her anticipation. Often a pair of cows became so excited about getting their quota of silage we could hardly squeeze a heaped crate between them to throw from the top of the stanchion to the floor of the manger. We topped the silage with a quart of ground grain to the delight of the feasting critters.

During the winter, the animals live in the barn night and day. The considerable accumulation of manure must be cleaned out of the gutters, a job we usually did after breakfast. When I was ten, our litter carrier was still operational. Within a year or two, it developed problems beyond our resources to repair. We mourned its demise since we had to resort to using the wheelbarrow. What in early fall was but a little heap of manure in the middle of the barnyard would, by spring, become a pile of mammoth proportions.

We routed our wheelbarrow on a series of two-by-twelve planks. A first plank stretched from the threshold of the west stable door beyond the end of the cement ramp. In early fall we trundled each load to the extreme of the proposed pile and dumped it. As load after load accumulated, we placed additional planks semi-permanently on the top of those loads. Each dumped load increased the height of the pile. When we needed to lengthen or widen the pile to bring it to its full size, we redirected the planks to suit our needs.

Come spring, we spread the huge manure pile over our fields as fertilizer, forkful after forkful, manure spreader load after load, day after day, until finally the pile was gone. Oh, but then there was still the box stall to be emptied of months of accumulation of manure, mixed with bedding and packed hard by so many feet for so long.

The aroma of the manure pile changed as the season progressed. The fall smell was of fresh manure straight from the gutter, powerful and unpleasant. The winter pile had hardly any smell, since the frost sealed it so tightly it couldn't release enough molecules to create response in the human nose, though on warm days a slight steam often broke through the covering of snow, releasing a promising acrid odor of better things to come. By spring the manure had ripened.

Sometimes we conscientiously cleaned the gutters twice a day, once in the morning after milking, and again in the afternoon before milking. Even so, it was impossible to keep the animals really clean. Some were habitual backsliders, that is, they would stand so far back

in the stable that while their front feet were standing at stall height, their back feet were a foot lower and in the gutter. When they decided to step forward and upward their hind feet took with them some of the manure. The animals did lie down at night, and often their tails rested in the gutters. Though there were no flies in the stable during the winter, the cows habitually switched their tails. The more the tail hairs were loaded with juice, the more likely the cow was to swing them.

This distributed the manure mixture over a considerable area of the cow's hind quarters. In time it dried and gradually this layer built up, alligatoring itself a half inch or more thick on the legs and flanks of the animals. Before we milked, we brushed off anything loose from the udders, but that was the extent of their cleansing. Years later, the companies buying whole milk from dairy farmers insisted that udders be washed with soap and water before every milking. We were born too soon. We were somewhat careful not to allow too much manure to infiltrate the foamy milk in the pail, but we certainly didn't worry about a bit of additional flavor. We strained the milk through a cotton pad as we poured it into the separator supply tank. The pad filtered out almost everything except germs. We didn't think much about germs in those days.

One of the most inviting experiences on a dark, cold, wintry morning on the family farm was the walking from the sharp air of the out-of-doors into the moist, warm stable. Milking began long before daylight during the short days of winter. While most of our neighbors used kerosene lanterns to light their stables, we had electricity thanks to our Delco plant. A twist of the switch outside the stable door lit the two bulbs positioned over the walk between the rows of the animals. Slowly, one after another the animals would stand up, perhaps moo a greeting, always to arch her back and empty her bladder into the gutter. Once those formalities were over and we had removed from the cement floor of the alley the excess manure that had missed the gutters, we carried the milk pails in and began milking.

Yes, there were yawns, and sometimes there were bouts of disagreement with fidgety critters, but mostly there was nothing but the warm, comfortable peace of the stables with only the gentle murmuring of the contented cows and the soft mewing of pleading cats to interrupt. On those mornings when the winds of a February storm beat on the north corner of the stables with whistling fury, the peace of the security of the warm stables was a bit of heaven on earth.

We raised our cows to produce milk. A cow's milk production begins when she gives birth to her first calf. The birth is necessarily preceded by insemination. During the 1930s and 1940s, we sometimes owned a bull. When we did, he was given a special stall, the location depending on the size of the animal. If the bull was young, close in size to a cow, he was

stabled in the area with the cows, though his stall was reinforced to make his stay more certain. If the animal was older, heavier, stronger, and less trusted, we built a special “bull pen” for him in the area next to the box stall where the bull was chained as well as penned. Never was a bull of an age to service the cows allowed the run of the pasture.

Dad had begun his herd with high goals. At that time money was plentiful, so he invested in quality, registered Holstein cattle, including a bull for which he had paid over $200. However, two years later, the animal developed a growth in his throat that the good Dr. Hoekzema of McBain failed to find, and the poor animal choked to death after servicing a young heifer. By this time money had become tight, and the animal was not replaced. Instead, we relied upon the neighbor's bulls for the service we needed.

Male calves were fattened and sold as veal six to twelve weeks after they were born. Our female calves were usually kept as future additions to our herd and were allowed to grow at a slow but steady pace until they were over a year. No longer were they calves. Now they were yearlings. Halfway through this year they were bred. Our watchful eyes noted the morning when each in tum gave evidence of being “in heat.” We phoned whichever of the neighbors had the bull of choice at the time, alerting him to the fact that after breakfast we would be over if it was all right with him. Usually, it was. The $2.00 fee increased his willingness to accommodate us.

After breakfast the circus began. The yearling was singled out of her box stall fellows and a ten-foot length of half-inch rope tied around her neck. The noose was made with a knot which did not slip tighter as the animal struggled. Her first trip to the bull included the additional first of allowing herself to being led. Naturally, the animal had no way of knowing what lay ahead of her, so she resisted. She allowed herself to be led out of the door with little protest.

Trouble began when she realized she was being led away from the gate to the pasture. The duration of the tug of war between the animal and her handler depended on the stubbornness of the animal, the size and experience of the person trying to educate her, the patience of the person providing the education, and the urgency of the plans he had for the remainder of the morning.

Dad was a masterful educator since his patience factor was short. Within minutes the ground in the arena of education was seriously rutted by hoof prints in rough circles at the center of which were sets of prints made by the heels of a fine set of plow shoes. Eventually, after some shouting and some swatting with the loose end of the rope, a fairly tangential set of prints led through the farmyard, out the driveway, and down the road.

Once at the neighbors, the options of procedure were explored. A yearling had to be tied to a post somewhere near the barn. An older, more experienced animal could be depended upon to stand still at the end of a held rope. Once the animal was quieted down and stationary, the bull was brought out of the barn at the end of a rigid six foot hickory stick an inch and a half square and attached to the bull by a snap through the brass ring mounted permanently in the tender nose of the animal The most belligerent and powerful bull was perfectly docile so long as that stick was attached to the ring in his nose.

After the bull had been introduced to the female, it took only minutes for the consummation of copulation. A few sniffs of the genital area of the cow aroused the sexual instincts of the bull. He pawed the ground, flattened his back, stretched his body to its full length, snorted a time or two, then mounted the cow, and in a few quick plunges of his copulatory organ, the act was accomplished.

The reaction of the heifer or cow ranged from naive surprise to complacent fulfillment, indicated by her arched back, which was then massaged by her handler, the supposition being that the rubbing insured a successful insemination.

While all this was going on, the humans supervising the animals exchanged local news, made small talk about the weather, the crops, church affairs, and, when time permitted, and there were no young ears around, exchanged a “humorous” story or two, inspired by the occasion. After the bull was returned to the barn and the fee was paid, the handler and the cow went home.

The date of insemination was marked on the calendar, a special one kept inside the kitchen cupboard door. If in a month she did not again come into heat, we were promised a new milk-producing animal at the end of her nine-month gestation period.

Once she had delivered her calf, she would continue to produce milk for about ten months. Three to six months after the delivery of her calf she was again bred. Depending upon her qualities, she would be allowed to stop her production of milk from four to six weeks before again producing a calf, during which period she was said to be dry.

Many of our neighbors, all of whom were dairy farmers, had varying views of how best to program their herds. Some wanted all calves to be born during the winter so they would be born in the barn under human supervision. This sharply reduced their milk production during the early winter months. We spread the calving throughout the year to keep production as uniform as possible. Companies that bought our milk in later years appreciated as even a production flow as was possible.

Our animals, and those of our neighbors, had their share of medical problems, mostly associated with calving. Normally, within an hour after the birth of a calf, the cow's

afterbirth left the mother. If not, human assistance was necessary. The service of veterinarians was expensive then as now, and they were not always available since they could not be in two places at the same time. A wait of a half-day was a gamble that sometimes paid off. Most often it didn't, and the wait made the job of the vet more difficult. The tissue by that time had begun to deteriorate and the accompanying odor was not exactly pleasant.

Early in his dairying years, Dad had often called Dr. Hoekzema from McBain to remove afterbirths from his animals. The good doctor often came somewhat under the influence of alcohol. The last time he came he was so under the influence that he simply could not make his fingers function to do what had to be done. Finally, after he had tried and failed several times, he burst out laughing, turned to Dad and said, “Case, I’ll tell you how to do it. You do it for me!”

Though appearing reluctant, Dad eagerly accepted the short course in veterinary medicine. Step one: remove your shirts, wash your right hand and arm with a solution of water and carbolic acid. Step two: thrust the washed hand and arm to its limit into the birth canal of the animal. Step three: locate the “buttons,” the nodules which affix the afterbirth to the wall of the uterus. Upon locating each, pinch it until it bursts. Step four: after locating and pinching all seven of the buttons, slide the afterbirth out of the animal. Step five: clean your hand and arm from the blood and gore it has collected--the carbolic acid solution will be fine to use. Dry your arm and put your shirts back on.

The good doctor did not charge Dad for that call, nor was he ever invited back to the farm for a similar procedure. Dad had done it once, he could and did repeat it whenever necessary. The good doctor's drinking habit eventually saved us money.

An opposite difficulty in calving occurred when a cow, after her calf was born, “cast her whethers,” the lining of her uterus. If not remedied within a few hours, the cow died. The remedy included the thorough cleaning of the expelled, though still attached, mass of tissue (there was about a peck of it), and then, with a disinfected hand, literally to stuff the tissue back from where it had come. All the while the cow kept trying to force it back out. On the rare occasions when the cow won, she paid for her victory with her life.

Once the “whethers” were back in place, the opening was sewed shut with a stout suture, either of fish line or of a very heavy linen thread which was allowed to remain in place for about a week and then removed. By that time the natural healing capacity of the animal had restored the mass of tissue to its rightful place. Most of the dairy men in the community had teamed how to do the procedure themselves, though some chose to call the veterinarian rather than to attempt the job. The man who practiced the process a few

times a week certainly was more likely to do it successfully than one who did so only once in three years. The job itself was neither pleasant nor without risk. Cows were not above timing their bowel movements or bladder emptyings to coincide with the repair job in progress. Also, the pain of suturing was likely to provoke an angry kick.

Sometimes, in spite of the best veterinary help, cows died. It was a sad day when that happened. If the death was the result of illness, the meat of the animal was not fit for human consumption. When that happened, we called the “chemical” people in Manton who picked up the carcass within twenty-four hours. Their vehicle was an ordinary dump truck fitted with a winch at the front of the box. Using horse power, we had dragged the animal from the stables and out of the barn. The driver backed the truck as close to the animal as he could get, attached a cable with a hook at its end around the neck of the animal and winched it into the box. Rigor mortis had by this time made the animal's limbs stiff, so the movement into the box was far from even and smooth. How traumatic it was for us kids to watch a cow we had pastured, petted, fed, and perhaps milked pulled ignominiously into the bed of a gravel truck! The groaning of the engine and winch, the clanking of the metal ramp, and the final banging shut of the door at the rear of the truck bed embedded themselves permanently into impressionable young minds troubled at the thought of the death of a familiar animal.

Sometimes an animal that appeared to be sick wasn't sick at all. Cows sometimes developed blind staggers, especially noticeable when the critter walked down a ramp or the slope of a hill. The animal appeared to be in horrible shape, stumbling, weaving, and even going down onto its knees. Her milk production fell off drastically, and she would sometimes develop a fever.

All the above were not symptoms of an illness but rather the result of a piece of hardware in the animal's stomach--a short length of wire or a nail picked up who knows where with a bite of food. Two options were open. The first, expensive and never guaranteed, was a surgical operation performed by a veterinarian and used only in cases involving very valuable animals.

The second was to butcher the animal and use her body to feed the family. Either option had to be acted upon before the animal lost much weight or died when the hardware moved from the stomach to the heart.

Butchering beef was an annual event in our household, whether prompted by hardware or by an empty larder. When I was young, Grandpa and Grandma Westmaas were always invited to help. “Tomorrow morning” was the day, after the breakfast hour.

Tomorrow morning, the herd was milked, loosed, and turned out to pasture. The doomed animal was remanded to the stable. We ate breakfast, cleaned the stables, washed the dishes and separator. About then, Grandpa's black isinglass-curtained Model T Ford chugged down the last hill of the road and turned into the driveway. While Grandma went to the house to help wherever she could, Grandpa and Dad sorted out the knives they would need from the drawer in the back kitchen and Dad picked up his double barrel shotgun from its corner near the kitchen door, opened the doors of the back kitchen cupboard, and took from the blue Peter's box on the top shelf two bird shot shells, one for each of the barrels of the gun, dropped them into his jacket pocket, then led the procession of all parties interested across the yard and to the barn.

In the engine room Dad assembled the fence stretcher, a block and tackle arrangement of rope and two double pulleys with attached hooks. Grandpa went behind the barn to remove a singletree from the front of the one-horse cultivator. They met at the south sliding doors of the barn floor which Dad slid open to about six feet, then looked up.

Strung across the inside of the opening a couple feet above the top of the doors was the six-inch-thick trunk of a tree, bark still on it, resting in the trusses of the barn, used only for hoisting such heavy things as the bodies of cows or the engines of cars, trucks, and tractors. Dad moved the ladder from its accustomed spot in the north end of the barn floor to rest against the pole around which a length of chain had permanently been wrapped and wired in anticipation of such events as this. Draping one end of the fence stretcher over his shoulder, he climbed the ladder and hooked the hook of one pulley into the chain. That done, he hooked the lower end onto a nail on the wall of the barn floor for future reference.

All was now ready. Dad lifted the rope for leading animals from its nail near the stable door, opened the door, and walked to the doomed cow. He tied the rope around her neck, loosed the chain of the stanchion, hooked its ring onto its customary nail on the stable, and led the animal to the sliding barn door, the site of her death.

The feelings generated in us by the butchering were far different from the feelings generated by the chemical truck. We were aware that we were losing one of our friendly and familiar friends of the stable, but we realized this loss was not total. If there were tears in our eyes, they had a different flavor from those we shed as we watched the operation of the chemical truck.

Once the animal was at the end of the barn floor, Dad gave the rope to Grandpa and picked up his shotgun from where it leaned against the east wall of the barn floor and walked outside the building. The two men positioned the animal's head outside the track of the sliding doors which Dad then slid shut until they held the animal's neck between them.

Only then did he open the breach of his gun and insert the shells into the chambers of the barrels. One shell would be needed, but he inserted two in case the execution did not come off cleanly.

He walked up to the animal he had fed and milked hundreds of times and asked quietly, “Pa, is everything ready?” and when be heard Grandpa's muttered, “Yup” he raised the gun, flicked back one of the hammers with his thumb, aimed it at the central area of the animal's head, and pulled the trigger. The distance between the end of the barrel of the gun and the head of the cow was less than two feet so the charge of birdshot created a single circular hole the size of a nickel in the skull of the animal.

If we who watched had never understood death before, we understood it when we saw the animal drop. Suddenly, what we saw was no longer a cow. It was a carcass, a body, a beef. The animal didn't fall; it dropped. No time elapsed between the shot and the fact of the animal lying on the cool cement of the barn floor, its head slid to the ground while still squeezed between the edges of the opened barn doors, its unseeing eyes staring vacantly at us. Grandpa slid the east door away from the head of the cow, picked up the knife he had chosen from the far side of the barn floor, moved quickly to stand over the neck of the animal, bent down and plunged the knife into its jugular. Blood gushed out onto the cement, into the track in which the bottom of the doors slid, and oozed a few feet down the slight incline of cement of the approach to the barn floor. Sport, the hound we owned at the time, stood up from where he was sunbathing under the window of the grain bin, intent on lapping up some of the aromatic, warm blood, but Grandpa kicked him out from under foot. Dad opened the breach of the shot gun, removed the unused shell and the empty shell casing, flipped the casing onto the ground and slid the unused shell back into the pocket of his jacket. After propping the gun against the east wall of the barn floor, he picked up his chosen knife, moved to the hind legs of the animal, and made a slit in each of the legs just above the knee joint. Working quickly, he and Grandpa slid each end of the singletree through the slits and tied the legs firmly to the end of the singletree with a strand of binder twine. Dad hooked the singletree onto the fence stretcher, grasped the free end of the rope of the apparatus and began hoisting the animal by its hind legs.

The first pulls on the rope after the slack had been taken out of it were the easy ones. Part of the weight of the animal still rested on the barn floor. By the time half of her weight was hanging from the fence stretcher Grandpa added his weight and muscle. The ropes creaked. The pole on which the stretcher was anchored groaned and cracked, but finally the four hands and the combined weight of both the men raised the carcass to the point where the nose rested an inch above the cement floor. Spot got up enough nerve to sneak between the open doors and the feet and legs of Dad and Grandpa. He touched his nose to

the nose of the hanging cow, sniffed twice, tucked his tail between his legs, backed a few steps, spun halfway around, and retreated to his sunny bath under the grain bin window.

The blood, the hole in the center of the animal's head, the wide-open sightless eyes of the cow, the strange posture of an animal strung up by his hind legs, its tail hanging limply between her legs and draped over the dangling teats of her udder were pictures forever etched on our memories.

Now, before anything further was to be done with the carcass, it was time to go for a cup of coffee. Conversation over the cups neatly arranged on the oil cloth around the kitchen table was about anything except that of the death of the cow. Crops, the recounting of a recent fire, a neighbor's new baby, and the doings of the uncles and aunts were included, but not a word was spoken about the job of butchering waiting in the barn. Finally, the last piece of molasses cake was gone, washed down by one last swallow of a second cup of coffee. Dad and Grandpa scraped their chairs away from the table over the worn surface of the kitchen linoleum. Grandma and Ma stayed where they were until the last of us had let the west screen door of the kitchen slam shut behind us. There were dishes to be done and a dinner to get ready. We kids could have helped. Usually some of us would have been called on to help, but not today. There were things for us to learn in the barn that we couldn't learn around a dishpan of dirty dishes.

Dad grabbed a couple of milk pails from their rack on the east side of the barn as he walked through the barn to the water tank on the northwest corner of the barn. He dipped the pails into the water, filled both, and pulled both out with a single sweeping motion. Grandpa found an old broom in the engine room. The two men met at the bloody concrete at the south end of the barn floor. Dad set one pail down, then emptied the other in a swish of horizontal motion that swept a layer of blood from the floor and out the door. Grandpa loosed more blood with a few sweeps of the broom. Dad sloshed the water from the second pail over it, removing enough of the slippery blood to make walking on the cement safe. Dad set his eyes on me, looked at the pails and said, “Bring 'em back, and on your way back here pick up a couple of crates.”

There were more orders that morning. We who watched became the “gophers” for Dad and Grandpa. Go for this, go for that. Dad and Grandpa used the potato crates to stand on so they could reach the elevated rear of the animal. Grandpa cut a quick circle around each hind leg just above the knee, slit a straight line from the knee to the crotch, and followed it with a long slit up the belly to a line between the two front legs.

Once the slit was made, the slow, delicate process of cutting under the hide to peel it free from the flesh, square inch by square inch began. The freed hide, an ever-growing blanket,

draped away from the carcass. When finally it was completely removed, Dad folded it, tied it into a bundle with a few yards of binder twine, and laid it aside to await the next trip into McBain where it would be tagged with the address of a Traverse City tannery and left in the depot for shipment on the next train north.

The dressing process was begun by a cut through the layers of belly muscle, opening the abdomen. Grandpa knew how and where to make the cuts with little wasted effort. A slash here, a stab there, a twist of the knife here and in a matter of minutes, the contents of the abdomen spilled down onto the cement floor with a squishing thud. The opening of the abdomen brought with it a wave of warm odor that again brought Sport to his feet, his nose leading him close to the animal. However, the splash of the intestines and stomach on the floor changed his mind, and he wheeled out of the way to return to his sunbathing.

Once the final cut separating the esophagus from the stomach had been made, Grandpa used his booted feet to slide the mass away from where he had to stand to finish the job of dressing. Turning to me he ordered, “Get me a dishpan from the house.”

In minutes, I returned with the pan, holding it out with both hands. Grandpa bent down, reached into the gastronomic mass on the cement floor and grasped the liver in his left hand. Using the knife in his right hand, he severed it from its connective tissues and dropped it into the dishpan. I nearly dropped the heavy liver, pan and all. “Hang on,” Grandpa chuckled. Then he reached his fingers into the liver, flicked his knife quickly first in one direction, then in another and still another, and lifted out from the maroon mass a small handful of something more or less dark green. “Gall bladder,” he stated as he tossed it back onto the intestines. “Now bring that liver into the house to Grandma.”

The warm, moist smell of the organ was smothering and its weight was all I could handle, but I carried it to the house without incident or accident, anticipating the thin slices rolled in flour, smothered in onions and cooked in the cast iron frying pan on the hot wood stove as only Grandma knew how to cook them. Tonight's supper would be mouthwatering!

When I returned to the barn, Grandpa was reaching into the chest cavity, cutting in quick strokes. He lifted out the heart, turned to my sister Gert and said, “Here, take this to Grandma, too.” While she turned and moved toward the house, Grandpa removed the lungs, snipping off the trachea in the process, and tossing the lungs onto the stomachs and intestines.

The severing of the head from the body was the last major step in the dressing process. Once it was lying on the floor, Grandpa reached into its mouth to remove the tongue, slashing off its roots with the sharp edge of his knife. He intended to hand it to Marv, who, anticipating his intentions and wanting no part of the handling the organs of the dead

animal, turned quickly and put as much distance between himself and Grandpa as he could. Grandpa grinned and handed the tongue to me without bothering to tell me what to do with it. I knew it had to go to the house.

Dad walked with me to the southeast corner of the barn on his way to get the saw from the engine room. When he returned to the carcass he climbed onto one of the potato crates and began sawing the carcass into two halves by severing the backbone lengthwise. How strange to see the saw we had used to saw wood now cutting flesh and bone. It really didn't seem right, but the only meat saw we ever owned had a broken blade that we couldn't afford to replace. The wood saw took its place.

After the carcass was cut in half, there remained only the quartering to complete the butchering job. By pulling the fence stretcher rope, Grandpa raised the carcass by about two feet. Dad grasped one front leg and swung it so it laid on his shoulder as he bent beneath it. Grandpa quickly sliced through the half, just back of the rib cage. The weight of the quarter all but buckled Dad's knees, but he straightened up under the load and, more or less, staggered with it to the house. By the time Dad had the meat on the back kitchen table, he was bushed. That quarter of beef weighed over a hundred fifty pounds, and there were three more like that one. He rested a few minutes, then went for another quarter.

The meat would stay on the table in the back kitchen for a couple of days before we cut it off the bones, chopped it into inch-and-a-half cubes, and packed it tightly into quart fruit cans, topping each with a teaspoon of salt and a half teaspoon of pepper. We fitted each jar with a rubber ring and a zinc cover twisted tight. Twenty-one jars, standing on a frame of wood slats, fit into a wash boiler of water. We boiled each batch on the kitchen stove top for two hours. How many cans did it take to hold the cow? I recall several shelves in the fruit cellar filled with jars of beef, waiting for the slow but sure depletion of the supply during a year.

The bones? We cooked some for beef stock for soup. We boiled the ribs for hours, then chewed and sucked the meat off them. That and the liver were the only fresh meat we ate. Steaks in any form were considered a sacrilege. No person needed that much meat at one sitting. Had we tried to cook the steaks, we probably would have found the meat of an old milk cow too tough to enjoy. Fresh liver was wondrously good, but since we had no means of keeping the meat cool, we had to eat more of it in a shorter time than was good for us, which usually produced a variety of stomach disorders. We concluded that if a little fresh liver would do that, fresh steaks might be worse. We were content with our canned meat.

Two parts of the animal never made it into the cans. One was the tail, with which we made a considerable pot of soup, allowed to simmer on the back of the stove for a couple of days

until we finally finished the last bowl of it. The other part was a choice ten pounds or more of one of the better cuts that we brought to the parsonage. This was our thank offering to God by way of the pastor and his family who received little enough pay for their work, and who were grateful for our love offerings.

We became terribly bored with the eating of beef cubes from mason jars, and we wished for a pound or two of tasty “wienies” from the store, though we knew better than to complain. The truth is, when we opened a can of meat from the fruit cellar, we seldom, if ever, thought about the dead cow hanging from a singletree in the open doors of the barn floor.

A day or two after the butchering, Dad hitched one of the horses to the stone boat, slid it to the south barn doors, rolled onto it the abdominal remains of the cow, stacked alongside them her head and four hooves and half legs, and slid them through the gate, through the barnyard, and down to wherever he thought a proper place at the time under the trees in the southwest corner of our land. There he unloaded them, left to scavengers and the elements, close to the three ancient car bodies in which we had spent imaginative and whimsical hours in our younger days. In our wanderings over the next few years, we sometimes happened to walk past the ever changing remains as they slowly went the way of all flesh. Years later the whitened skull with the nickel sized hole midway between the eye sockets served as a reminder of that day when Grandpa and Grandma came to help us butcher one early summer morning.

Cows in the spring season of anticipation were a unique experience. Though the pasture grass had been green for a few weeks, it needed several inches of growth before the cropping of the cows would no longer do damage to the plants. The cows had to wait for their spring release from the barn until the day was right. That day was a day blessed by man and animal alike. The door at the west end of the barn was flung open and the warm, fragrant air of spring flooded the stables. No plank was propped against the threshold to clean stables. This morning we loosed, one by one, the chains that had for so many months fastened the animals to their stanchions.

The reaction of each animal was her personal celebration of renewal. Even the most aged trotted down the ramp, eager for the feel of gentle soil under hoofs too long accustomed to the hard, cruel cement of the stall. The green grass begged each animal to come take a bite. In minutes the smell of spring grass being chewed in the mouths of salivating bovines filled the air. The animals shook their heads as if to say they had all but forgotten how much better tasting than hay was the greenery of spring.

Not yet would the animals be allowed to go to the woods. We had opened pastures in the fields to keep them out of the woods, where leaks grew, the wild onions the cows loved.

Leaks, however, passed their pungent flavor from the stomach of the cow into her udder. One taste of milk from a cow who had eaten leaks was enough to upset the most tolerant of human stomachs. Leak flavor permeated the cream and the butter made from it, rendering it unfit for sale. Though our animals cavorted through the pasture, tails in air, and their hungry mouths delighting in green vegetation, we made very sure their romping was not done in the woods.

Spring in Mid-Michigan is a very short season. Almost as soon as the weather warmed enough to tum the cattle to pasture, the heat of the sun proclaimed summer, completing the cycle of animal husbandry on our family farm.

Pigs, Pork, Chickens, and Eggs

Pigs

Sometimes we had no pigs, sometimes we had a dozen. We had no brood sow, no incubator, and neither the time nor the desire to get into the farrowing business. We did need pigs to round out our meat supply, and should we raise extra, the porkers were salable commodities.

Every spring we bought piglets, sometimes from an enterprising neighbor, sometimes at an auction sale, sometimes from a relative who found that the birthrate of his brood had exceeded their death rate for a change. Every spring we got a batch of piglets.

Our pig pen was in the northeast corner of the barn. As one entered the barn through the small arched door at the center of the east face of the building, he found himself in an alley. On his left was the engine room and a series of bins for ground grain. Between the bins and the alley stood the fanning mill. We no longer used this well-preserved piece of antique machinery. Why we had not junked it I don't know, except that it was a joy to crank it to full speed and listen to it whir and clunk so neatly, so cleanly, so precisely. Its function, before threshing machines were perfected to the degree we knew, was to clean the oats which had been run through the thresher of the bits of dirt and the weed seed it contained. A bushel at a time was thrown into the hopper at the top of the four-foot by five-foot by six-foot rectangular wooden box while the crank lent it motion. Slowly the oats sifted through the various trays as air was blown through it. The cleaned oats came out of the end to drop into a bushel basket. The weed seeds dropped through side chutes into other baskets. The chaff blew where it willed. Though we never used the fanning mill, once or twice a week as we walked past it, we simply had to turn the crank just to hear it run.

Beyond the fanning mill was a platform scale. We weighed potatoes on it, weighed the meat we sold on it, weighed ourselves on it, and weighed on it anything over ten pounds that needed weighing. Scattered around the scale was an accumulation of worn-out milk pails that we used to handle grain at one time or another, a metal bushel basket which we sometimes used for silage but would rather not because its rope handles were broken. But it was still too good to throw away.

Across the alley was the pig pen, all twelve feet by eighteen feet of it. Part of its floor was the original concrete. On that part was the feeding trough made of two-inch lumber five feet long and a foot high. Into this trough we poured whatever we intended to feed to the pigs. Immediately, the pigs got into the trough, literally and bodily when they were young, and

with as much of their bodies as was possible when they had grown to maturity, squealing, fighting, and complaining all the while.

The rest of the floor of the pig pen was a dirt floor. If it had once been paved, the pavement had disappeared, which was just as well. This dirt floor was more absorbent than concrete and the pigs were healthier for it. We cleaned out the pig pen only after each batch of pigs was grown and had departed. Sometimes the filth got deeper than it should have. At every afternoon chore time we threw forkfuls of clean straw into one corner of the pen for the pigs to sleep on, but as dirty as they were, that corner didn't stay clean long.

We fed the pigs well. With every chore time, we poured “slop,” a thick mixture of skim milk and grain, into their trough. Besides slop, we fed the pigs ears of ripe corn, cull and second potatoes, plus any other available produce in season. In summer it was cucumbers. In the fall it was turnips. (In the spring of some years we mixed a few pounds of turnip seed in with the hay seeds we sowed with our oats and let the turnips vie with the young crop of hay growing after the oats were harvested. Pigs loved turnips!)

Most of all, we fed the pigs corn, whole ears of corn straight from the corn crib. Pigs are experts at shelling corn. Their teeth are powerful, capable of stripping the kernels off the cobs and of grinding them to digestibility. The empty cobs cluttered the floor of their pen, adding to the accumulated mass of manure.

We kids were never allowed into the pig pen. If the trough was out of our reach when we came with the slop, we got the garden rake from the engine room, hooked the trough by its teeth, and scraped it toward the board partition dividing the pig pen from the alley. We had a healthy respect for pigs. Yes, we would reach our arms into the pen and pet them, marveling at the coarse hair which covered their tawny bodies. We tickled their snouts, but at no time were we allowed to climb over the partition. Pigs are animals. Animals are unpredictable, to be treated with discretion.

Our pigs grew well. Piglets in March had grown to butcherable size by September and were huge by November when we had to decide which pig or pigs would provide us with pork products throughout the winter and which would be sold. The decision made, we called Ralph Van Houten who loaded those to be sold into his truck and took them to his choice of slaughterhouse or livestock sale. He handled all further transactions.

Butchering day eventually came for the pig, or pigs, left lonesome in the pen. Dad never butchered a pig without the help of a relative or neighbor until we boys were old enough and big enough to give him the kind of help he needed.

We butchered pigs under one of the tall poplar trees near the house. A ladder leaned against the tree provided the necessary scaffold. We wired the fence stretcher to a high

rung on the ladder and hooked the other end in a singletree to spread apart the hind legs of the suspended animal once he had been killed, bled, and de-haired.

We set up two sawhorses six feet apart and laid flat on them an old wooden door. On the ground beneath the sawhorses were two strange-looking tools. Each had as a handle a wood dowel some five inches long and two inches thick at the thickest part, shaped on a lathe to fit the inside of a hand. On one end of each of these handles was a piece of steel less than an eighth of an inch thick, the shape and size of a saucer. These were the scrapers used to remove the hair from the skin of the pig.

The pig had to be caught and killed. One of the days when Fred Pluger helped butcher comes to mind. The pig pen had an outside door that opened on the north wall of the barn. Through that door Dad and Fred slipped into the pen. Dad held a half-inch rope tied into a slip knot noose in his hand and began stalking the pig. While one of us distracted the animal with some enticing food, Dad slipped the knotted rope around the ankle of one of its back legs and the two men proceeded to pull the animal away from the trough, through the pen, and out the door. The pig protested most loudly and most shrilly with scream after scream, none of which did him any good. How human the scream of the pig sounded!

Once the two men bad removed the pig from the pen and walked him to the east side of the barn, they allowed the pig a relaxed moment, long enough for Dad to lift from the separator stand the butcher knife with the curved blade. While Fred held the rope, Dad grabbed the animal by both front legs and flipped him onto his back.

Immediately the pathetic squealing resumed. Young members of the family who were standing on the knoll by the chicken coop or in the shelter of the east barn door clapped their hands over their ears so they wouldn't hear the full force of the screams, though they never for one moment thought to leave the scene and miss the action.

Once he had pig its back, Dad quickly bent over him, straddled his head, and in less time than it takes to tell it, plunged the knife into the pale throat, sinking it down to its wooden handle, then quickly drawing it out. Blood gushed out with the knife blade. As quickly as Dad stood, Fred removed the rope from the pig's foot, freeing the animal to scamper to its feet and run where it would, blood spurting from its throat with every beat of its pounding heart.

As inhumane as this method of killing a pig might seem, it did have its purpose. Pork has to be thoroughly bled. The only way we knew to accomplish this bleeding was to let the stuck pig run around until his own muscular actions had forced every possible drop of blood into his circulatory system and out of his neck. The pure white pork we ate was testimony to the effectiveness of the method.

While none of us had felt particularly close to the pig in the months he lived in the pen, the death struggles of the animal impressed in us a sense of the preciousness of life. We watched that pig fight for its life to his last drop of blood. When the animal had finally collapsed and all life had gone out its body, we sensed that in some way the world was less for the fact. We had read Genesis 9:3,[1] and we did enjoy our pork.

Dad and Fred dragged the carcass by its heels from the middle of the bloodied driveway to the ladder under the tree and heaved it onto the door resting on the sawhorses, tipping the carcass onto its side. Several kettles of water had been heating on the top of the kitchen range through the morning. Those of us big enough to help layered hot pan mitts into the palms of our hands for protection and carried the boiling kettles to the men. Dad took a kettle at a time from our hands and slowly poured its steaming contents over the carcass. One kettle, two kettles, three kettles of water he, slowly and carefully, let drain over the steaming, smelly hide until the entire top half of the pig had been scalded.

Bending to pick up one of the de-hairing tools with his right hand, he plucked at some of the thin hairs of the pig with his left. The hairs easily pulled out of the follicles which had grown them. “Good enough!” Dad said, and both men began to scrape away the hair from the hide, each scrape laying bare a two-inch wide eight-inch strip down the carcass. When the top side of the pig had been de-haired the men struggled the carcass over and de-haired the other side. Getting every hair from around the eyes, the snout, the ears, and the tail took care, but they did the job to perfection.

The denuded carcass was finally sloshed clean with the remaining hot water. The men fixed the ends of the singletree in slots they cut inches above the knee joint of both hind legs, and hoisted the animal, tail up, for the rest of the slaughtering process. After moving the door and the sawhorses out of the way, they made an incision from the rear crotch of the animal to its rib cage. Intestines and organs cascaded out of the abdominal cavity onto the ground. From this mass they rescued the liver, stripped the gall bladder from it, and brought it to the kitchen. A few more cuts parted the rib cage exposing the lungs and heart for removal. Finally, the men severed the head from the body, and, with the saw from the engine room, sawed the animal into its two halves, each dangling from its end of the singletree. Only after it had cooled to air temperature would they carry the halves into the back kitchen and rest it on the table for processing.

Farmer Peet Packing Company at one time made the claim that, in their slaughtering process, the only part of a pig not utilized was the squeal. We didn't quite reach that point

[1] Genesis 9:3 declares, "Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything" (NIV). This post-flood covenant with Noah and his sons marks a shift to meat consumption, while verse 4 immediately restricts this by forbidding the consumption of blood.

of efficiency, but we came close. Except for the bones, teeth, brain, eyes, and ears we used the entire head, carving from it all of the flesh including the tongue. This flesh became the basis for our version of head cheese. We added the heart and the kidneys grinding it all together. We packed the mixture into bread tins, added a few spices, to simmer and sputter for several hours in the oven of the kitchen range. When thoroughly cooked, we drained off the lard from the top of each tin and allowed the cheese to cool. We took the cool meat out of the bread tins (we needed them tomorrow for a new batch of homemade bread) and wrapped each loaf of head cheese in waxed paper and stored the cheese in the ice-less ice box in the back kitchen. Since this was the cool part of the year, the head cheese would not spoil before we used it as sandwich meat. We did regret that each pig produced only six or eight loaves of the delicacy.

To complete the processing of the meat, we carved the carcass into its most useful parts. With the exception of the hams and side pork, all the meat was boned and cut up into cubes and canned as we had our beef. We rubbed the hams with salt, basted them with a liquid smoke compound, and stored them in crocks. Eventually the smoke flavor permeated the ham.

The combination of the salt and the liquid smoke prevented spoilage. We cooked the hams only as we used them.

The abdominal walls of the pig provided slabs of side pork. We salted them into a ten-gallon crock, spreading an inch thick layer of coarse salt in the bottom of the crock, fit into it slab by slab a layer of pork, hid each under a layer of salt, and continued to add alternating layers until the crock was full.

All winter long we dug into the crock for slabs of salt pork to fry with the potatoes we ate for supper. “Spek,” Grandma Westmaas called it. We enjoyed eating the slices of *spek*. When we had finished the soft, fleshy part, we still had the hard rinds on which to chew. A good fried pork rind could last well into a milking.

The fatty part of the pig, including what we stripped off the intestines, was cut into chunks and rendered in a shallow pan on the top of the kitchen range. The process took several days. Rendering produced two products, the lard and the “corns.” We poured the lard out of the rendering pan (a big cake pan) into gallon crocks which we stored in the ice-less ice box in the back kitchen to use as shortening in baking or for frying potatoes. The “corns” were the remaining small chunks of solids. We cooled them and threw them over the fence behind the clothes lines for interested animals and birds, but not before each of us had salted and eaten “a corn or two” as they were cooling. Sometimes there weren't many left to throw out.

Ma made meat balls from some of the pork. She cooked them in a shallow pan in the oven for an entire afternoon, then pressed them into a crock and covered them with melted lard, thus preserving them. She stored them in the ice-less ice box in the back kitchen. Once a week, as long as they lasted, we enjoyed meatballs for supper. Between times, when one or another of us decided we were hungry while on our way from the kitchen through the back kitchen and out the north door of the house, if and when we thought we could get away with it, we quietly opened the ice box door and quickly pried a meatball from the crock and crammed it into our mouth. A jack knife pried better than a finger! Meatballs tasted almost as good cold as they did hot!

After we had butchered the last pig of the year, we cleaned the pen. Throughout the winter, the pen stayed empty. The east end of the barn was cold, and the body heat of even a dozen pigs would not have been enough to keep them warm and healthy. Come spring, we bought another batch of pigs and repeated the cycle.

Chickens

We always had chickens. Most of the time we had nearly two hundred of them. When Grandpa first built the chicken coop, he placed it a rod or so to the west of the toilet. The original coop was about fourteen feet wide and twenty feet long. It had a door in the east end of its south side and another on the center of the west end. The floor was concrete. Only the south wall had windows. The rear section of the coop was filled with the roosts on which the hens rested at night. The roosts were a slanted five-foot shelf extending from the back wall about five feet off the ground. Above this shelf, a series of inch-and-a-half poles was fixed. Every night each hen found her rightful place on the poles, clenched her toes around the pole, tucked her head under a wing, and shut out the world. The shelf under the roosts caught the droppings of the birds. We hoed them off every two or three weeks, then sprinkled the shelf with lime as a sanitizer.

The nests, in which the hens were supposed to lay their eggs, were mainly on the east wall. They were a series of wooden cubicles about ten inches high, a foot wide, and a foot deep. An assigned chore boy lined the bottom of each nest with new straw every Saturday morning.

Before he left the farm, Grandpa had doubled the size of the coop, extending it to the west toward the barn but leaving intact the original west wall. Hence our coop boasted a divider with a doorway opening from the old half to the new. Since the ground sloped down from the east end of the chicken coop toward the barn, the foundations on the west end of the coop were made of concrete, several feet high. The jump from the west door to the ground was a test of our nerve when we were young.

The windows of the addition were made of a product called Flex-o-Glas, a plastic substitute for glass invented and sold by Harold Warp specifically for use in chicken coops. It promised healthier chickens and more eggs since it allowed beneficial rays from the sun into the coop, rays ordinary window glass filtered out, rays that killed germs that would otherwise thrive among the fowl. Flex-o-Glas was a tough product. None of it would have had to be replaced as long as I lived on the farm were it not for boys who shot stones from sling shots.

Feed troughs and water pans occupied assigned positions on the chicken coop floor. We fed the chickens with the same ground oats we fed the cattle, plus shelled com.

Sometimes we had the shelled corn cracked to make it more digestible. Feeding and watering the chickens was a twice a day chore. Though the women on most of our neighbors' farms took care of their chickens, the constant brood of children in our home made such an arrangement impractical, so we boys got stuck with the chicken chores with but little help from our sisters.

Besides the feed troughs and watering pans, a permanent box for oyster shells was nailed to each of the three open walls of each half of the coop. Once a week we renewed the supply of shells. We bought them with our groceries at the local general store at Highland Corners. The chickens needed the calcium in oyster shells to produce strong egg shells.

We gathered the eggs every afternoon. Eggs were the profit end of the chicken business. Chickens distributed their egg laying fairly evenly throughout the hours of the day, production dwindling toward evening. We gathered eggs in that slack time when the only hens on the nests were the broody hens. Broody hens were birds in whom something had triggered a decree that they should stop laying eggs and begin incubating those already laid. Broody hens were usually one step away from a Sunday dinner, but until then they sat determinately on the eggs in a nest. Before we could collect the eggs we had to drive them out. We threw corn cobs at them, prodded them with sticks, or jabbed sticks toward them so they would grab them with their beaks and we could pull them out far enough to get hold of their necks. Usually none of the above worked, which meant we had to screw up our courage and pull them bodily off the warm eggs. Broody hens pecked at bare hands and fingers. Their aim was good. In the end they always lost, but they loudly squawked their protests which added to the constant cacophony of the conversations of a couple hundred female birds constantly flooding the chicken coop.

From two hundred laying hens, we could expect to gather a hundred eggs per day. If we kept clean straw in the nests, most of the eggs were clean enough to be packed directly into the thirty dozen crates popular at the time. These were wooden rectangular crates made of two

fifteen-inch cubical receptacles into which eggs were packed on end in layers. The bottom of each layer was a pressed papier-mâché pad, with indentations to fit the ends of the eggs. A cleverly fashioned cardboard folder opened to set on the pad, separating egg from egg. This folder was fashioned from fourteen strips of cardboard two and a half inches high, slotted in such a way that, when closed flat, it took only a minimum of space, but when opened, it produced thirty-six egg-sized compartments.

If and when we didn't keep the nests clean enough, or if and when chickens smashed the laid eggs when getting in and out of the nest, the eggs had to be washed, a job postponed until the last minute before John Ouwinga came to pick up the eggs when he delivered the week's order of groceries.

In retrospect, one fact seems a bit strange to me, though maybe it isn't as strange as it seems. Grandpa and Grandma Vredevoogd retired from the farm to raise chickens on their small farm across and up the road. Grandpa had built three large coops and usually kept about five hundred chickens. Each Friday, they took eggs to Cadillac, where they peddled them from door to door to nearly a hundred egg customers.

When at times they didn't have enough eggs to supply their customers, they never came to us for eggs. We washed ours. Grandma never washed hers. She sandpapered off any dirt, thus retaining on them a preserving layer of oil. She was not about to sell to her customers eggs of which she knew some might have been washed. She would rather buy from the corner grocery eggs about which she had no knowledge. I presume she philosophized that what she didn't know wouldn't hurt her customers.

Every year we raised a batch of chicks with which to replace our most tired, worn-out layers. We usually ordered the chicks from a hatchery in Zeeland, Michigan, to be delivered by the parcel post service of the U.S. Mail. Our mail man, Mr. Foster, delivered them in large, flat cardboard cartons perforated with enough penny sized holes to provide the chicks with air. I can imagine how glad he was to rid the back seat of his car of the two hundred chirping, chipping creatures he had endured during the long, slow seven miles of the stop and go mail route from Marion.

As soon as they arrived, we freed them into the brooder coop north of the windmill on the edge of the orchard. They lived in that heated shelter for about six weeks until they had grown to where they crowded the available space. We then moved them to the larger pullet coop in the middle of the orchard, a short distance east of the brooder coop where they ate and drank and grew to maturity. When they were old enough to begin laying, we set aside an evening to catch the old hens as they slept on their roosts and chucked them into wooden, spindled chicken crates, courtesy the corner grocery. We carried the loaded

crates somewhere near the barn and called John Ouwinga to come and pick them up. No doubt they eventually found their way to the meat counters of the stores in Cadillac and finally to the stew pots on the stoves of the residents of the town.

We spent the next two hours walking back and forth between the pullet coop and the chicken coop. We caught the pullets off their roosts (and the more adventurous from the apple trees), held them ignominiously feet up, head down and wings flapping, two birds in one hand, three in the other, trip after trip, until we had moved all the pullets from adolescence to adulthood in a single night. For a few weeks the pullet size eggs they laid were too small to sell, but after that they swung into full production, the young birds were a financial asset to our farm.

Chickens are cruel to each other. If one has a spot of blood on its feathers, the others will pick at the spot, eventually picking through the feathers and into the flesh of the poor victim. Every week, we found the remains of a bird or two on the floor of the coop, deeply eaten into before she finally died. Once the bird was dead her fellows lost interest in her.

We usually kept a few roosters in our chicken coop. Though we bought chicks which had been sorted by sex after hatching, the job was never done with total accuracy. So with our hens we got a few roosters. Dad said they came to keep the hens happy. Ma disagreed. The roosters woke us at sunrise if we weren't already wake. They signaled disturbances in the hen house. Once every few years, weasels invaded our coop, intent on sucking the life blood out of a hen or two. They always came at night. Sometimes when they came the roosters would notice them and would begin to crow and make an awful fuss. Dad chased more than one out of the coops. Roosters made exceptional Sunday dinners. They were enough larger than the hens so we could tell the difference in the amount of meat each of us was allotted.

From early spring until snow fell, our White Leghorns had the run of the place. They roamed the barnyard, scratched through the manure pile, took dust baths under the lilac bushes, and had to be shooed out of the garden now and then, but we thought far too much of our chickens to ever dream of getting along without them or to try to fence them in. The eggs they produced helped buy the groceries, shoes, and overalls at the general store and put eggs on our table several times a week.

The demands our flock of chickens made on our time and effort were not that great. It only took us ten or fifteen minutes a day to keep them supplied with food and water and to gather their eggs. Cleaning the roosts, cleaning the floors, putting new straw in the nests and scattering it on the floor took an hour once a week. Painting the roosts with Black Leaf

40 to kill the lice hiding in the feathers of the birds took a couple of hours a few times a year. Little wonder we considered the raising of chickens a pretty good deal.

More Bits and Pieces

Cranking The Model T

The Model T Ford was the most common auto in Highland during the mid-1930s. The car was unique for its transmission. On the floor, at the feet of the driver, were three pedals. The right pedal was the foot brake. The middle pedal controlled forward and reverse directions. Push the pedal down and the vehicle was in reverse, hold the pedal halfway to the floor and the car was in neutral. The relaxed, foot-off position was forward. The left pedal controlled high and low speeds forward, the only two speeds the Model T boasted. When the pedal was in its spring-loaded position with no foot applied, the vehicle was in high gear. Depressed, it was in low.

Low gear for a Model T was very slow.

Late Model T's had self-starters. Early models had to be cranked, an art accomplished best with the help of a cooperative passenger willing to slide from the passenger side of the front seat far enough to reach a foot to the middle floor pedal and hold it in neutral. With that kind of help, the driver was free to concentrate on cranking the engine.

The Model T crank was permanently spring-mounted through a hole under the radiator. No one ever lost the crank of a Model T. No one ever left the crank of a Model T home while the car went elsewhere. To engage the crank, the operator grasped its handle with the right hand and pressed the topmost bend of the crank farther into the slotted crankshaft with the left. Once he had the crank in place, the operator pulled toward himself a two-inch metal ring at the end of a choke wire at the lower left-hand corner of the radiator. While pulling the choke with his left hand, he turned the crank clockwise a half-turn with his right. If the engine fired, well and good.

If it did not, he repeated the process until it did start.

Two levers were mounted on the steering column just under the steering wheel. The right lever controlled the flow of gasoline to the engine, and thus its RPMs. The left lever was used to retard the spark while the engine was cranked. Retarding the spark delayed the firing in the cylinder until the piston was past its peak. Ignition at that point continued the downward direction of the piston. Failure to pull down the lever ignited the gas-air mix before the piston reached its peak position, forcing the piston back down, thus producing on the crank a counter clockwise rotation so powerful that no human muscle could prevent the crank from whipping out of the cranker's hand, slamming against his forearm with enough violence to break a bone or two. The engine was said to have kicked. That kick was about the only characteristic of the horse and buggy applicable to the horseless carriage.

The front bumper of the Model T was designed so the cranker had to reach one leg between the bumper and the radiator. After the engine had started, the car immediately began to move forward unless someone prevented it by the use of the pedals. Agility was an asset.

Tys Mys, one of the members of our church, had problems starting his Model T. Tys was portly. To get a leg into the space between the radiator and the bumper was work enough to bring drops of sweat to his forehead. For him to remove it quickly was impossible. Tys had a second problem. His wife refused to have anything to do with motor vehicles other than to ride in them. No way could Tys entice her to plant her foot on the middle transmission pedal and hold it down halfway while he cranked. Since a cranked, running engine was going to move the car ahead and would run over a person who had one leg trapped between the radiator and the bumper, Tys had cause to worry.

There was a way around the problem. Simply jack one back wheel an inch off the ground, then crank the engine. With the engine running, the differential allowed the jacked wheel to spin freely. The other would not turn, and the car would not move. With one back wheel jacked up there was plenty of time to lift one's leg from its entanglement with the bumper. One had only to remove the jack from under the wheel, quickly throw it between the front and back seats, quickly jump into the driver's seat and quickly be off. Tys had perfected the procedure. Once the engine was running, Tys moved around the vehicle, leaned a shoulder against the back of the car hard enough to slip it off the jack. A quick snatch of the jack, two quick steps to catch up with the car, a quick toss of the jack onto the back seat floor, a quick step onto the running board, a grasp of the wheel, a sliding onto the seat, and Tys, the car, and his wife were on their way home for a welcome cup of coffee.

Tys was in good company. Many a Sunday morning after a church service, men no longer as young as once they were, joined Tys in jacking up their Model T's. Tys was a careful man. He always remembered to set the spark lever properly before he cranked his Model T. Tys never wore his arm in a sling.

Junior Salesmen

“Would you like to buy some Cloverine Salve? Or maybe some flower seeds? How about subscribing to a magazine?”

Farm homes are seldom near each other. It takes a lot of walking to knock on the doors of enough farm homes to sell a dozen cans of Cloverine salve. Or twenty-four packets of flower seeds. Or twenty subscriptions to the *Reader's Digest*.

The ads in *Boy's Life*, *The Grit*, or *The Michigan Farmer* made selling appear both easy and productive. The prizes offered for selling only twelve boxes of Cloverine Salve were

wonderful! And the money to be made from selling only twenty subscriptions to the *Reader's Digest* was inviting beyond resistance.

Twelve farm families lived on the two-mile stretch of road we called our road. There was but one house on the mile road that connected the east end of our road with the road paralleling our road a mile to the north. Another dozen or more homes existed on that particular two-mile stretch of the Missaukee-Osceola County Line. Only two houses existed on the north-south one mile road that connected the County Line to the western end of our road. It took me an entire day to cover the east half of this block. I cut across the field on the way home, happy with my success. I had sold my entire dozen cans of Cloverine salve. People liked its fragrance, it claimed to promote healing, and at only $.25 a can, not only, but also, a free eight-by-ten full color frameable picture, who could resist a junior salesman? (Cloverine salve is still marketed, though the price has been multiplied).

I ordered another dozen and sold most of them on the west half of the block, the rest to uncles and aunts. I can't recall the prize I won, but in my opinion, it was well worth the effort. Two things surprise me to this day. The first is that my parents allowed me to try my hand at selling. Not that they needed my time around the house and the farm. I wasn't so productive that they would miss the hours it took to walk the four miles and pound on a dozen or more doors.

The second surprise was that people were willing to buy what I sold. Money was scarce. Twenty-five cents is a paltry sum today, but, in the 1930s, a person worked for farmers an eight-hour day for a dollar. Quarters were not taken for granted.

Encouraged by my success selling salve, I had to try my hand at selling seeds. We and our neighbors produced many of our own garden seeds. We took some of the biggest and the best tomatoes, cut them open, squeezed out their seeds, dried and stored them until spring. We dried the best ears of sweet corn seed and shelled off the kernels. We let some of our bean pods ripen and popped them open for spring planting. Lettuce and radishes were different. We bought new seeds for them every spring.

Most of our flowers bloomed from the seeds we had saved from previous years. We had a fair variety of the common annuals: zinnias, cosmos, nasturtiums, and marigolds. But the flowers advertised in *Grit* were new, colorful varieties we had never grown. The pictures on the packets were irresistible. I have no recall of whether I sold for a prize or for a percentage of the money collected, but I did sell seeds. My success convinced me that there was money to be made at the selling game.

A few years later, I was high school scholar in need of money. The Depression was mostly history, and people had more money to spend on luxuries. At that time, *Reader's Digest*

offered a reasonable return for the sale of subscriptions. Other magazines offered even more. I ordered samples of *Reader's Digest*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *McCall's*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Redhook*. Again, I made my way from door to door, this time going much farther from home than the two square mile block of home turf. Sometimes I walked. Often, I rode a bike. Occasionally, I took a car. Twice I worked the streets of Cadillac. I didn't sell much. People find it much easier to say no to a high school student they don't know than to a neighbor kid they know. I finally concluded that income from working on the farms of the neighbors, small though it might be, was more sure than income from door-to-door selling.

The enticement of making a buck by selling has stuck with me and some of those I grew up with, for I was not the only salesman in Highland. We all learned there is no free breakfast. Salesman who make it work hard at it. And some junior salesmen learned to hate selling so much they would never again try. To each his own.

The Watkins Man

A visit by a door-to-door salesman was a welcome break in the monotony of everyday life for my mother and most other women in our community. Few salesmen got a warmer welcome than the Watkins man. Once a month, he drove into the yard, unlimbered his two huge, heavy, black, square-cornered rectangular cases from the back seat of his car, and waddled with them to the door of the house. The dogs had long since announced his presence, but he dutifully set one case down on the porch to free a hand to rap on the door. Little faces disappeared from the windows, burying themselves in Ma's skirts as she opened the door and formally welcomed the man into the kitchen. Before she answered the door, she had slid a chair near the table for him to use as he displayed his wares.

No pudding was quite as tasty as Watkin's vanilla or lemon pudding, packaged in a round cardboard box with a metal top lid and a metal plate at the bottom. We had better get another can today because the one we got won't last the rest of the month. Watkin's vanilla extract was twice as potent as the general store variety. And there was an udder ointment on a par with Bag Balm but considerably cheaper. There was fly spray in the bulk, and there was a powdered lemon drink.

I do think Ma delighted in buying everything she could conscientiously use from the Watkins man because it gave her the opportunity to choose and to buy, an opportunity she seldom got at the corner grocery. True, she phoned in her order every Friday morning when we were young, and whatever she ordered was delivered to our door the same afternoon, but that was a far cry from walking the two aisles of the store and making choices from the variety on the shelves. Ma seldom set foot in the Highland corner store.

Later, when going to the store meant going to Maple Grove on Saturday night, Ma wrote out the order, and Dad and whoever of the older kids managed to tag along, took it to the store. The grocer and his wife filled the order, packing the items into used cardboard cartons, while Dad swapped stories with other men of the community who practiced the Saturday night ritual. Meanwhile, Ma was giving the little kids their baths. Little wonder that she and so many of the women of the community delighted in the wares of the Watkins man.

Brother Marv hated the Watkins man. When he was very young the Watkins man had threatened to stuff him into one of his suitcases and take him along in his car. The threat put such fear into Marv that whenever the Watkins man drove into the yard, Marv disappeared until the man was gone and the dust of his vehicle had settled on the road leading up the hill to the neighbors.

The Shortchanging Druggist

The only druggist in McBain had a reputation for shortchanging his customers. Everybody claimed he shortchanged people. Everybody tried to keep from being shortchanged, but the man was a practiced expert.

One hot day in July, Dad went to McBain on an errand. While in town, he went to the drug store and bought a “dollar dummy,” a pocket watch bearing the name Westclox. He came home beaming, which was unusual. The trip had cost him money and usually spending money didn't make him beam.

“You won't believe what happened!” he began, even before he heard the west kitchen screen-door slam behind him. “Tefft outdid himself today! He shortchanged himself! And I'd be hanged if I was going to tell him. The buzzard had it coming. I bought this watch,” he said as he pulled out the chrome plated orb at the end of a short length of black shoestring from the top pocket of his bib overalls.

“It cost $3.49, and I gave the man a five. He was so busy miscounting the nickels and dimes he gave me instead of the half-dollar and a penny he could have given me, that he forgot I had given him a five. He gave me change for a ten! He shorted me a dime on the small change but gave me back the five I had given him!

I don't know how Dad managed with his conscience. Maybe he dropped that extra five into the collection plate the next Sunday. Though money was hard to come by, it wasn't the fact of the five dollars that made him so happy that morning, it was the fact that the shortchange expert had set his foot in his own trap.

WPA

Or was it the PWA? Historical records indicate there were both. However they were called, they were part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal solution to the Depression. People who had no jobs were given government jobs under either the Works Progress Administration or the Public Works Administration. Those who landed such jobs were given work to do, but were told never ever to work fast. In fact, the ambitious ones who insisted on putting in a day's work for a day's pay were quickly made to understand that when one worked for the government, one made the job last as long as possible. The nicknames by which the programs were commonly called tell their own story. WPA was known as “We Putter Along,” illustrated in editorial cartoons by men leaning on shovel handles while museums, government buildings, and roads slowly took shape. The second more healthy label, “Pa Works Again,” was spoken thankfully by children who knew about empty grocery bags.

Most of the men of our community disliked working on either the W.P.A. or the P.W.A. The few who signed up did so only when every other possibility of putting food on the table was gone. Some critics, whose financial circumstances were more secure and whose political leanings were more Republican than Roosevelt Democratic, criticized those who turned to the government for help. Some critics held positions of leadership in their churches. Sometimes their criticism was just cause for WPA members to transfer their membership from the churches in which they had been born, baptized, and reared to churches whose leaders were less judgmental.

The Lost Wheel

Our old twenty-seven Chevy ran marvelously--most of the time. It was the only car we had, and the Depression determined it would be the only car we would have for some time. We used that car well, and that car served us well--most of the time.

There was a Sunday evening when the folks loaded the family into it to drive to the village of Lucas to visit Uncle Abe and Aunt Lena Lucas. Dad and Ma were in the front seat, four or five of us were squeezed into the back seat. Our mood was high and heady. A visit with Uncle Abe and Aunt Lena always meant a good time for all. We were just beyond the cemetery a mile north of Stoney Corners, nearing the bottom of a hollow, when Dad shouted over the engine noise, “Look, there's a wheel rolling alongside us, going faster than we are! Where in the world did that thing ...”

He never finished the sentence for at that precise moment the back corner, driver's side of the car, dropped to the ground with a gravel studded crash. Dad fought the steering wheel to keep us out of the ditch. We stopped so close to it that, when we opened the passenger side doors, the tall grasses along the road bent their heads into the car.

Dad got out and jacked up the rear corner of the car to assess the damage. A couple of us ran ahead, found the errant wheel where it had finally stopped, deep in the ditch, and rolled it up to the road and back to the car. By robbing a nut from each of the other wheels, Dad locked the wheel back in its place. We went on to Uncle Abe and Aunt Lena, but our visit was short and was shadowed by concern. We had an early lunch so we could leave for home before it got too dark. If that wheel came off again, especially in the dark, we were in real trouble.

Quack Grass

Our farm had more than its share of quack grass. All our neighbors also grew a plentiful supply of quack grass. The miserable stuff grew when and where nothing else would grow, and it spread no matter how we tried to kill it.

The roots of quack grass resemble long strings of thin spaghetti. Each joint in the root, spaced from one to three inches apart, can and will produce a new plant. The very end of the root has a sharp point, capable of piercing and growing through the biggest of potatoes. We had potatoes with quack roots grown through them to prove it.

The plants were slender stalks with blades a few inches apart, topped by a head sprinkled with seeds half the size of a grain of oats. The nutritional value of quack grass was slight. Most reproduction occurred from the roots, not the seeds. Plowing quack grass only buried the roots deeper. Given time, they grew their way to the surface and to new life and hope. Cultivating quack grass broke the roots into smaller pieces and scattered them. Certainly some of them were brought to the surface, and if the ground was dry, they died, but with a smile on their faces, for underneath the top layer of soil, all those pieces the cultivator shovels had created were biding their time until they got enough moisture to pop through the surface of the soil and become a newer, healthier crop.

Tool makers invented tools to kill quack grass. There was the quack drag (harrow), narrower than the usual harrow, and made in only one section, with teeth set at an angle to bring the roots to the surface. It was an improvement over the traditional harrow, but it was no death knell to the quack grass.

When tractors became a part of our lives, we bought field cultivators. These wheeled, deep tilling tools had teeth much more formidable than anything we had seen before. Where the quack was thick, the teeth of the field cultivators yanked them up to the surface in wads a foot thick where most would die, but enough would live to frustrate efforts to wipe out the grass. The process also made the surface of the cultivated fields so rough that the next trip over the field in soil preparation was a guaranteed rough ride.

I asked Dad how quack grass had gotten started in the community. Was it a native grass, or was it something introduced through agriculture? He told me to ask Grandpa. Grandpa wasn't sure. He had heard stories, he said, stories told years before when most of the fields were still studded with the stumps of the trees the soil originally supported, stories about a man who had visited the area, selling seeds for a variety of hay he guaranteed would never fail to grow.

According to Grandpa, somebody bought the seed, planted it, and proudly displayed his wondrous crop, and the scourge was on. Never again would our soils be free from quack grass. And that, Grandpa said, was how the stuff had got its name, after the old quack who came along and sold a good-for-nothing product destined to put misery into life on the family farm forever!

The Perils of the Harrow

We who lived on the hills and in the hollows of Highland learned how to drag (harrow) a field as soon as we were judged to be reasonably safe with a team of three horses, which was when we were perhaps ten years old, or younger if we were big for our age.

Of course, we had help getting the horses harnessed, teamed, and hooked to the harrow, but once that was accomplished, we were on our own. We were told which field we were to work, how many notches deep to set the levers controlling the teeth of the harrow, and in which direction we were to drag the field. Usually, the first dragging followed the direction of the plow furrows which the harrow was intended to smooth, going around the field beginning at the outside and working toward its center.

The second and third harrowings were more difficult. Since many of the fields were to be marked and planted into row crops, it was essential that the final teeth marks the harrow made were in a direction other than the marks made by the chains of the marker, therefore diagonally, or as we said, “Kitty Corner.” One began the job by going to a corner of the field and aiming the horses at the opposite corner. Once there, the team and harrow had to be turned 180 degrees to return alongside the original path to the beginning corner. Every end of the field meant another 180 degree tum. Each turn was fraught with danger.

Harrows are built in sections. A hinged joint connected each section to its neighbor.

Three horses generally pulled three sections. When the horses turned a 180 degree tum, the outer section would often lift into the air and flip on top of its neighbor. The trick of making a safe turn was to so keep the horses pulling ahead as they turned that the outside section did not lift off the ground and flip.

Every turn was a test of the skill of the person handling the team, but horses are unpredictable creatures, and sometimes even the most talented drivers lost control at a critical moment. A horse sometimes stumbled over his own feet, or perhaps he tried to bite the irritating animal next to him, breaking the rhythm of the tum. At such times, there was no stopping the outer section of the drag from flipping, and once it had flipped it had to be flipped back.

No proud, young handler of horses was ever willing to admit having failed to flip a drag section back to its normal position, but sections don't flip back of themselves. Ten-year-old teamsters are not hugely muscular. And don't forget the devil. He knows his way around the furrows of the farm, and I am convinced he did his worst to complicate things for young teamsters.

When one section flips onto another section, their curved teeth naturally hook onto each other. As soon as one braces his feet to try to flip the errant section back to normalcy, it becomes obvious that a tooth of section “A” is embracing a tooth of section “B,” and no power on earth is going to flip the errant section back to normalcy until that embrace is broken. Both hands reach into the tangle of teeth, grasp the embracer, and make him give up his hold. All the While that old devil grins as he helps the teeth hold to each other.

Oh, the sweating, the tears, mingled with a swear word or two, that were required to separate the teeth from each other and to finally get the three sections flat again. By that time the horses seemed glad to be off and pulling. But on the next tum, and the next tum, and on every tum thereafter, the fear was going to be there. Keep those horses pulling! Keep the tugs tight! Keep them thinking about what they are doing! Keep that outside section down on the ground! A hex on you if you don't!

Saturday Night Movies

Card playing, dancing, and theater attendance were the three big taboos of our denomination during the 1930s. We didn't dance. We weren't event tempted to dance. We played cards, but only *Rook*, which everybody in our family had played long before our church fathers had declared card playing off limits. Therefore, we kept playing Rook with no qualms of conscience, but we didn't play Pinochle or Poker with their kings, queens and jacks. We didn't go to theaters, not until we were old enough to sneak off to Cadillac in our own cars. But that didn't mean we couldn't watch moving pictures. After all, a picture that moved was no more sinful than in a snapshot which didn't move, and since the movies we saw were rented and projected by the merchants in McBain on a white-painted outside wall of a building behind the water tower, the theater industry didn't benefit from our dollars. We didn't pay to see it. The movie was free, and we were free.

It takes forever to get dark on a summer night, though in the thirties and forties we still lived all year on eastern standard time. As the daylight finally began to fade, Dad drove the whole family to McBain, except for the times we left Ma home because she was tired and the baby was coming before long, although we weren't supposed to know that. But we had to get there on time to get a decent parking place, and there were always friendly families who would welcome some visiting before the show began.

When it was almost dark enough to recognize figures on the screen, the show began with cartoons. One of the first we saw was created by Walt Disney before he became conscientious about what he produced. It was his version of Noah's Ark and the Flood. Most of it squared with the Bible, but Disney added details Moses left out. For instance, when the flood was over and the gangplank was lowered, the animals came out of the ark, capering and cavorting in the joy of their release. First off the Ark were the big animals, mostly two by two, then the smaller animals whose numbers had somewhat multiplied during their voyage. Finally, the skunks came, their number substantially increased from the original two, and their peculiar aroma wafting to the nose of Mrs. Noah as she gladly watched their departure. Whatever she said to Noah as she held her nose and turned her head was lost in the laughter of the audience. Then came the rabbits, and the rabbits, and more rabbits, and still more rabbits. One began to think they would never end, and that was the point Walt was trying to make and which the audience picked up very quickly. Ma didn't think much of Walt Disney for a long time after we watched that cartoon.

The main attractions were usually westerns or train robberies, and were spiced with romance, limited in the 1930s to hugging and kissing, but sometimes with a zest our parents commented about in Dutch. We couldn't understand what was said, but we knew by the tone of the conversation that they were thinking maybe it would have been better if we hadn't come. But next week we were back again. The movies were free, you know!

Chasing Flies

How many flies can exist within the confines of the kitchen of a farm home? We never tried to count the flies in the kitchen at any given time, but what with the cattle, pigs, and horses, our farm bred flies by the hundred thousands. Given the cooking aromas of a farm home kitchen, given a goodly number of people going in and out of the kitchen through screen doors, and given that some who used the doors were toddlers who took forever to get in or out, the scene was set for a kitchen black with flies.

We hung sticky fly paper from thumb tacks in the ceiling. We bought the fly paper from the grocery store in dozen lots of small cardboard cylinders with a loop of fibrous string sticking out the top. In less than twenty-four hours after we had pulled out the sticky strips and

tacked them by their loops to the kitchen ceiling they were so thickly stuck with flies there was room for no more, yet the number of flies in the kitchen had not noticeably decreased.

We tried to spray, but found even *Flit* coated everything in the kitchen with a petroleum based film that tainted everything we put to our lips. And the flies lived on. We bought guaranteed *Daisy Fly Killers*, flat four-by-seven-inch metal containers a half-inch thick, filled with a lethal liquid fed up through eight or ten cork-like sponges the size of dimes on which flies were supposed to land, drink, and promptly die. Our flies loved the liquid, drank deeply, and lived! And if a fly did die, there were three more to take its place.

When the number of flies finally became intolerable, there was nothing left to do but chase them out. Ma directed the operation. First she issued a diaper or dish towel to every able bodied person available. These she lined up on the east end of the kitchen except for one person who attended the west screen door. At her signal every participant waved his or her cloth erratically from the ceiling to the floor and back and forth across that distance, all the while edging one small step at a time toward that west door.

When the advancing line had reached the point where the clothesline reel was attached to the door casing on the back kitchen door it was time for the door keeper to open the screen door and allow the insects out. The advancing line kept advancing until the last cubic foot of air space in the kitchen had been scoured of flies--well, almost. Some always managed to escape, but by the time the door keeper had slammed the screen door shut amid the storm of white cloths jamming the doorway, the number of flies left in the kitchen had diminished to the point where normal kitchen life could resume for at least another day or two.

Washing Dishes

Our dishes had to be washed three times a day. Never was the stacking of pots, pans, and china allowed until after the following meal. It wouldn't have worked if Ma had allowed it. We had to wash dishes before we could make another meal. There weren't enough pieces of anything to make the putting out of second meal possible.

We, that is, my sister Gert and I, were broken into the dishwashing routine as soon as we could stand on chairs and reach the top of the dishpans. It was our idea, not Ma's. We wanted to be grown-up. We wanted to wash dishes. Which was our undoing. Once we had proved we could, we were stuck with the job. We learned to hate it. How we procrastinated! Both of us had to make a trip to the toilet before we could even consider clearing the table and getting going on the job. Even in the cold of winter, we stretched that trip to its longest possible physical limit! We killed time by arguing about whose turn it was to wash or to dry.

Anything to postpone the job! But each time there came that moment when Ma put her foot down and there were no more options.

By that time the food left on the plates had dried and almost had to be chiseled off, and the silverware had to be soaked to make it come clean, but we never seemed to learn. We stacked the plates, the cups and saucers, and made a heap of the silverware. We brought the pots and pans from the stove to the table. Then we brought out from the back kitchen the two big aluminum dishpans some ten inches deep and twenty inches across. One was for washing, the other for rinsing. We placed them on the right end of the wide side of the table, filled the washing pan with hot water from a teakettle on the wood stove and added a couple of dippers full of warm water from the reservoir on the right end of the same stove until the pan was half full. Next, we added the soap. *Rinso* was its name. It came in a blue cardboard box with yellow letters. It was a powder which dissolved well, even in our hard well water. Then we got the dish rag from its nail on the west end of the cupboard, not quite dry from the last session of dishes.

The wiper had the choice of at least three towels from the towel bar on the wall near the cupboard but behind the stove where they had been drying since their last appearance. And don't forget the chore ball, that fluff of intertwined copper shavings absolutely necessary to scrape the remains of the meat and potatoes from the pots, pans, and tins. A dipper full of hot water from the reservoir was enough to rinse the soapy water off the clean dishes before drying them.

The big plates were first. Each demanded the full attention of the washer armed with the thick dish rag. Each took a full minute to make totally clean. Ten plates, ten minutes. By the time those plates were cleaned the water was already tepid and the suds were fast disappearing.

Next in line were the cups and saucers. They shouldn't have taken as long to clean, for they had far less food attached than had the plates, but by this time the dishwater was becoming increasingly ineffective, and so was the washer. Another ten minutes passed and by now the water was cool and the suds were gone!

The silverware followed. Some of that cleaned easily, some had food stuck on like it would never come off. The washer, lost in a reverie of what might have been, usually missed some of that stuck food. A sizzling return of a dirty fork or knife into the dishwater by the wiper coupled with a disparaging remark was incentive enough for the washer to parry with a similar cutting word or phrase. The exchange of nasties increased in nastiness and volume until from a distant room Ma accepted her referee duty lest words became blows. When she made her appearance she usually stuck her hand into the dishwater, discovered how

cold it had grown in the half hour or more since dishwashing had begun, added a shot of hot water from the teakettle, and advised the antagonists to get at those pots and pans right now lest they still be washing dishes when coffee time came around. Not that her warning did anything to speed up the process. The speed of dishwashing had been set into the slowest of slow gear ratios too long ago to be challenged by something as benign as words of wisdom from a mother.

Eventually the job got done. Eventually the dried dishes were returned to the cupboards, the oilcloth on the tabletop washed with the dishrag and dried with the dishtowel. Eventually the pans of dirty water were clumsily but cautiously carried from the table to the sink across the kitchen and sloshed in and around it. Most of the water found its way down the drain immediately, though some had to be mopped from the floor with the rag mop always at ready position in the corner behind the west kitchen door. Finally, the two dishpans were bung on their proper and appointed nails in the back kitchen for a very short rest before the next meal returned them for a repeat performance.

Could things have been different? I suppose. Ma could have done the dishes herself in a fraction of the time it took us to do them and with half the cause for ulcers. Or she could have done the washing and had one of us help her by doing the wiping. That would have resulted in more speed, a better product, and more harmony. Had she done so, perhaps we would have learned something about the work ethic that we certainly failed to achieve until much later in life. But perhaps when she was young Ma had learned to detest washing and wiping dishes as much as we did, and now gladly delegated the job on the two of us and later on our siblings who followed us. What might have been shall forever remain anybody's guess. The fact was, we procrastinated our way through our share of dish washings so often and for so long that, in retrospect, we can only marvel that we are not at this very moment still standing at that table with our arms stuck in those two dishpans.

Gardening

Everybody had a garden. Without gardens we would have been hard pressed to survive the long winters of Highland's hills and hollows. From our gardens, we stocked the shelves of the fruit cellar with hundreds of quart mason jars of com, tomatoes, beans, peas, and more. How dull our meals would have been had we not grown gardens.

Our garden was laid out along the west side of the driveway from the road to the house, a level spot, totally level, unbelievably level. It had been blessed with its share of stones since it lay directly in one of the two stony swaths crossing our farm, but the stones had been picked off it so often and for so long that it was difficult to find a stone in the garden when we wanted one.

Dad prepared the soil of the garden. Every spring, weeks before time for plowing, he wheeled, or had wheeled, the manure from the chicken coop roosts onto the soil to enrich it. Should that be in short supply, there was always some manure left in the pig pen to complete the enrichment exercise. Then he plowed, and harrowed the entire garden and assumed the responsibility for planting that part of it which he could plant with the corn-planter, usually three 100 foot long rows of three varieties of sweet com, a 70 day early variety, an 80 day mid-season corn, the one most likely to be canned for winter use, and finally, the 85 day corn, a white variety with long, deep kernels and large ears. If the frost held off and the white corn got ripe, each ear was almost a meal in itself.

With the same corn-planter, he planted a full row of peas and at least two rows of beans, both of which would provide more than enough to supply the family during the long months of winter.

The rest of the planting had to be done by hand, and it was left for Ma with what child labor was available. One row of beets would suffice, their rough seeds buried a full inch into the fine soil. There had to be at least two rows of cabbage, a half row of which had to be red. Two rows of tomatoes usually were enough, paired off with two rows of carrots, plus a part of a row of leaf lettuce, and a part of a row each of kale and spinach to use when the leaf lettuce got too bitter. Radishes, too! We had to have a long half row of round red ones plus a part of a row of long white ones.

To space the rows straight and properly, we used two broken car axle stakes, one on each end of the garden, connected by a strand of binder twine to project the location of the row beneath it. A hoe used properly under the binder twine carved the trench into which we dropped the seeds, each according to the prescription long ago imprinted in Ma's mind by many annual plantings. The seeds, bought at the corner grocery store and packaged in tiny brown paper bags or homegrown and saved from last year's crop, were sown in a fine line in the trench or dropped inches apart as determined by the nature of the plant the seed would produce. No row was labeled as to what kind of seed had been planted in it. When the plants came out of the ground, we recognized which was which.

Though the varieties of garden vegetables would mature at different times during the growing season, we planted all our seeds within a week. We were glad the job was done, but knew that with the planting, the work of gardening had just begun.

To help balance the labor of gardening with the joy of living, Ma planted flowers in the garden, a row of hollyhocks near the fence along the driveway and often a single hollyhocks plant at both ends of each row of vegetables to shield from prying eyes the condition of the garden, its productivity, and “cleanliness” or lack of the same.

A row of zinnias brought color along the driveway, next to a row of two of glads grown from bulbs that we had protected from winter in the root cellar along with the potatoes and apples.

Along the west edge of the garden was the perennial patch of rhubarb (known to us only as pie plant), not worked up except when it became so infiltrated by quack grass as to prohibit growth. We used rhubarb only in the spring, the first fresh non-preserved fruit in months.

As soon as the garden vegetables sprouted out of the ground, the contest between vegetable and weed began. Given half a chance, the weeds were destined to win. It was up to Ma and the kids to keep them from crowding out the vegetables.

Peas were the earliest garden product. School wasn't out long before their pods were filled and ready to be picked. The heartbreak of peas was that it took so many to make a meal. And it took so long to prepare them. First, we picked up a milk pail full of pods, we shelled them, which reduced their volume by five sixths and used up half a morning. But they were worth it.

Cooking peas didn't take long. Boiled, salted, and coated with pure butter, what a delight to the palate. Peas were the only vegetable Ma canned in pint cans. But oh, the many pails of pea pods it took to produce even a respectable row of pint cans on the shelf in the basement!

Carrots required an infinite amount of weeding. Pull the weeds out of them this week, forget them for a week, and by the third week you could hardly find the carrots for weeds.

Carrots took all season to fully mature. Ma planted them thick. We thinned them by pulling baby carrots and enjoying their fresh taste. When they got as thick as a clothes pin, we thinned them again, sliced, cooked, and buttered them and ate them with our potatoes. In the fall when the survivors were as thick as small bananas, we finally pulled them all, boiled what we wanted to use as a fresh vegetable and stored the rest in the root cellar for use during the winter. No matter when we used them, they responded with their crisp, firm, orange willingness. Carrots were the one vegetable we never bothered to can.

We nursed the beets through the summer until they were nearly three inches across. We didn't consider them edible until they were pickled in vinegar and sugar and stored in quart mason jars for at least a month. By then they tasted so good we forgot about the mess of digging them out of the ground, wringing the tops off them, washing them, and boiling them in a huge kettle until the skins could be twisted off. We quartered them and halved the quarters until they were small enough to go through the neck of the fruit jars, filling the jars with the sugary vinegar solution, and boiling the cans in the wash boiler until they were

cooked through and through. We imagined we could still see red stains on our fingers by the time they had aged sufficiently to eat.

The first sweet corn was ready some seventy days after the seed was planted. Impatiently, we watched the corn grow. We had helped it along by first cultivating it with the one-horse cultivator. We had pulled the weeds in it at least three times before the tassels developed and the silk appeared. We knew little about pollination, but we knew that once the tassel and the silk appeared it would be only a week before the miniature ear developed, and in another three weeks we would have fully grown cobs of steaming corn on the kitchen table, two ears apiece for the grown-ups, one ear for all whose teeth were strong enough to bite it off the cob. Boiled, salted, and buttered, corn on the cob was a meal fit for a king.

The first two rows were designed for day-to-day use. The second two rows were dedicated for the fruit cellar. Dad helped us boys pick the ripe ears into potato crates and brought them onto the side porch. The rest was up to Ma, though she usually got help from Grandma and the Aunts with the promise to return the favor when their corn got ripe. The job was much more inviting when there were enough hands to make light work of 1) husking each ear and stripping it of all its silk, 2) affixing the large end of the husked ear to a nail driven through an inch thick board a few inches wide and more than a foot long, and 3) slicing the kernels off the ear with the butcher knife honed to its sharpest edge.

Heaps of golden kernels filled the dishpans until the last ear had been stripped. Quart mason jars, freshly scrubbed and scalded, were filled with the kernels scooped by the double-handfuls from the dishpans and funneled into the necks of the jars, thumped down time after time to settle the kernels, and finally squeezed down with both thumbs. A teaspoon of salt on the top of the filled jar guaranteed the best of flavor plus protection from spoilage.

When all the jars were filled, we stretched the sealing rubbers onto each of their necks and screwed the zinc coated, glass lined jar lids onto the tops, though not yet quite tight. We hauled the wash boiler from the back kitchen, filled it partially with hot water, and set it on the hottest part of the kitchen range. We fitted a wooden rack into the bottom of the boiler so the jars would not make direct contact with its metal bottom. Twenty-one jars we squeezed into the boiler, poured into it enough water to fill it to just below the necks of the jars, put the lid on the boiler, and stoked the stove. While the first boiler was heating, we filled a second batch of jars, and after that there would be yet a third and a fourth batch of jars. The day would see nearly a hundred quarts of corn preserved and stored on the shelves in the fruit cellar against the long days of winter.

Once the boiler began boiling, the alarm on the clock on the shelf in the far corner of the kitchen was set for twenty minutes. When the alarm rang, the tallest of the adults lifted the lid from the boiler and, using a metal can handler, carefully lifted each steaming can out onto an inch thick board on the top of the kitchen table. As she released each can, another woman grasped it in her toweled left hand while she tightened the zinc jar cap as tight as the muscles of her right hand could, all the while holding in her palm a wet dish cloth as protection from the steaming lid.

Oh, the heat in the kitchen during the canning process! Small wonder that back kitchens had been invented. Small wonder that electric stoves were so welcome by those who canned.

Memories of aprons totally wet with the sweat wiped from dripping foreheads rose from the cellar with every can of the corn of a winter's meal by the women folk who had done the canning.

We canned our yellow beans immediately after we picked them. We snapped off their ends and broke the long pods into three or four pieces, a couple of milk pails per session, enough to fill at least one boiler, maybe two. Another week, another session, until we had the hundred quarts we needed to see us through the winter. Security for our family was the set of basement shelves filled with hundreds of cans of our own vegetables.

Yellow Ice

From the first snows of winter to the spring melt, one could expect to find a small mound of yellow ice located at one of the corners of the house, somewhat hidden from the plain view of those traveling the road or walking around the farmyard.

The privy, common to all farmsteads, was built to facilitate at most two people at a time. The two holes in the five feet of seat space limited its use. Usually, one of the two holes was of major size, the other of minor size, which further restricted its use. In most families there were rush hours that overtaxed the capacity of the privy. What to do?

The male portion of the family provided the solution to the problem. Since God had endowed them with more convenient and accessible plumbing, they could and they did simply walk to the barn and use the gutters behind the cows or horses. But the barn was much farther from the house than the privy, and in the cold of winter or in the throes of having waited thirty seconds too long, or when laziness won the day, it was much simpler to step around the corner of the house.

And who ought to be critical of the practice? After all, the farm animals emptied their bladders wherever they were, whenever they needed. Two minutes after the deed was done

the evidence had disappeared into the soil and there were no second thoughts to mark the event.

Except in the winter.

Snow is cold, much colder than urine. Surprising how quickly the combination of pristine white snow and urine turned to yellow ice. Multiply the number of males making use of the area around the corner times the number of trips made per day and compute the degrees of freezing cold and the number of days since the last thaw and one could calculate the size of the mound of yellow ice around the corner. But no one did. The mound was taken for granted.

The distaff share of each household was the more thankful for the arrangement when they considered that a mound of yellow ice around the corner was a guarantee that the seat in the privy was dry. No need to check it.

Thundermugs

Ours was the day of repeated riddles, one of which was: What is the difference between the bed of the rich man and the bed of the poor man? The answer: The rich man had a canopy over his bed; the poor man had a can of pee under his bed.

The answer, of course, contained a fallacy. In our day, the rich probably had both, while the poor lacked only the canopy. Truth was, in the days of the outdoor privy, some emergency eliminational contingency was expedient, and certainly well used. What with our use of laxatives, there was not always time to leave the bed and make the outdoor toilet. And not everyone in the family had a bladder which would guarantee comfort until *Reveille*.

Better to have a pot under the bed than a wet mattress. And for those whose ambition was low, and comfort was a must, that last cold trip out of doors before retiring was not taken, and before the night was hardly begun, the scrape of the pot and the gush of liquid announced the fact.

One of the morning chores for the distaff half of every household was the making of the rounds of all bedrooms to collect all of the thundermugs, from the small, one-eared pots under the beds to the lidded chamber pails in the closets, and empty them, either in the two-holed toilet or behind the lilac bush, or out beyond the ash heap at the edge of the yard.

One of the most important bits of information given to those who were invited to spend the night was the location of the most convenient thunder mug, knowledge necessary before one could peacefully drop off to sleep.

Storms

Michigan weather is changeable. A common Michigan cliche is, “If you don't like the weather, stick around for a few hours and you will have something different.”

With the exception of fall, each season has its own variety of storm. Fall doesn't produce anything worse than a lot of rain. Summer storms are usually limited to sudden showers accompanied by nasty gusts of wind and serious lightning. All our larger buildings were equipped with lightning rods and cables to channel the lightning safely from their highest points into the clouds, though not without a lot of noise.

Our home drew lightning like a magnet. Every summer storm brought several crashes of lightning that struck the lightning rods with reports as loud as the shooting of both barrels of a twelve-gauge shotgun inside a closed room.

We had learned early in our experiences with storms to disconnect the telephone at the first rumble of thunder. While most of the phones in our community came equipped with a double-bladed switch that could be flipped in a fraction of a second to make the disconnection, ours was not so blessed, probably a result of Dad's procrastination. When the thunder rumbled, we had to take a table knife (closer at hand than a screwdriver) and loosen the two screws set in metal posts at the top of the wooden phone box on the wall and pull from each socket the wire the screw held.

At times we were a bit tardy disconnecting the phone. Brother Jack learned rather painfully that the electricity which came along the telephone wires was nothing to joke about. On the day of his graduation from high school, as he was loosening one of the screws on the top of the phone with a table knife, lightning struck the wire a mile or so down the line. The charge knocked him to the floor across the room, not seriously hurt by the experience, but shaken, wiser, and very respectful of lightning.

The two seasons of the year when storms became violent were spring and winter in the order of damage done. Spring storms could produce tornadoes. Evidence in the woodlots of our area abounded that in the past tornadoes had come through and had done severe damage to trees. Decaying logs strewn in circles on the ground gave evidence that, within the fifty years before our day, a tornado or two had come through. In our short years on the farm, we had no tornadoes. What we did have were destructive winds out of the northwest accompanied by heavy rains and plenty of lightning.

Those storms usually gave enough warning for us to get battened down what we could and to take shelter in the house. Signs of an approaching storm were a blackened sky to the northwest, the absolute silence of all fowl, from the chickens in their coop to the wrens on

their nests in the hollow fence posts, and such a total stillness of the atmosphere that the air itself seemed not to move. Every leaf on the trees around the house hung without a flutter.

Looking out of the windows and doors of the house toward the west, the peak of the barn stood out in sharp red and white relief against the black of the northwestern sky. Rolling thunder became louder and closer. The dog scurried to the arched window opening under the cement of the side porch along the west wall of the kitchen. Ma shut all the doors and the windows, and the entire family huddled into the back kitchen. With the first drops of rain, and the accompanying flicks of gusty wind, the heartiest of the chickens who had stayed in their dust baths under the row of lilac bushes fronting the chicken coop made a dash for the trap door in the wall. Hardly had the last of their tail feathers disappeared when the skies fell in.

Blasts of wind, torrents of rain, flashing lightning, and burst after burst and thunder loud enough to drown out the screams of those too young to understand, struck down on us mortals with a celestial fury. Dad stationed himself at the north window, closest the outside door, ready to leave through it should something outside demand his presence, though he would have been hard pressed to say what he could have done should he have been called. Ma watched the sky and the trees from the west window, wiping her forehead with the skirt of her apron to keep the sweat from dripping into her eyes. Crying little ones tugged at her skirts. The rest of us stood as close to the windows as we dared, stealing glimpses of the swirling whipping of the branches of the row of poplars between the house and the driveway. A sudden, new creaking, cracking sound lasting only a second broke through the rest of the noise. It seemed to come from the front, the south end of the house. “What was that?” Ma asked.

Dad ran through the rooms on the main floor to look out one of the south windows.

Moments later he came back, tragedy written on his face. “The cherry tree,” he announced. “It's flat.” And the wind kept blowing and the lightning kept flashing.

Another sound, new to our ears, a whumping, grinding sound, fringed with the metallic, ripped through the room. “What was that?” Ma again asked. “Where did it come from?” Dad asked in reply.

“From somewhere out there,” one of the boys answered, pointing to the east. Dad again ran into the kitchen, this time looking out of the east window to the north. When he came back his face was white. “The windmill,” he announced.

We kept looking toward the barn, the chicken coop, and the garage. Pieces of board flew. Wood shingles sailed through the air, doors flapped open and banged shut again but stayed

fastened by their hinges. Finally, and gradually the wind subsided, the rain slacked off, and the thunder generated its crashing and bumbling from the southeast. After a few minutes, Dad could stand the suspense no longer. He opened the back door, slid through it, slammed it shut behind him. Within minutes, the last of the storm slid past. The rain stopped and all of us left the back kitchen for the rain-freshened out-door air.

What a mess that burst of storm had made of the place! Boards we had not guessed were loose had been blown off the garage and barn. Milk pails stacked on the bench on the east wall of the barn were blown across the yard toward the road. Limbs, branches, and leaves from all the trees cluttered the ground everywhere. The saddest sight of all was the flattened windmill, its four angle iron legs kinked perpendicularly eight feet above the ground. The heavy wooden pump rod had snapped, its stump pointing at the clouds from a few feet above the cast iron pump to which it was attached. The cherry tree, halfway from the house to the road on the east side of the driveway, was totally ruined, flattened, splintered, its half-grown cherries forever deprived of their maturity. So many things would never be quite the same as we had known them.

Winter storms had a different flavor. They seldom contained lightning and thunder. Usually they were snowstorms, sometimes sleet. Sleet snapped limbs off trees, especially from our apple and pear trees, but even the tall poplar trees around our house bore signs of sleet damage. After 1936, when the power lines came through, the sleet storms seemed the more devastating because they robbed us of electrical power for however many days it took for Consumers Power Company crews to restore broken lines.

It was the snowstorms that made the most lasting impressions on us, especially the champion of them all, the snowstorm of 1936! It was the first time in my six years of school that school had shut down because of a storm. The snow didn't just fall. It blew in with such a force that packed drifts burying the roads with a snow so hard-packed that not only we who were young and light were able to walk over them, but our parents and grandparents could join us.

To shovel such hard packed snow meant first, with the blade of the shovel, to chop it into blocks the size one could handle and then to move the heavy stuff aside. Ordinary snowplows were useless to open the roads. The snow was packed too deep and too hard.

Farmers who had to get their eggs and cream to market managed with horses and sleighs and combined their efforts to get as far as McBain, though often they had to open fences and detour through fields around places where the drifts in the roads were too much for the horses. In other places drifts were packed so tight they sustained the weight of a horse and sleigh.

The plows for our township were headquartered in Marion. Their drivers tried to get to our area. More often than not, something on the plow broke within the first few miles out of town, so they had to return to make repairs. It took more than a week for the first of them to finally try to plow out the road that ran a half mile to the south of our road and the county line a mile to the north of our road.

Our release was finally made by a rotary plow, but even that was not up to the job.

Everyone in the community big enough to carry a shovel volunteered to break up the snow ahead of the plow. What a crew that was! Scores of men and boys armed with shovels worked ahead of the snowplow, chopping into the solid drifts as rapidly as they could. When they had a rod or two hacked into chunks, the plow sounded its horn, gave the crew time to move out of its path, then moved ahead to swallow all the chunks, grind them to powdery bits, and spew them out of its stack onto the fence row beyond the ditch. Once it reached the wall of solid snow it was forced to retreat so the crew could again manually attack the drifts.

Between morning and afternoon chores, every able-bodied male was out helping the plow through. We began a half mile south of our farm on the road paralleling our road. We worked the two miles to the west, the mile and a half to the north, and the two miles to the east ending north of our farm a mile across the field. Others took up where we left off.

Much to our disappointment and angry frustration, when the rotary had those roads cleared with the help of many of the twelve occupants of the farms on our road, the county commission pulled the machine out of our area without clearing our road. The drifts in it were left for the warm breezes of spring to melt. In the meantime, we got where we needed to go by horse and sleigh, not over the road, but across the fields. Our team of horses pulled our car across the field a half mile and parked it on the road in front of the farm of Pete and Thressa Smits. We used it when we had to use it, though to start it after it had been setting in the open cold was quite an undertaking.

We walked or rode in a sleigh of one of our neighbors to church. Our sleigh had no box on it, only a flat rack, and it was considered unfit for human transportation, especially on Sunday. We had plenty of neighbors who offered us rides. Those of us males old enough and strong enough to walk chose to walk. Ma, the girls, and the very young rode.

John Ouwinga delivered our groceries by sleigh and took our eggs and cream in exchange, though Dad said we could have gotten more for the cream if we had been able to cart it to McBain. But we survived. The experiences of togetherness and cooperation knit us more closely than we had been knit before.

Our phones continued to work throughout the storm. By phone we learned that as the storm struck, an elderly man living three miles to the west bad died. At the instructions of the mortician who could not get to the house, his widow opened the windows of the room he was in and waited the week until the mortician was able to get through. The funeral was held in the church as soon as the roads were cleared.

Other winters brought other storms. We more or less got used to them, and, at times, we enjoyed them. We still talk about how much snow a Model A Ford or a '32 Chevy could plow through, provided it was equipped with a set of tire chains on the rear wheels and had some added weight in the back seat. We did push through snow halfway up the radiator, yes, and sometimes we got stuck. Sometimes, a blizzard hit unexpectedly, catching us away from home. Sometimes, we got hung up in a drift. A little shoveling and a lot of pushing got us through and on our way again. Many were the times we had to push a car up one of the hills at either end of our two-mile road to make it the rest of the way home, but we enjoyed the satisfaction of getting home each time. We were used to winter and its storms. We were willing to put up with the hardships they brought. The old folks said winters were like marriages. A bit of a storm now and then makes a person more appreciative when the storm is over.

Cisterns

Our early water supply was of two kinds, rainwater and well water. Before he bought a windmill to pump well water, Grandpa had put eave troughs and down spouts on the house and dug a cistern with a capacity of a few thousand gallons of water on the north end of the west side of the house. Its interior was smoothly troweled cement. The inside had the shape of a squat vase, the opening of which was a three-foot square hole, framed in cement and fitted with a sturdy wooden cap held down by a couple of large rocks. A round four-inch hole in the top of the cistern near the corner of the house fit the eave trough spout through which water flowed with every rain.

An one-inch pipe from the cistern led into the cellar and up behind the sink on the west wall of the kitchen. A pitcher pump on the sink pumped water from the cistern for washing and cleaning only. Rainwater was cheap water but not pure water. Cracks in the top of the wall allowed curious rodents and ignorant insects to enter its cavernous confines. Their dead bodies polluted the water. Rain that had fallen on the wooden roof of the house and run down over bird droppings and through eave troughs into which tree leaves had fallen and rotted created additional pollution. My mother was, as she put it in Dutch, "Feese of the Vater!" To pump empty the cistern and to clean it was a long day's work. Often it didn't get done. At the time our family's need for water peaked, we took the pump out, removed the down spout from its hole, put a more secure cap on the cistern, and used only well water.

Our well was near the northeast corner of the house. It was pumped by the windmill until it had been blown down twice by summer storms, then by a gasoline engine, and later an electric motor. A one-inch pipe ran from the well to a tank in the northwest corner of the kitchen, then on to a cistern dug into the hill behind the chicken coop. When the tank in the kitchen was empty, and the pump was not running, water from the cistern ran back to the tank. Another pipe from the cistern brought water to the barn. That cistern was not totally rodent proof either.

Twice a year we cleaned it. Sometimes we didn't dare tell Ma what we found in it. Before we could clean it we had to empty it. Since the cistern was built on a hill, we had only to open the faucet of the cattle tank on the north side of the barn and in half a day the cistern would be dry. The tank filled and overflowed, the water ran into the barnyard and seeped into the ground.

Once the cistern was empty, we removed the wooden lid from the mouth of that awesome hole in the ground, dropped a ladder down into the pit, and with the brooms, brushes, and buckets we scoured the inside walls, cleaned the muck and debris from the floor, and got ourselves out again. Given a bit of time the pump would refill the cistern with clean water.

Though the wooden tops of both cisterns were heavy enough to require adult muscle power to remove them, we always planted on top of the lids two stones large enough that no curious child, regardless of his or her inventive capabilities, could remove them, remove the lid, and find death inside the cistern.

Rats

We usually had a few rats on the farm. So did everyone else. Rats were such a nuisance for a few years that the township government had placed a bounty on them. We cut the tail off every rat we killed and brought it in to the township treasurer who paid the bounty: two cents per tail. But the rats multiplied faster than the government could cut them down.

We fought rats with traps, both the glorified mouse trap style and the steel traps familiar to muskrat trapping. Trapping rats was quite different from trapping mice. Mice were dumb. A piece of cheese, a slick of peanut butter on the trigger of the trap, and one could be assured that greedy mice would soon trigger their own doom. Not so with rats. They knew what was bait and what was food. They could smell humans on anything a human had handled and they avoided it. We laid cloths over the traps to hide our scent. We used tongs to handle the bait on the traps. It made little difference. We caught so few rats in traps that it didn't pay to set them.

We bought rat poison guaranteed to kill rats. Our rats wouldn't eat the stuff It was as if they had read the label on the box and decided to turn down our offer of boxed food. We mixed our own poisoned rat food, using strychnine, a more powerful poison than any prepared poison we could buy. Later, and with good reason, the use of strychnine was ruled illegal because of its potency and lack of an antidote. A rat, dead from the poison, was a tempting meal for a cat, but the poison in the body of the rat was not dead. It killed the cat who ate the rat.

Our house had no basement under the back kitchen and back shed. The space under these rooms were rat incubators. In the floor of the back kitchen near the outside door was a hole about the size of an adult foot. How it got there I don't know. We had nailed a piece of tin over it, but the rats had gnawed alongside the tin making an opening large enough to squeeze through.

One spring when the rats got unusually thick Dad insisted that one of us boys sit into the night in the back kitchen with a .22 to shoot the rats as they came up through that hole. We did.

The naked light bulb dangling from its twisted cord a yard down from the high ceiling gave enough light and at the right angle to see the sights of the .22. The hours it took to wait out a daring rat were long and boring. We shot few rats, but their shot bodies convinced the hoard that enough was enough. They soon moved out and on. Which of our neighbors thanked us for the favor I couldn't tell you. We didn't ask around.

Deer Hunting

Dad and I went deer hunting for the first time in 1941. No deer lived in our area, but ten miles east of McBain deer had moved into the territory near Cranberry Lake and into the farmlands near it. The high school boys from Vogel Center began the deer hunting itch by the middle of October. The stories of their past escapades were more than enough to make me want to join them the worst way. In 1941, I was fifteen, old enough to buy a license.

All of us boys had hunted rabbits, partridges, and squirrels. We owned shotguns. Shotguns with slugs or buckshot were acceptable guns for hunting deer. The law said deer hunters had to wear red. It seemed all the men, young and old, who lived five miles or more east of McBain spent most of the cold months of the year in red plaid jackets. Ours were blue denim. But we were inventive. A few yards of red flannel pinned or sewn onto both the back and front panels of our jackets gave all the red we needed.

A week before November 15, opening day of the season, Dad and I drove to the scrub oak woods east of Vogel Center to check out the territory. We had lots of company. All down the

two track men were staking out their stands. We did find promising spot with few close neighbors. Aided by the more experienced, who were generous with their knowledge, we learned how to recognize a deer trail and how to mark its location, so when we came into the woods before daylight on the 15th, we could find it back.

The cows didn't know what had come over us that we should attempt to milk them two hours before milking time on November 15th. Nor could they understand our desperate hurry. We could hardly believe it ourselves. A half hour before daylight we were in the woods, on location, prepared to participate in the making of the 1941 edition of the tall tales of the hunting woods. The morning was cold but clear. To our relief, our nearest neighbors were at least five hundred yards from us.

Dad and I found the spot we had picked out as my stand. He left me at that spot with the whispered instruction not to leave my stand, come what may, until he came by for me unless I shot a deer. If so, I was to fire my gun three times as rapidly as I could to let him know I needed help. Then he disappeared into the brush. I could hear his steps for a few minutes, then there was only quiet. The woods were scary. The last ten minutes before the darkness finally lifted were deathly silent. Every hunter was in place.

The first shots of the morning came from a quarter mile away when it was still so dark I couldn't imagine anyone being able to see horns on a deer. Within minutes, there were shots all around, some in the distance, some shockingly close. The unusual noise and the smell of the hunters combined to put the fear of death into the hearts of the deer. They began moving, some cautiously, some pell mell through the brush.

A few came near enough to tell that they were not wearing antlers. Each sighting was a disappointment, but each pumped adrenaline through my veins, warming me from my chilled toes up.

Neither of us got a buck that year. We had a shot or two, but our guns were far from effective, and buck fever, combined with our inexperience, kept us from scoring. But we had caught the disease. Never again would November 15 be just another date on the calendar. Never again would we be able to walk through deer country except that our eyes were trained on the ground, studying tracks and spoor, calculating the prospects the area held for some future hunt.

To Make Ends Meet

Fixing Separators

Toward the end of the thirties, Dad became convinced that farming eighty acres was not enough to support a large family. The family had not yet reached its final size of ten children, but it was well on its way. Though we rented most of Grandpa's forty, farming alone could no longer bring in enough money for the family.

The repairing of cream separators was one of his early attempts to increase his income. I think it was an issue of the *Michigan Farmer*, one of the two farm magazines to which we subscribed, that ran an ad for a tool and a process to extend and increase the efficiency of worn cream separators. The idea appealed to Dad. He knew our own separator wasn't skimming nearly all the cream out of the milk we ran through it. Without consulting Ma, he filled his name and address in the indicated blanks, cut out the ad, slipped it into an envelope, addressed it, affixed to it the required three cent postage stamp, and one of us kids brought it to the mailbox on Corneal Bos's corner.

Within a week a representative of the company responded in person, bringing with him a copy of the advertised machine. Dad invited the man into the house, offered him a chair at the kitchen table and space for a demonstration on the oilcloth covered table. Ma sat skeptically at the far end of the table. Dad sat next the man. The rest of us crowded wherever we could find room to both sit and see.

The man brought from his black leather satchel sample disks from various makes of cream separators, calling attention to the small spacers, rectangular pieces of metal a quarter of an inch wide, a half inch long and originally a sixteenth of an inch thick that had been welded onto the top surface of each disk, in eight or ten equally spaced positions. He showed new disks, pointing out the original thickness of their spacers. He showed worn disks with paper-thin spacers and asked how much milk could get between disks if its spacers were worn. Even the youngest of us could give the man the answer he wanted.

He quickly pointed out that with such a small flow of milk between the disks of the bowl while it was spinning at hundreds of revolutions per minute, the separator could not possibly remove all the cream from the milk. He concluded that much of the profit from our herd was going to the pigs who drank the poorly skimmed milk.

The man then slid his machine over the oilcloth on the top of the table, unlatched its eighteen-inch handle, raised it, slid a worn sample disk between the jaws of the pincer-like affair at the small end of the handle and quickly worked the handle down and back up. “There,” the man proudly asserted, “there is the cheapest solution to the problem of worn

disks. See, the machine punched a blister into the metal of the disk itself. The top of the blister is exactly the height of the spacer when it was new. The bottom of the blister is a dimple in the underside of the disk. That dimple will make it more difficult to clean the disk thoroughly, but the cleaning problem is a small price to pay for such a simple, cheap solution to worn disks."

The man was convincing. He took another disk and punched blisters on it, one next to each worn out spacer. In seconds he had punched blisters on several disks.

"How much?" Dad asked.

"One hundred dollars," was the quick reply.

An immense silence circled the table. Dad and Ma looked at each other. If Dad was looking for a signal from her to help his decision-making process, he failed to receive it. Ma's look was as blank as the windowpane behind her head.

"Now," the salesman added. "Bring me your separator bowl disks, and I'll fix them for you. That's part of the deal."

Dad was glad to get out of the kitchen if only for the few minutes it took to walk to the barn, get the hanger of disks from the separator rack on the east wall of the barn and bring them back to the kitchen.

As the salesman rejuvenated that set of disks, Dad paced the floor, then took another walk to the barn and back, wrestling all the while with the decision he had to make. Hundred-dollar bills didn't grow on trees!

"How much does a person charge for fixin' separator disks like that?" he finally asked the salesman.

"Charge what you like. A new set of disks costs $50.00. This machine will repair the disks so they will last at least half as long as a new set of disks. But we only sell the machines. We don't tell people what to do with them."

"What's to stop somebody else in the area from buying one like it if I do buy one and set myself up in business?" Dad asked.

"Nothing," the man answered honestly. We're in the business of selling machines, and if tomorrow I get a letter from your neighbor, I'll be right back here to try to sell him a machine." "How much time will you give me to pay for the machine," Dad asked.

“One hundred dollars is the cash price,” the man stated. “The only thing we do is to give you thirty days in which to change your mind. But if you change your mind, you have to ship it back and pay the shipping charges on it,” the man concluded.

Dad announced, “I'm going to McBain to talk to Mac the banker. Get the man a cup of coffee and a slice or two of bread. I'll be back as soon as I can, maybe a half hour or so.”

Dad left. Ma brewed a pot of coffee on the cook stove, got out several slices of homemade bread and the waxed cardboard carton of peanut butter from its shelf in the cupboard and set both on plates next to the black machine on the center of the end of the table. We watched the hungry salesman eat, but didn't think it proper to ask for any food for ourselves. We could still taste our dinner.

An hour later Dad was back, a $100 bank note in his hand. He handed the note to the salesman. The man handed Dad his machine.

Prospects were as numerous as the farmers who owned cream separators, meaning every farmer within a radius of fifteen miles or more. The number was in the hundreds. But how does one go about selling repair jobs to people?

Dad began with relatives. He knew quite well the condition of each of their separator bowls because in the course of recent Sunday night visits they had complained that soon they would have to spend big dollars they didn't have to buy new bowls of their cream separators. The pain of the inevitable was enough to make them talk about it even on Sunday.

Dad was an effective salesman. He believed in his repair jobs, and therefore he could sell them. Uncle Bill was the first, then Uncle Jerry, and finally Uncle Perry. Word of mouth began its work. Come Saturday night at the Maple Grove Store, Uncle Bill and Uncle Jerry compared notes. They were pleased with how their repaired separators were skimming, and the $3.50 fee was a lot less money that $50 for a new bowl. Neighbors listened. The phone began to ring.

People began asking for Dad to come and fix their separators, happy to pay the fee. Dad was in business!

Worn disks were not the only ills of cream separators. A worn neck bearing allowed the bowl to wobble, decreasing its effectiveness. Dad bought a wide enough variety of neck bearings to fit the most widely used machines and gladly installed them at a profit. Floats that regulated the flow of milk from the supply tank on the top of the bowls often rusted through, allowing a greater volume of milk to enter the bowl than it could handle. Dad learned how to find the holes and solder them shut, for a fee, of course.

In fact, Dad built a reputation as the man who knew cream separators inside and out, and could and would make house calls to fix them for a reasonable sum. Parts of two or three days a week he spent traveling throughout the community. He bought separators on auction sales to sell to people whose machines were beyond repair or to cannibalize them for cheap parts for machines he could repair.

The $100.00 investment paid off very well. Had the separator repair business been set a few years earlier in time, it could have provided the only supplementary income Dad needed to keep the family afloat. As it happened, by the time Dad's reputation as the separator repair man peaked, one by one, the farmers of the community began to sell whole milk instead of cream. A powdered milk plant opened in Evart. There was no end to the amount of milk it could use.

Within a few years, the entire dairy community switched to selling milk and the $100 machine was retired to a shelf in the back kitchen cupboard. And it didn't owe Dad one cent!

Buzzing Wood

Every farm in our area had its woodlot, often on land not fit for general farming.

Woodlots were not waste land. They provided some grazing for the cattle during the warmer parts of the year, but more importantly, they were a perpetual source of firewood for the family home.

Every farmer spent several of his winter weeks harvesting trees. If the tree was straight and the wood in demand, he sold its trunk to the nearest sawmill and turned its limbs into firewood. Few trunks were salable. Most trees became firewood.

To fell a tree, we used an ax, a crosscut saw, and a steel wedge or two. Each of us learned how to handle these tools as soon as we were big enough to handle one end of the crosscut.

After selecting a tree for harvest, we determined where it ought to be felled. The angle the trunk made with the ground, its branch configuration, the proximity of other trees, and the direction and force of the wind all had to be taken into consideration. We used the crosscut saw to cut into the trunk horizontally, knee high on the side of the tree toward which it was to fall, cutting to a depth of a third of the radius of the tree trunk. That cut made, we chopped out a wedge of wood from the trunk above the incision. Next, we sawed into the trunk directly opposite the original cut. When the two cuts came within a small inch of meeting, we removed the saw and pounded wedges into the incision with the flat end of a

single bit ax. Gradually the treetop described a swishing downward arc, culminating in a massive thump-crunch.

After the tree was felled, the hard work began. Each limb had to be sawn free from the trunk. Branches and twigs had to be chopped from the limbs. We cut the trunk and the larger limbs into logs of ten to twelve feet, then heaped the twigs and lighter branches in brush piles to “cure” for at least a year. When next year’s snow covered the ground, they would be safe to bum.

Brush piles had a secondary value. Hardly would the pile be settled when rabbit tracks in the snow proved that families of cottontails had moved under their shelter to bear and protect their many offspring. Come fall, shotguns in hand, we climbed onto the dried, crackling piles, jumped up and down on them, and the sound of impending doom scared out the cottontails. As they darted from the piles, we shot them. A brush pile failing to produce a few rabbits for the pot was a poor pile indeed. Rabbit meat was a welcome break from canned beef and pork.

After we had felled and trimmed enough trees to replenish the supply of firewood, we brought the team of horses into the woods to skid the logs one by one over and through the snow to a “buzz pile” on a level bit of ground near the edge of the woodlot. Sheer muscle power, augmented by the use of cant hooks, shaped the buzz pile. Big logs formed its base layer, smaller ones filled in on top of them, limbs and branches piled high the top layers until a small mountain of logs was created.

Sometimes the weather was frightfully cold. Blowing snow often hampered our work.

Sometimes we worked in balmy sunshine, when the temperature hovered between twenty and thirty. Occasionally we enjoyed those days of a January thaw, when we could shed our jackets and work in our shirt sleeves, though the blessing of such heat waves also meant we got soaking wet. Wet snow decreased the traction of our cleated boots, which allowed us to slip and slide when we least needed to. Working in the woods was dangerous enough without added hazards. We preferred the cold!

The buzzing of the logs in the buzz pile was where Dad found another niche in his effort to make extra dollars for the family coffers. While most families prided themselves in a high degree of self-sufficiency, not all were willing to stretch their self-sufficiency to include the buzzing of its own wood pile. The initial cost of a buzz rig was a factor. The power to run the rig added dollars to the investment.

Dad drifted into the business. On some forgotten auction sale, he bought the saw, its arbor, and its table. The foundation of the saw was a pair of eight-inch trees trimmed into skids. The bearings on the right end of the arbor supported the shaft on which the pulley was

mounted, the bearings on the opposite end supported the shaft on which the thirty-two-inch circular saw was bolted. The shaft itself was about four feet long.

Between the pulley and the saw, a vertical buffer was solidly mounted, sixteen inches from the saw. Between this buffer and the pulley was enough leg room for a person to stand, his back to the pulley, his face toward the saw. His job was to handle each chunk of wood while it was being sliced from its parent log, and after it had been severed from the log, to either fling it, heave it, or roll it away from the saw, depending on its size. Flying sawdust, the scream of the saw, and the ever-present threat of a mismove disastrous enough to blow up the saw or to turn a piece of stove wood into a deadly projectile made the job of the block handler extremely dangerous.

Beyond the saw was the table, onto which each log in turn was laid to be cut. A wooden handle was mounted on the end of the table, nearest the saw. By grasping the handle in the right hand, bracing the left hand heavily on the log, and tilting the entire table on its pivot mount, the sawyer fed the log into the teeth of the saw. The skill of the sawyer was critical to an efficient operation. The fine line between moving the log into the teeth of the saw, rapidly enough to make the most progress yet slowly enough so as not to over-burden the engine, was an art Dad had mastered. Dad seldom allowed anyone but himself the privilege of the handle. When he did, he usually regretted it. Few men had mastered the rhythm necessary to handle the smaller logs fast enough to snap them off zing, zing, zing, zing, making the most of every minute the rig ran. Few could control the slow feeding of the larger logs to keep the saw singing its way through the hard wood inch by inch without robbing the saw of efficient speed.

Besides the block thrower and the sawyer, two men stationed at the far-left end of the table pushed ahead the log being cut after each cut had been made. In cases where the log was so large that its diameter was greater than the radius of the saw, a man with a cant hook turned the log once or twice on the table so it could be cut from two or three angles. The youngest helpers brought up the logs from the skid pile to the buzz rig. Eventually every log, big or small, was rolled, shoved, slid or carried to the table of the saw until the last one had been cut into pieces sixteen inches long.

The engine Dad used to run his saw was the product of the mechanical genius of Uncle John Bos. Originally the engine had been a model T Ford car. One weekend Uncle John had towed the car home from his factory job in Flint. When he had finished working it over, the body was gone, the frame was shortened almost by half, and the means of self-propulsion via transmission and drive shaft was removed. In place of the above, he had fashioned a clutch that offered only the choice of engaging or disengaging the pulley he had mounted on the rear of a shaft directly from the engine.

The engine was a typical Model T engine. It was started by a crank permanently suspended in a hole beneath the radiator by a spring arrangement. Pressure on the bend of the crank engaged the crankshaft of the engine. A twist or two of the crank started the engine. It was water-cooled. At that time, alcohol was the only available anti-freeze. It was not at all reliable. Dad carried pure water from home to use in the engine. After he had started the engine and let it warm for a minute or two, so all its metal parts were above the freezing point, he filled the radiator. After the day's running he drained the engine. To forget was to invite disaster. More than one night after chores we made a trip back to the site of a day's work to be sure that Dad had indeed drained the radiator water.

Most farmers' skid piles could be buzzed in a short day, its hours sandwiched between the long morning and evening winter chores. This meant that, while our neighbors took their time with the chores, did them up brown, and then spent much of the rest of the short winter days reading, relaxing, or tinkering with one thing or another, our chores were usually hurried, seldom done to a polished degree, and Dad pushed himself from one activity to another. Before eight in the morning, he had started the car, backed it to the buzz rig, and hitched it with a sturdy length of logging chain bolted onto the trailer hitch. The Model T engine was already hitched to the back of the skids of the buzz rig. Water, gasoline, oil, an extra coat, and several extra pairs of gloves he loaded into the back seat of the car. The set of tire chains on the back wheels of the car guaranteed traction through what remained of the winter snows. Once Dad had the rig at the farm where the job was scheduled, the farmer assumed responsibility for hauling the rig to the buzz pile. Noon meals on a buzz job were provided for the crew by the farm family. They were sumptuous. Working in the woods was enough to burn off an enormous number of calories.

During the years when I was not attending school, I stayed home to finish the chores.

During the years when all us boys were attending school, our chores began early and were completely finished before we left for school shortly after eight.

Dad charged by the hour for buzzing wood, a fact that often produced pressure to get moving and to keep moving. One of the men for whom Dad buzzed could never push things fast enough. After he had made several remarks to the effect that if he were working the handle on the tilt bed of the saw, things would really get done, Dad got disgusted enough to tum the handle over to him. He cut the first block with no problem but pushed the second one too hard and stalled the engine. Dad cranked it, but within another two blocks the man had again stalled it.

Again, Dad cranked it. The man stalled it on the very next block. Dad simply looked at the man until he stepped away from the handle, walked to the engine, cranked it, and without another complaint returned to handling logs.

Buzzing wood brought in dollars, but it was not clear profit by any means. Saws wore out. At least once a year Dad had to send away to Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Ward for a new one. Every night, and again at noon, Dad filed sharp the teeth of the saw. The process took nearly a half-hour, but it had to be done. A dull saw would not cut properly nor profitably. Each filing of the teeth shortened them by a tiny fraction of an inch. Eventually they became too short to work effectively. When that happened, Dad took the saw to Cadillac to have it gummed, the process of grinding more deeply the spaces between the teeth of the saw. Gumming was expensive.

Dad began buzzing wood for the community in the early to mid-1930s, when money was tightest. He quit after tractors had made the belt power of a converted Model T obsolete, and then only when Jake Ellens, our new neighbor on the Van Houten farm just east of ours, argued that a man of Dad's age--all of 50--ought not to risk running a buzz rig every spring. He offered a convincing price for the rig and became its new owner and operator.

Sorting Potatoes

The farmers on the family farms west of McBain grew potatoes as their main cash crop. Most of the soil in the area was a clay to sand loam, very suitable for potatoes. Some sold their potatoes out of the field for the going price as soon as they were dug, saving only enough potatoes in the cellars under their houses for their own use and for seed the following spring.

Others rented storage bins in the potato houses of Park Lake, McBain, or Lucas, houses owned and operated by potato brokers who would gladly buy the “spuds” at whatever day during the season the owner decided to release ownership. Others, like our family, had storage cellars, designed to keep the tubers from freezing but cool enough so they would not sprout and turn spongy. Weekly government reports came to our home via the mailbox, informing us of price quotations in the potato markets of the various large cities to help us determine when to sell our potatoes.

When a farmer decided the time had come to sell, he phoned a local buyer who fixed the exact price per hundred pounds and assumed the responsibility of grading (sorting) the potatoes and bagging them in burlap bags imprinted with the name of the buyer. Before the bags could be removed from the farm or the potato house, the lot had to pass government inspection.

During the October harvest, those farmers who intended to sell out of the field temporarily stored them in "pits," made by smoothing and tramping to relative firmness an area of approximately fifteen by twenty feet. The loose soil removed from the area served as a dirt dike around the pit. Crate by crate, as they were picked and gathered, a few hundred bushels were dumped onto each pit. If the weather was warm, the potatoes were allowed to remain uncovered and unprotected. If the nights were cool enough to threaten frost, the heaps of potatoes were covered first with a layer of potato vines, then with a few inches of soil from the area around the pit.

During the digging season, the potato brokers worked as rapidly as possible, sorting, bagging, and shipping the potatoes to their respective markets. Sorting potatoes was done by licensed graders who used a machine built on four two-by-four legs. The rear legs of the grader were only three-and-a-half feet tall. A small hopper, hinged onto the rear of the machine, was kept filled by the person scooping the potatoes from ground level. He used a fork with a dozen steel tines about 15" long, shaped as a scoop with a handle short enough that the scooper had to bend each time he filled the scoop.

From the low rear to the five-foot high front of the machine, two metal mesh continuous screens, two feet wide, activated by a hand cranked rectangular wooden block assembly, graded the potatoes. The mesh of the top screen was about 2-1/4 inch in diameter. Potatoes that did not fall through this mesh were classified as number ones. Those which fell through landed on the inner screen of a mesh, an inch and a half in diameter. The potatoes that rode on top of this screen were classified as number twos or "seconds." Those which did not ride that screen fell out of the grading machine through a special chute and were disposed of immediately by throwing them back onto the soil which had produced them. The "seconds" that rolled off a chute on the side of the grading machine opposite its operator were not usually salable, so they were stored for family use, for seed, or for food for the farm animals. The number ones rolled off the high end of the grading machine into a bag held by a spring-loaded bagger and set on a scale.

As the potatoes made their way up the mesh belt, the licensed grader rolled them over, examined them, and threw out the culls. Culls included a) green potatoes (those which had grown partially above the soil, exposed to light that turned them green), b) potatoes which had been cut in two by the blade of the potato digger or which had been pierced by the forks used by those who dug their potatoes "by hand," c) potatoes which were covered by too much scab (a common potato skin problem), d) hollow potatoes (those whose growth was greater than its interior could handle), e) potatoes with open growth cracks (whose skins had not stretched to allow for the growth of the body of the potato), and f) rotting potatoes. Rot in potatoes in Michigan was a small problem until the early 1940s, when a

blight, common to potatoes in many parts of the world, first invaded Michigan. The rot of blight was often not at all visible on the exterior of the tuber. It was only when the government inspector took his knife and began slicing a potato that the rot showed. If there was too much of it, naturally, he had to “turn down” the lot that had to be regraded until it met his standards.

Since money was always scarce in our family, and since Dad still felt he had more free time than he could tolerate, he took the tests, paid the fees, and became a licensed potato grader. He offered his services to anyone interested, though only during the winter and before the wood buzzing season.

The men for whom Dad graded the most potatoes during his first years in the trade were Clarence Dykstra, a trucker from northwest Grand Rapids, and Jake Betten, from Cadillac. When these brokers bought the crop of potatoes of a given farmer, they called Dad to do the grading.

Dad moved into the root cellar of the farmer, taking with him the grader, the scale, the bagger, the bags, the needle and the twine, and a bright gasoline lantern if the root cellar had no electricity. The farmer and another man helped, one scooping the potatoes onto the grading machine and taking care of the seconds and culls, the other sewing up the filled bags and stacking them. The bags were sewn to form an ear on their two top corners, with stitches of twine running the width of the bag top between the ears. As he sorted, Dad watched the balance beam of the scale to be sure each bag contained at least a hundred pounds.

Root cellars were quiet as tombs except during the grading process. The three working men shared local news, discussed politics and religion, and swapped a store of jokes, stale or fresh, tame or tainted, some of which were not intended for the ears of females, the young, or ministers.

Food for the coffee breaks and noon dinners on the days of grading potatoes was provided in the family kitchen by the family involved. Dad put his feet under the tables of enough families of the community to know which man's wife was a quality cook and which was not.

The job had its frustrations. Sometimes an inspector was in a foul mood, and with little or no cause would tum down a batch of filled bags. There was no recourse but to empty each and every bag, dump it back onto the grading machine, and pick out anything and everything that could be questioned. It did not happen often. It was a sad day for everyone when it did happen. Those of us who helped with chores on the nights when a batch of potatoes was rejected reaped the ill winds of the situation.

Root cellars were damp and chilly. The operator of the grading machine moved less than those who worked with him. Usually, he stood on a box about a foot high, and, hour after hour, turned the crank that moved the mesh screens, stopping every half tum to check the potatoes directly before him, throwing out those unfit for sale, then turning the crank another half tum. That activity was hardly enough to keep a person warm. Dad dressed warmly, as warmly as for deer hunting in the fall, boots and all, but occasionally he had to step down from his box and pace the floor of the cellar to increase circulation. All to make a buck.

Custom Bindering

We never intended to do custom bindering. It grew on us, thanks to Mrs. Harm Pluger and her family, our neighbors to the northeast. Harm had died before I was old enough to know him. The family farm was left to his widow and her large family. Her boys were the young half of her brood. Her girls were old enough to work, and they acquitted themselves magnificently, but there were some things too much for them to handle, including bindering.

A grain binder demanded the muscle power of three or four horses. A large steel wheel, called the bull wheel, located under the apex of the machine, activated all the parts of the wondrous machine. To prepare a binder for its season of work, took Dad an entire day. Each area of its operation had its complications, and each had to work acceptably or the whole machine was incapacitated. The Pluger family simply did not have the know how nor the time to ready their binder for use, so Dad offered to bind their grain with our machine as soon as our oats were off.

To get onto their farm from ours was simple. When the line fence between the farms had been built, somebody had the wisdom to put into it a sturdy wire gate so crossing from one farm to the other was only the matter of opening the gate. After our crop was bound, Dad drove to the far corner of the farm, opened the gate, and drove the machine to the nearest oat field and began to work. Binding the oats on the Pluger farm took three or four days each season, which was the extent and limit of our custom bindering as long as we farmed with horses.

The hot summer of the year we bought our Allis Chalmers changed that. Since our horses were beyond use on a binder, we discarded the set of front wheels, then took the hand saw to the tongue of the binder, and bolted onto its shortened end a couple of heavy straps of iron, one strap on top, one strap on the bottom with six inches of strap extending beyond the end of the tongue. We drilled a three-quarter inch hole through the exposed end of both. A bolt through the holes and through the hole in the center of the drawbar of the

tractor boosted the binder into the gasoline age. Much of the weight of the binder rested on the back wheels of the tractor, giving it the additional and needed traction. But Allis was able to work without being concerned for the summer heat. The arrangement had one disadvantage. Using horse power, one man could manage the machine alone. With tractor power, somebody needed to drive the tractor. That year I got to go across the field to the Pluger farm with Dad.

Stones were bindering hazards. True, we and the farmers around us always picked stones from the fields before we drilled the oat seeds into the soil and cultipacked the field after it had been planted, but, during the growing season, thunderstorms often washed away enough top soil to make the stones “grow,” threatening the guards which held the stalks of the grain while the sections (knives) of the sickle snipped them off. Worse than the loose stones were the large, embedded rocks, whose tips above the soil were like the tips of icebergs. To run into them crunched the binder to a halt and guaranteed a time-consuming on-the-spot repair job. We knew every embedded rock on our land, though there were times when we should have remembered, but didn't. We had no knowledge where such buried treasures were in our neighbor's field.

Since I drove the tractor, it fell to me to keep a sharp eye out for stones of either kind, which was fine as long as the crop of oats was not overly thick and the weeds in it were few. Usually such conditions did not exist, so it was all but impossible to spot stones before they brought us trouble. More than once, the first indication I had that I had missed seeing a stone was the hollow boom of the tin bottom of the binder as it announced contact with the rock or stone. Such a sound was immediately followed by the voice of my father from his seat at the rear of the binder. If the rock was big enough, it stopped the forward motion of the binder so abruptly as to pitch him forward onto the many levers by which he controlled the machine, Sometimes the stop was so sudden and so final that I could not kick in the clutch of the tractor quickly enough to prevent the engine from stalling. At times I got the blame for being so exceedingly blind as not to have averted such disasters.

Another hazard of the oat field was the washout. Our soil, and that of our neighbors, was a sand-clay loam that could and did wash in heavy rains. Such washouts as infested our fields were hard to spot. If they ran across the direction of our progress around the fields, the tractor came into contact with them a few feet before the binder, and by taking evasive action, I could avert disaster. I recall one time when a small gully, two feet deep and three feet across, lay directly in our path as we moved down a sloping grade. By chance I saw the gully a split second before the front wheels of the tractor dropped into the chasm, early enough to throw in the clutch and grab the brakes. Dad was not anticipating such a quick stop and had to pick himself out from the levers, but appreciatively, for a change. Gingerly I

shifted the tractor into reverse and backed away from trouble. We were able to change our plan and direction, getting most though not all the oats from the slope. We did save our machinery from damage.

At another time, I was blissfully driving down a slope of beautiful oats, senses somewhat dulled by the purr of the engine and the constant clattering of the binder, when Dad let out such a whoop that I instantly threw in the clutch and grabbed the brake. In the sudden quiet I looked from side to side to see where the trouble was but saw nothing. Dad hollered out, “Look down!” I did. Under the tractor was a washout, two feet deep and just as wide. The wheels of the tractor were straddling the gully, the bull wheel of the binder was down into it far enough that the bottom tin of the binder was resting on the soil. Fortunately, the slope of the hill was not impossibly steep, and the soil dense enough to provide a reasonable amount of traction. By putting the tractor into reverse and carefully, very carefully backing straight up the slope, we to retreated to safer ground. We weren't always that lucky.

As I said, the year we bought the tractor was a hot summer. With tractor power instead of horsepower, the heat did not slow us. We cut our own oats in record time, then the Pluger oats. If they had never noticed before, our neighbors now noted what we were doing. Before we had finished the Pluger fields, we were asked to cut the oats of a half-dozen neighbors who were concerned about their horses. We couldn't afford to allow bindering to interfere with picking pickles, but there was little else to do except to pull weeds in the corn and the potatoes. The younger boys worked at that while Dad and I explored the hills and hollows of the fields of friends, neighbors, and relatives for several miles around.

We knew our own land, and we knew our little tractor. We planned our crops to comply with the limitation of Allis. Our neighbors hadn't, so there were times we had to cut a field into pieces to manage hills too steep to climb in the direction normal bindering of the field suggested. There were times when the front end of the tractor raised off the ground and I had to steer it by the hand brakes, one on either side of my cushioned seat.

On one such testy hill I had a passenger on the tractor. Hank Van Houten, a school classmate, had broken his arm and was wearing it in a sling, preventing him from doing much work on their family farm. For entertainment, he had walked across the fields to the neighboring Heeringas while we were cutting their oats. I invited him to ride with me, and he gladly accepted--anything to escape the boredom of a summer day with nothing to do. As we began moving up the slope at the far end of the field, the front wheels of the tractor slowly lifted off the ground. I assured him there was nothing to worry about. I did have to reach across his lap to steer the machine with the hand brakes while the front wheels dangled a foot or more above the ground. The governor of the engine opened and the sound of the strain of the pistons was quite obvious to both of us. A few minutes of such tension

proved too much for Hank. He brushed my hand off the brake on his side of the seat, and with a single bound was on the ground heading for home. I was sorry I hadn't been able to convince him that, really, there wasn't a thing to worry about. The tractor could not flip over backward because of the drawbar and tongue arrangement.

The worst thing that could happen would be that the back wheels would dig a hole from which we would have to back out. But Hank was not about to stick around and see what would happen.

Only for a few years did we cut more than our share of oats. We were paid for doing so, except by one “freeloader” who was quick to invite us to do his oats, who watched us work from a rocking chair on his side porch, but who never got around to paying us. A few months later he moved out of the community. The money we did earn and collect was a boon for our family. No doubt it went toward paying off the debt Dad owed on the tractor, but, I must confess, I wasn't thinking about money or debts while we worked other people's fields. I was much more interested in the adventure of pulling the machine down the road, setting up in strange fields, eating at tables we would not have eaten at under other circumstances, and showing off the advantages of gasoline powered farming.

Our Education

Grade School

The experience of school for our family was unique, in that we were one of the significant percentage of people in our Dutch and Reformed community to support a non-public school. Ours was a parent-controlled private school, a Christian school, religiously oriented in the Calvinist tradition, and associated largely with the Christian Reformed denomination.

A public school, Highland District# 2, had existed at Highland Corners from its early settlement. The little two-room white wood-frame school was run well. My father's family and all the neighbors' families had attended it for their eight years of education. The roll of the teachers who taught there indicates that most were capable people with high moral principles, not members of the denomination in which we had membership, but solid church-going people. The boards who hired them insisted that Bible reading, prayer, and the practical application of the Ten Commandments were the backbone of their children's education.

During the twenties, the leaders of our denomination became dissatisfied with public education in general. The movement to separate church and state in public education had begun. In school districts where individuals objected to the traditional Judeo-Christian values and practices as part of the education of their children, limitations had been placed on religiously orientated aspects of the curriculum. The leaders of our denomination insisted that no education was complete unless it viewed all of life from the perspective of the Christian faith, and so they began to militate against the trends in public education. Eventually they determined that every congregation, in so far as it was able, establish and maintain its own school for Christian Education.

In 1928, our Highland congregation voted to follow the directive of the denomination. In that year, our men formed a Christian School Society and built a two-room elementary school on a two- or three-acre plot, across the road to the northeast of the church, a plot donated by Mr. Cornelius Bos. Grandpa Vredevoogd loaned money to the Society, interest free, to finance the building. Since most of the people in the Highland #2 School District were born and raised in our church, the opening of the Christian School left so few students in the public school it needed only one teacher. Its educational quality plummeted. The opening of the Christian School did little to enhance the image of the Dutch people of the Christian Reformed Church in the eyes of the families left in District #2. By comparison, the teachers in the new Highland Christian School were people who wanted to teach, who had received excellent training, and did a magnificent job of

teaching. Many were young. A two-room country school was an ideal place to get quality experience on which to launch an impressive teaching career. Several went on to prestigious positions after they left Highland, leaving behind them a legacy of challenge and opportunity in the minds and hearts of the students on whom they had practiced their art and honed their skills.

Our school day began at nine. While the public school had a cast iron bell that could be heard throughout the district on a quiet day, ours had only a bronze battery-powered electric clanger, rung by the pushing of a button mounted above the right-hand corner of the door leading from the “big room” into the hall. The principal, the teacher of grades five through eight, had the responsibility of ringing the bell which called and dismissed the classes.

My first recollection of the school was the final bit of its construction. A ground-level door opened on the north side of the building, the one that led from the basement steps where they met the steps coming down from the hall between the classrooms. The door was used only for hauling out furnace ashes and bringing in supplies. The school year had begun before the cement slab outside that door had been poured. At the time, Dad owned a Model T truck that lacked a floorboard in the cab. The fire wall separating the engine from the cab was there, but that part that was flat, directly under the feet of the driver and passenger, was not there. Since I was only two, my feet would not reach from the seat to the floorboard anyway. Lack of the floorboard was no threat to my security, so, if and when Dad went anywhere, I went along. On the day he trucked to school the gravel, bags of cement, mud box in which to mix the cement, and buckets of water necessary to make the cement, I rode with him. I recall watching the sand and gravel stones zipping by under the truck as we sped at twenty miles an hour down the scant mile and a half that separated our home from the school. A half dozen men had volunteered for the work detail. Before we went home that day we had the slab poured.

My contact with the educational aspect of the school began too early. I was only four, going on five, in January when the school year began in September. But it was a good time for me to start! Aunt Lena, my mother's sister, was the teacher. She boarded with us. She drove a Model T coupe to and from school. I could ride to and from school with her. So, I was a little young? It was a good time for me to start!

In spite of my immaturity, I learned to read and write. We developed our small muscles by carefully placing corn kernels on the outline of the people and animals Aunt Lena had drawn on big sheets of paper. We used them over and over until we could fill in the outline with corn in a tenth of the time it took for us to do it the first one. Our class of ten memorized the songs Aunt Lena wrote on the board long before we could read the words,

and we sang one set of those songs in the Christmas program at church and another set at the Ladies Aid Sale in the church basement in the spring.

We learned our numbers from flash cards, and when we knew our numbers, we learned what to do with them, to add them and subtract them, sometimes with the help of the corn kernels, and we marveled at the multiplying of numbers the kids in the third and fourth grades practiced on the blackboards. We played in the sand table, a sand box on legs. Local sand, dug from the cut in the road across from the school, dampened by a quart of water once a week, made fields and roads for us first graders and polders and canals for the fourth-grade geography classes.

We learned about Dutch windmills. We made our own, using construction paper cones for their bodies and, for their sails, precious squares of “notebook” paper, folded so their four corners met at the center, where they were affixed with a gob of white paste. When the paste was dry, we thrust a straight pin through that layered center into the peak of the paper cones. We knew our windmills didn't really look like Dutch windmills. We had seen pictures and models of them in our grandparents' homes, but we were proud of the fact that, when we blew on the wheels, they turned, at least until the pin wore out the hole in which it was placed.

While building the windmills and doing other cut-and-paste projects in our workbooks every day, we became addicted to the white paste we used. The paste was furnished by the school. Its perfumed smell invited us to take a small, a very small lick of it now and then while we worked. Each of us received a daily allotment of a teaspoon of paste from one of the jars our teacher (or her fourth-grade helper) placed on a three-inch square of tablet cardboard on the top right-hand corner of our desk. At the end of the session, all excess paste was to be returned to the jar. Our need for the paste plus our appetite for the paste always equaled the amount allotted to us. We never had any to put back.

Aunt Lena got married before the next school year began, and that put an end to her teaching in our school. Married women were not allowed in the classroom as teachers. Miss Yntema came to take her place. She excelled in art. We spent every Friday afternoon copying, with pencil and crayon, the bird or animal she had, early that morning, drawn on the blackboard in colored chalk. She was an artist. We weren't. Alongside the picture, she printed a description of the creature she had drawn and its habits. We copied the words much more accurately than we copied the picture.

I enjoyed reading. I read everything I could get my hands on. I read in school and out of school. I read during meals if I could get away with it. Numbers and I didn't get along well, nor was I good at spelling. My penmanship was a total disgrace. My grades were marginal.

The all-important grades in effort and deportment usually were far short of my parents' expectations.

I enjoyed learning, as did most of my class. The stories about Eskimo boys and girls we read and reread from the tan Carpenter Geographies mesmerized us. Revolutionary War heroes, preserved in the aqua-colored introductory history books, invited us to read more and more. We knew there were more books, bigger books, more interesting books in the big room, and we couldn't wait to get there. Besides, in the big room, we would have a man teacher.

Most of the socializing in our elementary years happened during recesses and noon hours. No teacher could survive teaching four grades with thirty students without a quiet atmosphere in which the students were quite restricted to their seats. Weather permitting, we played outdoors for the fifteen-minute break in the middle of both the morning and afternoon, and for whatever of the noon-hour remained after we ate the sack lunches we had carried from home. Six swings graced the playground outside the east windows of the little room. In the fall, we in the two lowest grades made life miserable for a colony of bumble bees inhabiting tunnels in the sand of a square rod of slope near the swings. In dry, warm weather, they constantly trafficked in and out of these tunnels. Using quart fruit jars we had taken from home, we tried to trap them as they emerged from the holes in the ground. We played roulette by placing the open mouth of a jar over one of the several holes they used for entry and egress. If we chose the wrong hole, we screamed and ran when a bee stumbled out inches from our fingers. If we had chosen the right hole, we had a huge bee in our jar. Quickly we slapped the lid on it and bounded into the school to show teacher. The noise of the wings of the bee drumming on the inside of the mason jar as it tried to comprehend what had happened to him, and the threat of what might happen to us should we not have the cover on tight made for excitement. When the bell rang, we gingerly set the jar on the ground, reached the length of our outstretched arms, and unscrewed the cap. Since the bee was usually at the bottom of the jar, we had enough time to leave before he came out and sought vengeance on us.

Part of our free time at recess and noon-hour was spent in and around the toilets. We called them cans. Our school had two cans, one for the boys and one for the girls. Both were of the two-hole outdoor privy style, glorified enough to serve the needs of the seventy students who kept the door hinges warm. The boys had the advantage of not having to go through the door into the inner sanctum except for drastic elimination needs. A tin trough hid behind a maze of board fence made for a quick and easy entry and exit. We boys learned early that the girls screamed if we pelted their can with stones while they were in it.

Sometimes they were downright violent when they came out. That pastime was also dangerously attractive.

Young boys played “horse,” a purposeless game in which two to four boys held hands and were driven around the school yard or down the road by a boy who held in his hands a few yards of binder twine, one end of which was held in the hand or in the mouth of the right-hand boy of the team, the other end by the boy at the left-hand end of the team. The imagination of the boy in control of his team determined what kinds of hard labor or entertaining gambols the team performed. Horses who were less than cooperative were treated with the kinds of penalties the driver had heard and seen inflicted on the farm horses with which he lived. Language not otherwise tolerated on the playground was tolerated while playing horse, if and when the errant horses were thought to deserve it.

Boys of the second through the fourth grades rolled hoops through many of their recess hours. Rolling hoops required skill. Hoops were steel bands from the hubs of farm wagons.

They ranged in size from seven to twenty inches in diameter, from an inch to an inch-and-a-half in width. The boys propelled the hoops with wooden lats in the form of a “T” with a comparatively short cross member. The stem of the “T” reached from the hand of the operator to the low mid-height of the hoop. Rolling the hoop down the flat stem of the “T” as the bottom end rested on the ground got the hoop rolling. Nudging it with the cross member kept it rolling and steered it. Beginners had trouble getting the hoop to roll five feet. Experts could keep the hoop going all day, every day, as long as their legs could chase it. We spent hours at the hoops, seeing who could go fastest, seeing who could make them go up the steps and down the steps, seeing who could make them turn the sharpest corners, or just making them roll.

When the weather got too cold for hoops, and the ground was frozen so hard they bounced out of control every time they hit a clod of dirt, it was time to play “rabbit.” Every boy in the lower middle grades carried in his overall pockets a supply of expended shot gun shells. He knew every shell he carried. The red ones were Federals, the green ones were Kleenbore, the blue ones were Peters. There might be an off brand or two thrown in for good measure, but he could identify by brand and gauge every shell he had brought to school without question.

Rabbit was played with one hunter and a lot of rabbits. When the game began, the hunter went into the can, shut the door, and counted to a hundred while the rabbits scurried for cover. Hard on the count of one hundred the hunter scoured the playground and the woods across the road. Upon spotting a rabbit, the hunter threw an empty shell at him. If the rabbit was hit, he was instantly turned into a second hunter. If not, the hunter retrieved the shell

he had thrown, then went on to seek another prey. When everyone was a hunter, a new cycle began.

The game was tame enough, though the sting of a thrown empty shot gun shell could smart, depending upon what part of the anatomy it hit. There was merit in the game. It taught patience, throwing accuracy, and a willingness to accept the fact that one had been shot, even if hit on the thickest part of a jacket or coat. Probably, those who suffered the most from the game were those who hid so well they were not shot at during an entire recess. They nearly froze.

While the boys rolled their hoops or played rabbit, the girls played hopscotch, some on the porch at the south side of the school, some in the sand off the porch, and some in the sand on the north side of the building. Sometimes they invited a few of the boys to play with them.

Sometimes the boys accepted the invitation, more often they didn't. For one reason or another, those who did were teased until they went back to rolling hoops.

The big boys played softball until the weather turned cold. The playground soil was sand, some of the sandiest sand in the community, and it grew marvelous sand burrs. Sand burrs penetrate the skin with a pain so exquisite it defies description. The long empty summer months allowed a tremendous crop to grow.

Softballs collect sand burrs. The flimsy leather jacket of a worn, scuffed softball begs sand burrs to stick into it. A ball batted on the ground by the batter and stopped by the fielder was bound to have a half dozen sand burrs stuck to its skin. Since we used no ball gloves or any other form of protection for our hands, each time we stopped a ball that had touched the ground we invited pain.

Some sand burrs came into school with us. Some found their way onto the empty seats of our neighbor students. When they next sat, they sat on the sand burr. The sit was neither long nor silent. Sometimes the person who put the sand burr on the seat sat long and silently after four o'clock!

Sand is soft. Running in sand is difficult. Hence our softball diamond bases were closer together than regulation. Usually, we chose sides. Only the boys in the big room were old enough and big enough to play softball. When a small fifth grader came to bat, the fielders pulled in close. When a powerful eighth grader came to bat, the fielders ran back as far as the field allowed. The wood pile at the two-thirds mark of the playground marked the extreme boundary of the field. If a ball landed in the wood of the wood pile it was a home run.

We didn't have umpires. Balls weren't counted, and strikes were strikes only when a batter swung at a ball and missed. Ticks were fouls, and three ticks made a strike. The ball was the largest sized softball available. The bats were baseball bats, discarded by the team of young men who played at the Ouwinga diamond to the southeast of the public school. Baseball bats have big ends, and a healthy swing sometimes surprised the fielders. I recall the time when I, a fifth grader, came to bat. My batting reputation must have been deplorable because the short stop came in very close. As usual, the fielders were doing their share of chattering which made me feel like there was a pack of wolves out there, out to get me, so when the pitcher pitched the ball, I swung with total abandon. I connected! I lined the ball directly to the short stop. He was so close his reaction time couldn't move his hands into a protective position. The ball caught him dead center. Instinctively his body folded around the ball. He had caught it without laying a hand on it, putting me out. It also knocked the wind out of him. The expression on the shortstop's face when he, a mighty eighth grader, got taken out by a fifth grader made for one huge laugh from everybody on both sides.

Sometimes in the cool weather of fall, both boys and girls played a game known as “Antee-Eye-Over.” We played it with a sponge ball or with a hollow rubber ball. We chose sides, each team having a captain. Each team took an opposite side of the school building, and no fair peeking around the corner. The game began when a player with a strong arm attempted to throw the ball over the roof of the school. If he succeeded, the entire team called out loudly enough to be heard on the other side of the school, “Antee-Eye-Over!”

If, and only if, a member of the opposing team caught the ball, the members of that team run pell-mell around the school, some around one side, some around the other, each with one hand behind his or her back, as if holding the caught ball. Once on the other side, whoever it was that actually had caught and now held the ball threw it at a member of the other team. If he scored a hit, that member became a member of the opposing team. As soon as the dust settled, the process repeated itself.

Should the person throwing the ball not succeed in heaving it over the school, the entire team was obliged to call out, “Pig tail!” an indication that no chase was being made. The game was won when all members of a given team were captured by the opposing team, eliminating the opposition. Games sometimes continued for several days of recesses before a winner was declared.

When the weather cooled too much for ball playing, we took to the three-acre woods across the road, where we invented games to play among the saplings growing on the hill. Most were varieties of tag. Some were tame versions of Blind Man's Bluff, in which a person whose eyes were shielded had to guess who it was who had inflicted on him some kind of

painful contact. Should he guess who it was, he had the right to chase that person, tag him within pre-determined limitations, and pass to him the “it.” We had fun. We had excellent exercise. We had more fresh air than we appreciated.

One time, when we were playing on that wooded knob, our limited knowledge of pole vaulting prompted us to experiment with the materials at hand. The knob was covered with poles. True, they had roots on one end and branches on the other, and they were growing taller every day. At their base, they were a couple of inches through. The tallest were ten to twelve feet. What more could we ask? We had no saw to cut down such saplings, but we had jackknives, and a noon hour was an hour long. Should we not be able to manufacture a vaulting pole within one noon hour, more would follow. We set to work and eventually fashioned for ourselves a few sturdy maple poles, heavy as lead, but guaranteed not to break under the weight of any of us.

The fact that pole vaulting was usually performed on a level surface from which the vaulter made an arc from point A to point B never occurred to us. We imagined the ideal place to perform was the slope from the wooded knob across the narrow gravel road onto the sandy school playground.

Johnny Eisenga, the most daring and agile of us all, volunteered to go first. Jaw set and teeth clenched, he trotted a bit cautiously down the path between the trees with the thin end of the pole firmly grasped in both hands, the heavier end weaving low to the ground ten feet ahead of him. At the edge of the woods, a four-foot cut had been carved out of the slope to create the level road. He jabbed the far end of the pole into the softer soil at the base of the hill as he threw his weight up and ahead on the end he held in his hands. It worked! Johnny vaulted across the road and thudded into the sand of the playground, minus his cap that the low strung telephone wire on the wooded edge of the road had neatly skimmed off his head at the peak of his arc.

The force of his landing knocked the wind out of him. Frantically he struggled to his feet, gasping and shaking his head from side to side. “I ain't gonna do that again,” he finally managed to say.

We looked at the poles in our hands, looked toward the top of the wooded knob, and looked at Johnny's pole lying on the edge of the road. Not one of us had the nerve to try a vault. If it was too much for Johnny, we didn't have a chance!

During my seventh and eighth years at Highland Christian School, a select group of students played “house” in the wood piles at the southern end of the school ground. They combined discarded fence posts from a trash pile in the woods across the road with the stove-length wood to build rooms with walls and ceilings. Tall tales of what went on within

those rooms circulated in whispers through the school, but only those whose credentials included the secret password were allowed to participate in the suspect activities. To this day I have no sure knowledge of anything that transpired within those playhouses, but beyond a doubt whatever transpired was not half as bad as imagined by those of us who weren't invited to the party.

The snows of winter transformed our playground into a winter sports arena. The slope of the hill constituting the east third of our playground was ideal for skiing and sledding. We reserved the south seventy-five feet for ski jumping. At the base of this ski hill, we built a miniature ramp. We hauled water in a cream can from Ouwinga's store to mix with the snow we shoveled from the sides of the run. Bit by bit we built the ramp four or five feet high, high enough so some dared to lay themselves in its shelter while skiers jumped over them.

When the snow piled to its deepest, propelled by the westerly winds, it formed a drift from the top of the roof of the horse barn in the northeast corner of the church yard, onto and over the road. We could ski from the top of the school yard hill, over the ski jump, across the flat at the bottom, and up the slope of snow to the peak of the roof of the horse barn.

Our skis were wooden, probably of yellow pine, with turned up points. A leather strap through the wood near the center of the length from tip to back end of the ski slipped over the toes of our boots to somewhat keep us and our skis attached. We cut huge rubber bands from car tire inner tubes, slipping one end under our toes, the other around our heels to hold our feet more securely into the strap. Never were we so securely fastened to our skis that we could make them negotiate a turn. Most of our skiing was downhill, although we did ski cross country on our way to and from school. When we went downhill, we went all the way down as fast as gravity pulled us--unless we wiped out, which we did often.

Our sledding was not totally confined to the school yard hill. Corneal Bos, owner of the land surrounding the school, was gracious enough to open the fence at the top of the school yard so we could go to the very top of the school yard slope. What a run we had down that hill after the snow packed hard enough so the metal runners of our sleds didn't cut through it!

Even during the heart of the depression, each family had its sled or two. Flexible Fliers vied with Champions on every run down the hill. Shorter sleds held one slider, longer ones held two or three. The more weight the sled carried the faster it traveled and the farther it went, all things being equal. Spilled sleds, sleds being hauled back up the hill, and foolish zig-zagging sledders created perils to threaten the well-being of every scholar on the hill, but we all survived our sledding years with no permanent damage.

Occasional sleet storms coated everything with ice, inviting us to a more daring kind of sledding. We used the huge hill to the north of school on the east side of the road as a starting point. Mr. Bos generously opened the fence at the bottom of the hill so we could slide down the hill, down onto the road, through the intersection at Highland Corners, and all the way to Coffee's Mill. More than a half-mile of speeds faster than a car! A couple students, usually girls, who didn't care to slide on a given day, stood at the intersection to wave their arms and shout and scream should a car dare to travel the east-west road during a noon hour. At such a sad signal, we dragged the toes of our boots to slow us down, and if we had to, rolled off our sleds to avoid a colliding with the car.

To add thrills, we made trains of sleds. The sled drivers, lying belly-flopped on their sleds, hooked their toes into the front bumpers of the following sled. Eight or ten sleds made a marvelous train. Daring lead sled drivers swung their sleds from side to side once we got onto the road. The entire train perforce followed, cutting back and forth across the width of the road as we sailed as fast as gravity pulled us. How fast? Fast enough that our eyes were so filled with tears we saw nothing more than happy blurs along the way, fast enough that if we had slid off the road and into a tree we would have been seriously hurt, and we knew it. But danger invited us, and we rode that long risky slide every chance we got.

Spring often brought with it ice. Ice meant skating. A sudden thaw melted the snow. The water couldn't sink through the frozen soil of the hollows, so it formed ponds three or four feet deep. Then the cold weather returned. Ice, sometimes inches thick, sometimes dangerously thin, formed on the ponds, and we went skating during noon hour. The ponds were not on the school yard. The closest and the best was on Ed Bloemsma's land to the west of the school, and he didn't care if we skated on it.

Our skates had been handed down a generation or two. Most were clamp-ons. At the edge of the gleaming ice of the pond we sat in the snow, slapped the metal base of the skate onto the sole of our shoes, wedged the edges of the soles into the bracket on the side of the skate, inserted the key on the tightening screw below the base, and screwed the bracket as tightly as our fingers could turn the key. None of us knew how to skate, but we all skated. Sometimes we played tin-can hockey. We fell but seldom got hurt. Bloody noses and bleeding lips, yes, but no teeth knocked out and no broken bones.

One day, three of the older, heavier boys went through the thin ice. Soaked to their arm pits in frigid water they clawed their way up onto the ice and stumbled up the hill to school without bothering to take off their skates. The warmth of the schoolhouse was the only thing on their mind. They spent that afternoon, stripped to their union suits, on chairs as close to the register of the furnace as they could get. By four o'clock they were dry enough to walk home. Despite our predictions, none of them developed pneumonia.

I said earlier that our skis were made of wood with the points turned up. That was true, but not the only truth. Some of the students had no uncles or aunts who had outgrown their skis or who had moved off to Grand Rapids where they had no use for them. They had no money to buy skis, so these underprivileged students did the next best thing. They substituted barrel staves from discarded, wooden, fifty-gallon barrels for skis. The natural bend of the stave enabled a person to ride it downhill if he nailed onto the inside center of the concave bend of the stave a leather strap to hold the toe of his foot.

Barrel staves had no center grooves as did wooden skis, therefore directional control had to be supplied by the daring soul who purposed to ride the staves down the hills. Since snow is a powder of sorts, and since the staves were bent as they were, though waxed with a most superb layer of paraffin wax, the miserable things chattered all way downhill. The chattering was not audible, but it was evident on the entire being of the skier. From the moment he gained speed enough to skim over the snow he vibrated visibly. Perhaps the vibration was the self-preservation of those who dared to ride the barrel staves. It took a steeled determination to keep those two curved pieces of wood going in the same direction and to keep them relatively close to the tracks grooved skis had carved in the track downhill. The chatter of the barrel staves kept the muscles of the skier from locking so tightly he would never have made it to the bottom of the hill.

The Heeringa boys invented a variation on barrel stave skis called The Jumper. They used a single barrel stave on which they mounted an upright four-inch block of stove wood about sixteen inches long. Across the top they nailed a slab of board for a seat. One rode the Jumper by holding both feet well off the ground while hanging on with both hands to the opposite ends of the seat. Balance was all important. Some boys learned the art well enough to survive one or two rides all way down the big hill during a noon hour.

Even recess activity tends to become boring at times. That was true of sliding and skiing. Besides, there were those warm winter days when the best waxed ski stuck to the snow and when sliding soaked a person's clothes through and through. For such days, we reverted to a diversion commonly called Turkey on the Stump. A person was selected to be “it” by a process long forgotten and surely not important. “It,” the turkey, stood either on a real stump (a few were extant near the school ground) or on an elevated bit of ground or snow. He turned his back toward the rest of the players who threw snowballs at him more or less one at a time. The turkey was to guess who it was who had most recently hit him with a snowball.

Honesty was taken for granted. When the turkey correctly guessed who had thrown the ball, all participants knew that he had done so, and the person who had thrown the snowball accepted his role as the next turkey without question or hesitation.

The game was often mean. Some players packed their snowballs terribly hard and threw with vengeful force. Over time, a good turkey learned from the feel of the balls hitting him who had thrown which ball and did not stay a turkey long. Regardless, every snowball produced some pain.

Since it took time to manufacture an effective snowball, the volleys usually were spaced far enough apart so the turkey had a fair chance at guessing who threw the last one. However, at times, all the throwers would hoard a ball or two to let fly at the turkey *en masse*. More than one turkey decided he would rather be anything but a turkey when pelted with a full barrage. Through tear-filled eyes departing turkeys vowed to get even. Sometimes they found ways and means to fulfill their vows.

Though the best part of school has always been recess, and though education gained at recess stays with students longer than that gained in the classroom, you must take a look inside our school. The south double doors opened from the high south porch into a north-south hallway. The pine two-and-a-half-inch flooring creaked under foot at every step, the heavier the walker the deeper the tone. Hooks for coats and caps lined both sides of the hallway, those on the east wall for the thirty plus students in the lower four grades, those on the west for the students in the upper four grades.

As one entered the door, the water cooler on the right caught his eye. This white five-gallon crock on black metal legs contained the only water in the school. Every morning the two big room students selected by rotation carried a five-gallon cream can between them to Ouwinga's store on the corner. They filled the can with water from an outside spigot in the warmer months of the year, from the back storage room on the east section of the store in winter and carried it back to school. If the day was hot, they got a second five gallons during noon hour.

The bubbler at the base of the cooler was activated by pushing a button on the end of the pipe by which it was attached to the crock. What water the drinker did not drink dribbled back into the bowl of the bubbler, down through a curved pipe and into a galvanized bucket on a bracket fixed between the metal legs near the bottom of the stand. The water fountain guaranteed that any student coming to school with a cold or other contagion had a golden opportunity to share his germs and viruses with the drinker next in line.

At the far end of the hall was a closet with four doors, two on the upper story, two below in which were all the secrets teachers must guard from the prying eyes of their students. Also in the closet were the cans of floor oil used only the week before school began in the fall and again during Christmas vacation, the pungent odor of which permanently permeated the building.

Both classrooms were outfitted with wooden desk units featuring a hinged wooden seat wide enough to seat two students if they sat close. A storage compartment under the desktop, open toward the person sitting in the next seat behind, had room enough to house books, a tablet, a notebook, a pencil box and a bottle of ink. Most of the wooden tops of the desks were inscribed with initialed reminders of those who had used them in years gone by. The desks had been purchased second hand. Some of the initials carved into them did not fit the names of any people in our community. The cast iron standards of the desks were screwed into the wooden floor when the school was built, but were later bolted onto wooden slats three inches wide, nearly an inch thick, and long enough to facilitate three or four desk units. The floors were wooden, the slats were wooden. Grains of sand between the two made easy but very noisy the sliding of the rows of seats over the floors for sweeping.

Five rows of desks filled the room from side to side, seven desks to a row. Blackboards took up most of the walls in both the front and back of the room from three to six feet up from the floor. Large pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln were permanent fixtures in the areas above the blackboards. The inside wall was part blackboard, part register, and part cork board onto which important things could be thumb-tacked. Above the blackboard at the center of the room was the Seth Thomas pendulum clock. The octagonal top part told the time in Roman numerals, the bottom, smaller compartment housed the pendulum behind a glass door, on which was printed in gold letters REGULATOR. The clock kept perfect time, provided it was wound once a week, a task performed by the big room teacher. No one except the experienced will ever know how slowly perfect time ticks out the seconds and the minutes after the four o'clock dismissal time, when all the other students had gone, and the room was painfully quiet except for the shuffling of the papers the teacher graded while those 'kept after' did penance! The laws of physics were suspended as the pendulum slid from one end of its arc to the other painfully and miserably slowly!

The outer wall of each classroom was plastered to a height of five feet. Above that was a set of six-foot high windows, then another foot of plaster. I recall the wistful look on the face of more than one teacher as he or she looked out windows too high for us students to see anything but sky and tree tops as we sat in our seats. What they saw as they looked, I will never know, but their faces communicated a world outside the classroom that beckoned them as much or more than it beckoned us who were confined to the lower regions of institutionalized learning.

The windows seemed unusual. Each half, bottom and top, was made of ten-by-twelve-inch panes, five in a row and three rows each. A slight push slid them up or down since they had

a system of weights built into the spaces between the sashes. A set of shades was hung between the upper and lower sashes. The top shade was pulled toward the top of the window by a cord strung through a pulley mounted at the center of the top of the frame. The pulley had a latch built into it to hold the cord in position once the shade was raised. A tug on the cord released it for re-adjustment. The bottom shade was adjusted by a length of cord dangling from the slat running through the loop at the bottom of the shade. We students were not allowed to adjust the shades.

During warm weather the windows were open. There were no screens. Flies, bees, and butterflies entered and left at will. There was no barnyard fly incubation center within a quarter of a mile of the school, so flies were no big problem. Since the windows lacked storm sashes, the cold winds of winter fought a constant battle with the hot air pushing in from the single register. Eighth graders sitting in the aisle along the windows could feel bits of frozen moisture blowing through joints in the closed windows. On most winter days, the windows were coated with exquisitely scrolled layers of white frost.

Late one spring, we noticed on the sills at the bottom of each window miniature drifts of fine dirt piled to a height of nearly a half inch. When we squeezed the dirt between our fingers we felt its gritty composition. The sky had a yellowish, gray cast and we wondered why. When news of the dust bowl finally reached us, the mystery was solved. Westerly winds had carried topsoil from Kansas and Oklahoma farms to our windowsills in Michigan. We lived a geography lesson.

What we studied and how we studied was quite the same for us as for most schools during the thirties and the forties. Classroom management depended on the teacher. We had good teachers who created an atmosphere to foster learning. None of our teachers were insistent on a brooding, heavy, stifling silence, but neither were they tolerant of disruptive noise or behavior that prevented learning.

Our textbooks were old, many of them purchased used when the school was opened.

Replacement was not scheduled until they fell apart, and they were bound well. Some of our history books were so old they knew nothing of World War I, but they did contain extremely interesting, detailed histories of the explorers, the colonies, and the people involved in early wars. Included in our small library was a huge, red volume of Brady's Civil War History, complete with all the gory pictures of torn human and animal bodies, horrible pictures that demanded that we look at them again and again.

Besides the few books our school library boasted, we circulated books from our home libraries, borrowing from fellow students books reputedly worth reading. Either our teachers didn't notice or didn't think they should interfere with what came from our homes,

but the range of books was not particularly limited. For instance, Zane Grey novels included language not used in Sunday School, yet there were few of us who had not read every Zane Grey novel in circulation.

The paper on which we wrote our lessons was the cheapest tablet paper manufactured.

Until we were in our last few years of school, a nickel tablet had to last a month or more, and we were extremely careful to use its precious sheets with care. Even the notes we wrote and passed to each other were written on the smallest scraps of paper we could scrounge, and then usually off a completed assignment, handed in, graded, and returned. Except for the nickel pencil given each of us at Christmas by the school board, our pencils were penny pencils. The lead in them was so hard we had to write with a hard surface directly beneath the paper or it left nothing legible. The eraser was a white stub of rubbery substance, tapered to a fairly sharp point and stuck into a hollow at the top end of the pencil without benefit of a metal ferule to hold it into place. Cheap as it was, the eraser served us better than the lead.

We had Crayola crayons. When we were in the little room, a pack of eight was expected to last a year. At the last day of school, our teachers collected all the unused crayons and stored them in an old shoe box, to be used next year by anyone lacking crayons. By the time we were in the upper grades, the Depression had eased enough for us to double the size of our crayon boxes. Sixteen glorious colors from which to choose!

All our writing in the lower grades was with pencil. In the big room, we graduated to fountain pens, though we did our penmanship with straight pens furnished by the school.

Special penmanship paper, six inches by eight and a half inches, lined the wide way, with no left-hand margin, was stored in our teacher's desk and distributed only for penmanship. Each of us had a personal bottle of ink used both for penmanship and for filling our fountain pens. Many used Carter ink, permanent, and of long-standing reputation, but the newest thing on the market, the one we all coveted, was Quink. It was not permanent. Quink, spilled on clothing, washed out, and often we did a bit of spilling. Aqua Quink came in a triangular pyramidal clear glass bottle, impossible to tip over. We loved Quink!

Our fountain pens were the most expensive single piece of school equipment we owned.

We took extremely good care of them since either we had paid for them with our own hard-earned potato picking money or had received them as presents from doting relatives. Inside the barrel of the pens was a rubber tube, designed to be squeezed by the metal lever built into the side of the barrel. By holding the pen with the point down and flipping the end of the lever away from the barrel, one exerted pressure on the rubber tube that pushed out of it all the ink and the air it contained. Inserting the emptied pen into the ink supply and

flipping the lever closed allowed the vacuum formed inside the tube to suck ink from the bottle into the tube. Once filled, the pens should have written for several days, though often the pens leaked ink, always at the most inopportune times. Since we stored our pens in our desks, it was not unusual to find the cover of a book blotched with ink from a leaky pen. Worse still were the times the ink soaked into our tablets, ruining sheet after sheet of perfectly good paper. Every winter weekend, the ink in our pens and bottles froze, so we planned not to need them until the heat of the room had thawed the ink.

Fountain pen points are fragile. We tried to handle them with care, but sometimes trying was not enough. There was the day when a girl across the aisle, and one grade ahead of me, wanted to write her spelling test in ink, but she had forgotten her pen at home. I loaned her mine. When she finished, she handed the pen back without first screwing on its cap. In the transfer from her fingers to mine it slipped and fell. The point end was the heavy end, the part of the pen to meet the wood of the floor first, curling its fragile tip forever into worthlessness. At the time, I blamed Alberdina for dropping my pen, but I suspect it was as much my fault as hers. I mourned the loss of that pen for weeks before I could get enough money to replace it.

Since ours was a Christian School, every day began with a fifteen or twenty-minute devotional period during which the little room students squeezed into the big room, sharing the small halves of the seats of older students. The devotional period was mainly the singing of hymns. One of the older girls usually played the upright Everett piano, so our singing was limited to the songs she had learned to play. The big room teacher, a man, led the singing and read a Bible passage, said a few words of explanation at times, and offered the concluding prayer. We may not have always enjoyed those minutes, but we did love to sing, and even the thought of a school day begun without scripture and prayer was unthinkable.

More than devotions took place during those minutes, though usually without the knowledge of the teachers. One morning, when I was in the third grade, I sat in a seat of an enormous eighth grader. On his desk was his Bible notebook to be turned in that morning. The boy conned me into writing on the cover of the notebook "C. B. + M. Y." the C. B. being the initials of the single male teacher of the big room, the M. Y. being the initials of the single female teacher of the little room. By coincidence, both of them had red hair, though hers was more auburn and his a sandy, powdery red. Both resented any suspicion on the part of students (or parents) that there was even a hint of romance between them. The hint of a romance that I was foolish enough to inscribe on the cover of the notebook was more than Mr. Boersma could tolerate. Naturally, when the pressure was put on the big boy on

whose book cover I had written the initials, he avoided punishment by fingering me, long since returned to the little room and blissfully unaware of trouble.

Mr. Boersma waited until recess to nab me, but nab me he did. The episode taught me a valuable lesson. Never again would I unquestioningly follow a suggestion for mischief given me by others. I had enough suggestions for mischief running riot through my own mind, for which I was scarcely willing to pay the consequences, should I be caught at them. I did not need prompting from the demons in the minds of others.

Arithmetic did me in when I moved from the little room to the big room. Mr. Boersma was still the big room teacher that year. My first month's report card grade in arithmetic was a large red E. I dreaded to take the card home, but there was no avoiding it. My parents knew that report cards were due the first Friday of every new month. My younger siblings proudly displayed theirs. I was humiliated!

l knew what had brought about my low grade. I knew I had never taken the time and effort to memorize the multiplication tables. I had discovered that by adding I could get by without memorizing. Six times six was six added to six six times, and I could get thirty-six for an answer eventually. The trouble was, the thirty-six was not fixed in my mind, and every time I needed six times six, I had to recalculate. I was slow. I made mistakes. I got into trouble.

That report card E put the pressure on me. I had to memorize the tables, and I did. Before the next month was gone, Dad and Ma saw to it that I had them mastered and was on my way to moderate success in arithmetic, though I suspect my early failures tainted my appreciation of numbers to the point where mathematics has since remained a weak area in my pool of basic knowledge.

The ancillary benefit I received through the experience was the realization that, if ever again I should feel memorizing something to be important, I could master it. The progress I made from that E on that first fifth grade report card, my other grades hovering around a mediocre “C” level, to my eighth-grade report cards of straight A's (except in penmanship), I credit largely to that shocking red E from Mr. Boersma.

When Mr. Boersma left us at the end of that year, eventually to hold the position of professor at Calvin College, he left behind many students who benefited from his insistence on excellence. Part of that excellence involved a musical heritage that has meant much to many over the years. He had the vision that we thirty-plus boys and girls in the upper grades should learn to sing harmony. Early in the year, he wrote in chalk on the back blackboard of the room the hymn *Jesus, Priceless Treasure* in three-part harmony. He chose from our number those who could carry a tune and insisted that we stay in school after four o'clock each night for fifteen minutes while he drilled into us a basic knowledge

of how to read notes and how to sing harmony. It took ages for us to learn that song, but finally we mastered it. The next songs we learned took far less time and effort. Eventually we were proud to sing them, and at the insistence of Mr. Boersma, we sang them *a cappella*.

Sorry to say, I did not share in the first production of that fledgling choir. One afternoon during September, when the silo filling crew was filling our silo, I decided it was more important for me to be at home watching than in school singing in a choir. Mr. Boersma disagreed. The next morning, he informed me I was no longer a member of his choir. I had expected some kind of punishment, but not that. I felt that I should have been given another chance, but it was not to be. I was out, and I stayed out for three months, getting back in only after I had proved to Mr. Boersma that I was willing to stick through thick and thin from that time on.

Music must have meant much to Mr. Boersma. He created an adult choir that included some of my uncles and aunts from Highland and its two neighboring congregations. That choir also sang *a cappella*, memorizing their music. Long after he had gone from the community, the choir on occasion got together, though they had no leader to bind them, and sang again the many songs they had learned under his guidance.

Another indication of how much music meant to Mr. Boersma was the blackboard space he devoted to the song we were learning at any given time. Blackboards were the only means of mass communication in our school. There was no copy machine, no duplicator, not even a hectograph. Test questions for students to answer on paper were written on the board by the teacher for every subject for every grade level before school began in the morning and hidden from view by pulled down maps. No fair peeking! To reserve a section of the board large enough to contain a song indicated the importance of music to Mr. Boersma.

Mr. Hero Bratt was the next teacher hired by the school board to give us instruction in all things. Nobody could ask for a finer teacher! His concern for us showed in every class every day. He was demanding. No one got by long doing less than the limits of his ability. Yet the man was kindly. We owe to Mr. Bratt a love for a different kind of music from that of Mr. Boersma. Surely, he taught us hymns. We sang them every morning in devotions, but he also introduced us to another world of music besides. He had a huge love for the songs of Stephen Foster, and he taught us to sing and enjoy all the Foster songs in the Golden Book. I do think that we sang *I Dream of Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair* with an even greater fervor than we sang *Onward Christian Soldiers*.

Mr. Bratt also taught us a love for good literature. His method of introducing us to books he felt worth knowing was to read to us for fifteen or twenty minutes at the beginning of every

afternoon session. As soon as we got into our seats from noon hour, no matter how furiously we had been involved in our play activities, he broke the spell of play and bent our minds toward books by carrying us to the frozen north with Jack London's *Call of the Wild*, or Curwood's *Nomads of the North*. *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates* took us to the land of our ancestors, and we loved it. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* brought home to us in the North the tragedy of the slavery of the South. *Nobody's Boy* and *Nobody's Girl* brought tears to our eyes as we learned that not all children lived the secure lives we took for granted. Mr. Bratt opened our eyes to the realization that, though we might not be able to travel to distant parts of the world, we could learn about them by opening the covers of available books.

After Mr. Bratt, came Mr. Rozema, a most unusual man. His father had been a sheriff of Ottawa County. As a youngster, Mr. Rozema had the privilege of playing on land on which the National Guard Unit of the Grand Haven area trained. On one such occasion he found in the sand a blank cartridge dropped by one of the guardsmen. Not realizing what it was, he pounded it against a tree, causing it to detonate and to take off his left hand. We never missed that hand. I am sure he did. At recess time, Mr. Rozema joined us in ball playing. He batted from the left-hand batting box, reaching across the plate with his right arm to get a powerful swing at the ball. His aim was good. We wished we could hit the ball half as hard with our two hands as he could with his one.

Mr. Rozema was instrumental in involving our school with education on both the county and state levels. It may have been a coincidence, but that year, the year we were in the eighth grade, for the first time ever, we had county-wide academic competition accomplished by way of uniform, printed achievement tests given in our school by the county school commissioner. Much to our amazement, our scores were some of the top scores in the county.

In fact, two of us in our class claimed both first and second place in spelling, and our math scores were not far behind.

We received another advantage because Mr. Rozema knew more about the workings of state government than previous teachers had cause to know. That advantage was the privilege of borrowing books for our school from a state library. Every month the mailman brought to our school a couple large cartons of books, directly from Lansing. Since the selection was that of the State Library, Mr. Rozema was very careful to check each book before putting it into circulation, but most were fine books, and certainly they gave us a much broader vision of our world than our little library afforded. We had to return the books at the end of the month, but, by that time, those of us who read had finished most of them.

Mr. Rozema was a very fair man. When punishment was in order, he could dispense it with grace. Sometimes we broke the rules. We knew we would have to pay, but at times it seemed worth the penalty to accomplish the forbidden. There was that noon hour when we seventh and eighth grade boys had gone too far from school. We played a wild game called “Wolf Head,” played only in the late fall, before the snows came for winter sports. Whoever was chosen to be “It” was duty bound to go into the boys can and count to a hundred. By the time he came out, every boy had disappeared from the school ground and was running across the farmlands and wood lots. “It” ran after them, trying to tag them. As each was tagged, he joined the “It” in catching others.

The game was grueling. Often, we stopped to rest more than a half mile from school, winded and panting, and knowing that at one o'clock we had to be back in our seats. We had no watches. There were days when we didn't make it back quite on time. Mr. Rozema knew why. He approved of the game, but rules are rules. He developed a standard punishment for noon tardies. Our civics book contained a lengthy paragraph comparing education in France with that of the United States. Should we be tardy, we had to stay after four and copy to his satisfaction that paragraph word for word. It was fair penalty. We paid with no regrets, but pay we did!

There were other days when we boys got late. It was normal for the older boys never to walk the roads to school in the morning, since most had a trap line to run. The boys to the south lived near creeks and swamps and muskrats. Muskrat hides meant money. So, they checked their steel traps each morning on the way to school. If they had caught a muskrat, it was simple to club it over the head and kill it with a convenient stick of wood. On the way home they picked up the animal, skinned it, and sold its pelt.

We who lived north of the school had no creek, but we did have stone piles, and stone piles were home to both rabbits and skunks. We trapped skunks for their hides and rabbits for their meat. Killing skunks without getting sprayed was tricky, but it could be done. One simply had to lift up the trap and the skunk in a single, quick movement. A skunk with his feet off the ground cannot spray. A clout over the head with a rock or stick put the animal out of its misery and produced another pelt.

If during our cross-country walking, we learned that a rabbit was living in a stone pile near school, we dug him out during noon hour, taking turns taking the rabbit home for supper. It happened at times that a rabbit was farther in than we had estimated. That's when we wrote the paragraph. Which was only fair. We knew we had it coming, and we were willing to pay that price for a rabbit in the pot.

There was that day when one of the boys from the south thought he had a muskrat in his trap and it turned out to be a skunk. He wasn't prepared for that surprise; the skunk was. As he walked, he became so accustomed to the scent he carried that it no longer bothered him. When he came over the hill and met the first of the skiers and sliders they covered their noses and fled the scene. He thought they were laying it on a bit thick until he walked into the school building. Shrieks and screams convinced him that his fellow students had reason to shun him. Mr. Rozema grinned when he met Adrian in the hall, but he said what had to be said. There were no two ways about it. Adrian had to go home, take a bath, change his clothes, and if and when he was rid of the smell he could come back to school. By noon Adrian was back, completely refreshed, smelling strongly only of Fels Naptha.

Our school had a full basement, half of which was an open space with a cement floor.

When outdoor play was impossible, the upper grade students played in that area. “Pom Pom Polla Way” and “Prisoners Goal” were the usual games. Both involved running, stopping, and the scuffling of the feet, which made dust. By the time the noon hour was over, the dust was so thick we could hardly see from one end of the basement to the other. A small pile of gravel stored for “some rainy day” along the back wall near the stairs was the play area for younger students who moved gravel stones from one area to another, using wooden shingles or ancient metal toy trucks, adding to the dust.

The remaining area of the basement housed a huge furnace and, next to it, a furnace wood storage room. The men of the school Society saw to it that this room was filled in the fall and refilled during Christmas vacation, but it was their sons' obligation to pitch the wood from its storage room through a “window” near the ceiling, and into the space near the furnace. Every two weeks some of the older boys spent part of a recess or noon hour pitching wood.

Our teachers often also served as our janitors. Early in the cold mornings, the principal lit the fire in the furnace. Wood did not hold fire overnight, so, each morning, the furnace had to be stoked and re-lit. After the students came and school began, the fueling of the fire was up to the seventh and eighth grade boys on an assigned basis. At regular intervals, the assigned student (only one at a time) would rise from his seat and walk very importantly across the room, through the door, and down to the furnace. We could hear him open the door and throw blocks of wood through it, shake the handle to drop some of the ash to the pit below the fire box, and slam the door shut again. As slowly as he dared, he returned up the stairs to his room to resume his studies.

There was the day when Whip Koetje was the assigned fire master. When he came back to the room he had an unusual smile on his face. Suddenly an unusual, muffled thump

echoed through the pipes and into the room, followed by a questioning silence. Whip's eyes were fixed on the book he was holding in front of him, his body slightly stiffened and his feet as far forward and his head as far backward as his seat allowed. Since he was the only one in the room who was reading, the teacher had no difficulty reasoning that Whip and the thump were related, but he was wise enough not to make an issue of it at the time.

At recess, on the playground, we pried out of Whip the source of the thump. He had thrown a twelve-gauge shotgun shell into the fire box as he shut the door. It had taken longer to go off than he thought it would, and it produced much less noise than he had hoped, but it had been good for a bit of diversion. Not long afterward, our parents informed us boys one on one that no longer were any of us allowed to carry loaded shot gun shells to school.

Speaking of shells, all the boys over ten carried .22 caliber cartridges to school. At ten we had graduated from BB guns to rifles. We lined up the shells in the pencil slot on the top of our desks when we ran out of more constructive things to do. One spring noon hour, some of us planned a dangerous experiment, so dangerous that we went over the big hill to the east of the school to a convenient stone pile. We found a stone with a relatively flat top, laid a .22 shell on it, and from a distance of a couple of feet above the stone, dropped onto it a stone twice the size of a softball. The shell exploded. It didn't make much noise, but it was something new. The bullet part of the shell didn't go anywhere. The force of the detonation split the casing. The fun lasted until Jess Heeringa caught a bit of one of the casings in his leg. It had gone through two layers of overall, a sock, and one layer of long underwear, and it did bleed quite profusely for a few minutes. Only a few of the boys went to the stone pile to blast shells the next day. Most of us had learned their lesson.

Since the teacher had to divide his time and efforts among four grades and could give direct attention to only one or two grades at any given time, we were assigned work to be done by ourselves. When finished, we were free to read library books, to draw, or to write, and we made the most of this time. Often our work was done more shoddily than it should have been so we could say it was done and go on to the more interesting aspects of learning.

We drew cars, not the Fords and Chevys we rode in, but cars the likes of which we were not to see in reality for another thirty years, streamlined, sleek, and with lots of glass. Had GM or Ford known about us and our futuristic visions, they would have fought each other to gain our services!

We drew other things not as admirable. We were at an age now known as the Wonder Years, and much of our wondering had to do with questions related to sex. Our drawings expressed our questions. We secreted them in our books. Had we been caught with some

of the things we drew, our lessons would have doubled so we would never, never have free time to draw. And the stories we wrote! Page upon page of tablet paper devoted to the heroes we manufactured and blessed with life. What fantasies they were! We shared them only with those we selected, those we knew would not divulge our fantasies to those who would not understand.

Not all of our fellow students shared our desires and dreams. They worked at their assignments begrudgingly, getting at least some of them done during the allotted time, but never having any time to go on to the things they could have enjoyed. We felt sorry for them, though we knew that, in other areas of life, they had found things to enjoy, some of which we found boring or distasteful. To each his own!

During our upper grade years, we had the privilege of making two trips far outside of our community. The first was arranged by Mr. Boersma, a native of Grand Rapids. He thought that we, isolated as we were in our rural area, ought to be exposed to life in the big city of Grand Rapids. We ought to see how our newspaper, the *Grand Rapids Press*, was produced, and we ought to visit a factory or two to learn something of the life of the young people who had outgrown our community and moved on to work in Grand Rapids. During our English class, we wrote letters to relatives living in northwest Grand Rapids, the area in which Mr. Boersma's parents lived, requesting overnight lodging. All of us had such relatives, though some were but distant cousins, they did invite us, and we did stay the night with them.

Our means of transportation to Grand Rapids was a cattle truck, owned by Ralph Van Houten. He had cleaned, as well as possible, the racks of the manure left by the cattle he had hauled. Along the front, the two sides, and down the center of the rack, he placed planks on potato crates covered with coarse blankets. Over the top of the rack he stretched a tarpaulin. For the three hours it took us to ride to Grand Rapids in the chill of a spring morning, the thirty plus students of grades five through eight rejoiced to be treated like animals. We did stop at Gordon Park on our way so we could snack from our sack lunches and use the toilets.

In Grand Rapids, we saw every aspect of the *Grand Rapids Press* printing operation. We visited a factory, we walked through the museum and the library. We got acquainted with relatives we had known only by name, and we enjoyed such luxuries as flush toilets, bathtubs, and toasters. We slept between cotton sheets instead of flannel blankets. We didn't have to go to the barn to do chores before we ate breakfast. The truth is, we were so out of our routine that we hadn't had time to get hungry before breakfast was served. That morning, we saw another factory and John Ball Park. By the time we got back home, we

were so tired, we couldn't talk about everything we had seen and done until after we had a night's rest in our own beds. That trip had been a huge educational success.

A second trip was part of the pleasure of graduating from the eighth grade. This was a trip to Lansing, made early enough in the spring so as not to interfere with farm work. The eleven of us graduates squeezed into two cars. I have no idea whose cars they were. I know whose they weren't. Our car was too old and had too many miles on it to trust.

In Lansing, we got to see Governor Murphy. In fact, he even shook our hands when we met him in his office in the capitol building. We visited a few minutes with our state senator. Our state representative took us on a grand tour of the entire capitol building. One other attraction was a museum of flight in which were preserved early aviation mementos and artifacts. How we marveled at the primitive qualities of the first parachutes, gliders, helmets and suits. The day was a very long day. We each had enough money to buy two meals in restaurants. Two restaurant meals in a single day! We were convinced the Depression was becoming history.

Eighth grade graduation for us boys marked the transition from knickers to long pants for our Sunday best. Each of us boys had gone to Cadillac in the spring of 1938 and had visited Mr. Beckman or Penny's. Graduation also meant a session with Jess Johnson, the photographer in Cadillac. Box cameras and snapshots were common fare, but a professional photograph was historical. Again, our class was packed into two cars. This time Dad offered to drive. Our car would probably make it to Cadillac, and Dad had an interest in photography. Earlier, he had owned an expensive bellows camera and had developed and printed his own negatives, so he saw the trip as an opportunity to catch up on what was new in the world of photography. Jess lined the twelve of us into two rows, girls in the front row, Mr. Rozema sitting at their center, and the back row filled with us boys. What memories that photograph holds! The graduation ceremony itself has faded into oblivion. It ended the formal education of most in the photograph, opening for them doors to a life in a world amazingly foreign to our little classrooms.

For four of us who graduated from the eighth grade in 1938, school did not end at the eighth-grade graduation exercise. That year, the Society decided a ninth grade should be added to our school, which made it possible for those intent on going on to high school to take one more year close to home. The teacher did his best, but that year we didn't learn as much as we should have learned. We studied biology, but got only as far as the anatomy of birds. We studied Latin and managed to cover the first quarter of the first-year book. We tried to unlock the secrets of algebra, but none of us in the class were mathematically minded, and our teacher was not all that enthralled by the discipline himself. World history we did proudly, and we thoroughly enjoyed literature, though grammar fell by the wayside.

We did get to wear something other than overalls to school. We were in high school, and we had to dress accordingly. Overalls were out. Dress pants were in. The girls wore colored skirts and bright blouses. Our classes began at eight thirty in the morning, we had only a half-hour noon hour, and we got out at three in the afternoon. This gave the teacher some freedom to tend to the needs of the other students without having us around to add to his burden of responsibility, and it gave us a whole afternoon hour to help with the farm work.

After that year, my father decided I could not go on to school. I had to stay home and work on the farm. I complied resentfully. At times, I did enjoy life outside the classroom, but after two years, I determined to go back and complete my education. Reluctantly my father allowed me to do so.

One school memory is extremely sad. When I was in the early elementary grades, a neighbor girl was very important to me. After Aunt Lena got married and I could no longer ride to and from school with her, I was on my own. I had little sense of time and no urgency to hurry. It was Gezina Van Houten who mothered me, making sure I got to school on time in the morning, and she at least got me headed toward home on time in the afternoon. She was always in a hurry. The amount of chores she had to do at home before going to school kept her busy until the very last possible moment. When she left for school, it was not to walk, it was almost always to run. Usually, she caught up with me near Corneal Bos's corner. That last half mile of the road to school we two made in record time. More often than not, we entered the northwest corner of the school grounds at the moment the first bell rang. We were in our seats before the last bell rang.

Gezina didn't pamper me. If she was to look after me, it was to be on her terms not on mine. I could walk with her, but at her speed, not mine. Before I was fifteen, Gezina had died, probably of abdominal cancer, though no one thought an autopsy necessary. The funeral was very private, if I recall. There was talk of scandal. I was not allowed to go to the funeral. Nor did I really want to. Gezina was gone, and I was going to miss her for a long time. Something of the ability to hurry that I learned from her helped me to help my younger brothers and sisters during their school years. At the time my sister Gert started school, I had been given a knapsack, a gas mask bag of World War I vintage. In that knapsack, Ma put Gert's lunch and mine. Unhampered by a lunch to carry, she started walking down the road to school a quarter of an hour earlier than I, since I had chores to get done before I could leave. When I caught up with her, it was time for both of us to rush. Gezina was coming soon!

Later, when brothers Marv and Jack came along, their lunches were added to my knapsack. By that time, I had learned there were quicker ways to get to school than to walk the road. By cutting across the fields, I knocked at least five minutes off the time it took me to get to

school, and the walking was better. In the winter, as long as there was snow, I skied. Once, after a hard sleet storm, I skated all way to school, cutting through the crust of ice on the snow going uphill, skating on the crust on the level or downhill. If for one reason or another it was the road I walked, my walk was always rushed. Run one telephone pole, walk the next, run one, walk the next.

Walking home from school was a totally different scene. For those of us who lived to the north and east of school, the first half mile was a procession the width of the road and strung out for rods. The Heukers, the Kuipers, the Bos family, the Heeringa family, the Van Houtens, the Van Dykes, and some of my Vredevoogd cousins made up the motley crew of walkers. We walked loudly. Most of the time we teased each other. Something said, something done in class that day, returned to plague us as we walked. Nothing ever was forgotten. We got mad at each other. We fought. Our fighting was out and out, no holds barred, may the best man win fighting, though we seldom had more to show for our escapades than bloody noses and ripped clothes. If we weren't teasing, we were arguing, especially about cars. Naturally, the make and model of car that a particular family owned was the very best make and model produced in the world, and every member of that family was duty bound to uphold and espouse all of its virtues.

Facts were few. Facts didn't matter. Volume did.

We argued the relative merits of Holstein cows versus Guernseys or Jerseys, arguments the more heated since we who walked represented families whose herds were made up of either one breed or the other. We argued the merits of horses by breed and by size. We argued about dogs, about whose hound dog could bring a rabbit around in less time than somebody else's hound dog could. I'm sure that the neighbors could hear us coming down the road a quarter of a mile before they could see us.

Sometimes our walk was sober and solemn, especially on days when a funeral had been held in church. We couldn't attend, and wouldn't have wanted to if we could, but the gloom caused by a death in our church family blanketed us. Such nights saw us home quickly and quietly.

Another time none of us said much was the day Roede's house burned. In the middle of the first class after lunch, we heard the outer door of school open. Footsteps pounded down the hall before the door could close, and without so much as knocking on the door, one of the neighbors stuck his head in and called out, “Alberdine, Marg, and Jim. Your house is burning down.” The shock paled the three faces that bore the three names. Shutting their books, jamming them and their papers into their desks, they jumped up and made for the door, not understanding what they were doing or why. They slowed only long enough to get

their younger siblings from the little room and head for home. But what was home? With no house to live in, where was home?

As we walked home that afternoon we empathized with the family. We had no way of knowing how they were meeting the emergency, but we speculated and we tried to imagine what would happen should such a catastrophe happen to us.

Winter walks home had a flavor all of their own. Sling shots had been stored until spring, since the stones were buried under the snow. Our roads were not plowed during the winter, so we walked in the hard-packed ruts of sleigh runners and in the hoof prints of the horses that pulled the sleighs. We boys always needed something to throw, and during our winter walks home, providence provided us with “road apples.” Horse manure is produced in heaps of egg-shaped orbs the size of a small apple. Once frozen, they had no smell, and each orb, kicked loose from its heap, fit perfectly into the palm of a throwing hand. To throw “road apples” at fellow homeward-bound students was a forbidden pleasure we all indulged in at every available opportunity. Sometimes we were “squealed on” by those who happened to catch one on some unprotected part of the anatomy, but the possibility of that happening was very slight. We wore so many clothes in the winter that a knight in armor was hardly less vulnerable to damage than we were.

Thanks to the weather, once or twice per winter we had the privilege of riding home from school in the box of a sleigh. It took quite a storm and a lot of cold to bring about such a ride. We knew as we bent over our books that a storm was bearing down on us. The heat from the furnace no longer kept the west room warm, and through the windows we could see nothing more than a white swirl. The sound of wind whipping under the eaves drowned out the recitations of the students. An uneasy feeling in the pit of our stomachs assured us that our parents or neighbors were busily arranging to bring us home in the box of a sleigh pulled by a team of faithful, panting horses.

Two sleighs held all the students from the north of school, one which went to the county line, a mile-and-a-half straight north, the other which took in all the students on our road, a half mile north of the school and then to the east. Whoever it was who volunteered to “get the kids” prepared the sleigh well. Straw strewn in the bottom provided something to sit on. A horse blanket strung tightly over the top of the box kept out wind and snow, and a couple of soap stones warmed in the oven before leaving home made the inside of the sleigh box as cozy as spring itself.

To describe the ride in such a blizzard is to recall the aroma of a wool scarf pulled tightly across mouth and nose, leaving only the eyes bare under the protection of a winter cap fitted with built-in ear flaps. The aroma of wet, cold wool needs the wind-slung particles of

penetrating snow to do justice to the experience. Add a leaning into the wind, pushing into it from the door of the school to the sleigh, and then finally to slip into the quiet, dark security of the underside of the horse blanket, warm body snuggled close against warm body. The smooth glide of the sleigh runners and the tinkling jingle of the harness bells were all but drowned in the whistle of the wind against the sides of the sleigh box. Surviving winter storms in such a style was more enjoyment than threat.

I do not recall a time that our school was called because of a winter storm. Even if it had blown the day before and the storm was about to make a return engagement, the early winter hours were peaceful enough for us to walk to school.

Spring thaws made walking home take much longer than usual and were, at times, more fun than recess. We usually had enough snow during a winter that most of it stayed where it fell until spring. Our springs were often impetuous. One day it was bitter winter, the next it was blessed spring. The snow on every hillside began to shrink, began to run down into the hollows, and sometimes began to flow from one hollow to another. A bit to the west of Corneal Bos's corner, at the west end of our road, was the largest culvert in our part of the township. Water ran a considerable distance to flow through it, eventually traveling far enough to find a stream bed and a creek. We didn't know about the creek. We knew the invitation of water rushing full force through a culvert. It was spring in all of its power and glory. Those who carried dinner pails dropped them into the stream above the culvert and watched them ride to and through the culvert. Where it went from there, who could predict? Some parts of the spring river were deep, and there was always the chance a dinner bucket would be trapped behind a stone or stump or uncooperative chunk of snow and ice. If it didn't, the owner and his company chased it until the spring gusher got wide enough and shallow enough to wade in after it. We still wore our winter boots, capable of stepping in at least ten inches of water without getting us wet. But we always did get wet when we chased dinner buckets. Oh, we got wet! It was such a good wet. It was spring!

If it was spring, soon it would be summer and school would be out! We loved school, but we loved our summer vacations too. What a joy it was to carry home from school on that last day of the year the remnants of tablets, and the stub ends of pencils in a pencil box whose cover would no longer slide back and forth, and to carry in the back pocket of one's overalls a dog-eared report card which said, “Promoted!” That was success! That was achievement! That was freedom!

Some bits and pieces of school life float around too freely to be attached to any particular area. The only way to include them is to relate, item by item as they flit in and out of the mind.

Item one: One of our big room teachers decided that we boys ought to experience something of the art of wood carving. He offered a prize of a dollar bill to the first person to carve a wooden ball within a channel carved into a rectangular wood solid four inches long and three-fourths inch thick. The ball had to roll back and forth within that stick. The teacher set a time limit of one single week, and furnished the pine wood cut to the assigned size. We sharpened our jack knives and whittled like mad every free moment we had. I think it was Sid De Haan who won the prize. Others came close. Many of us failed miserably. Some of us wounded ourselves by our own knives in the process of failing. The winner had a beautifully executed finished product. I hope he kept it.

Item two: During one of our four years in the big room, one week's worth of recesses and noon hours was dedicated to archery. Most of us had previously made some sort of a bow, but when it came to making arrows, we wiped out. No piece of wood we could find or make was straight enough to be accurate when shot from a bow. Our teacher suggested we use cat tail stems. They were straight, which was what we needed, but they were so light that the least puff of wind blew them off course. The teacher had a solution to the problem. A shingle nail pushed into the head of the cat tail and a bit of light cardboard stuck into crossed slots cut in the rear of the cat tail kept the projectile on its intended course more often than not. Of course, the arrow would not penetrate anything. That wasn't what we were after. If we could tack up the discarded cardboard backing of an empty tablet on a tree or fence post and hit it once out of four or five times with a cat tail arrow, we were jubilant. The archery contests were quite a diversion from our usual softball games.

Item three: Sling shots! We made our own out of crotches cut from young maple trees strung with used cross sections of inner tubes cut with precision for the required potential and kinetic energy. A two-inch square of leather from the tongue of some worn out shoe completed the weapon. When expertly put together by means of the stoutest cord available, these were lethal weapons. We carried them in our back overall pockets from spring to winter when frost fastened stones to the ground. We shot everything in sight. Glass insulators on telephone poles were totally irresistible temptations, though breaking them was a punishable offense. Few telephone poles near school had insulators left on them, and the poles themselves were pock marked by the prints of stones shot at them, insulators or not.

Songbirds were protected. We would not think of shooting a stone at a robin or wren, but the sparrows and starlings of the area kept a wary eye for boys with slingshots. They could recognize one in the hands of any of us at a greater distance than we could sling a stone. A cat prowling after prey beyond the protective limits of the farmyard where he belonged was fair game. Squirrels, especially the little useless red squirrels, were shot at random.

Foolishly we tried to shoot the rabbits we kicked up as we walked through fence rows or brushy woods, but none of us, as accurate as we became and as quickly as we could get a shot off, ever came close to hitting a rabbit.

One noon hour we learned how dangerous sling shots were. We boys were playing in the woods across from school, shooting at both birds and squirrels. Suddenly we noticed that one of us was no longer running, screaming, or shooting. In fact, Harv was lying in a heap on the ground, his body limp beside a couple of saplings. One of us went back to him to learn why. One look at Harv drained the blood from his face. Harv was dead! The stone that had done him in was lodged in his skull ahead of and over one ear. Some of us ran to tell the teacher. He didn't take the time to check Harv out, but ran to the parsonage, got the help of the pastor, his wife, and his car. By the time they had driven back to school we had Harv out of the woods to the side of the road. Within minutes he was on his way to Cadillac and the hospital.

What a relief flooded our school room when, hours later, the minister came back from the hospital to report that Harv was not dead after all. The doctors had removed the stone, Harv had regained consciousness, and within a few days would be back at school. The incident didn't make us give up on slingshots. It did make us much more careful how we used them.

Item four: School brought together students of both sexes in a relationship other than that of brothers and sisters living under the same roof. Some relationships had romantic tones and overtones. When I was in the second grade, a third grade boy decided to ask me over to play with him at his house come Saturday, but for some reason he didn't dare to ask me himself. He bribed his sister in my grade to ask me. She didn't dare to do it openly, but asked me to go around the corner of the school where the two of us could converse privately. She put the question to me as her brother had directed, and I promised to see if my parents would give their approval, and that was the end of that, except that it wasn't. It was the beginning of a round of teasing lasting for weeks. Somebody had seen us talking around the corner. Somebody broadcast to everyone, in all the grades, that Sally and I had kissed around the corner. Needless to say, I never did ask to go to visit her brother. Such a visit would add fuel to a fire already too hot for me.

Item five: The higher the grade, the more prolific the romantic incidents. We paired up in one way or another, to one extent or another, but the pairing was never more serious than the writing of notes, a stolen glance now and then, or perhaps a quick bit of conversation. By the time we graduated, we were thirteen or fourteen, but what we knew about the opposite sex was so meager as to amount to nothing. Yes, we had graduated from the ignorance that had blinded us for so many years, ignorance that insisted that Dr. Masselink

brought babies to one home or another in his black bag. We knew better, but not much better. We did more guessing than knowing about life and the birds and the bees. There were those boys who had bits of mirror that they stuck in their shoe laces, trying to focus them on the upper legs of the girls sitting in the seats behind them, but their dreams were doomed to failure. The girls of our day wore skirts down below their knees, stockings up to or above their knees, and above that, as witnessed on any set of clotheslines in the country on any Monday morning, they wore flannel bloomers that defied the giving away of any female anatomical secrets. Perhaps we were the privileged ones.

We had more years in which to wonder than those who grow up in today's world. The thrill of anticipation enthralled us far longer than it can for those born too late.

Item six: Of all the games we played at grade school, the game of leapfrog was the least competitive, the most entertaining, and the least purposeful. Yet we managed to build competition into the game.

Only boys were qualified players. There was no choosing of sides for all were on the same side. Once we had decided to play leapfrog, we simply lined up with a space of some four to six feet separating the players. We all faced in the same direction head to back and back to head.

Whoever was the last player in line began the action by calling out in his loudest and bravest voice, “Leapfrog!”

At that signal, all other players crouched with their hands clasped nearly under their chins, and their lower arms at the elbows resting solidly on their legs just above their knees. The last player in line bounced over the boy crouching ahead of him, momentarily resting his hands on the back of his bent form while straddling his body with his legs. Two or three steps and he sailed over the second crouched body as he had the first in line, then onto the next until he had run out of bodies to leap. Now he took his turn to crouch at the head of the line.

Long before the first leaper had come to the head of the line, the last crouching boy stood tall and began his turn at leaping. The line of boys moved down the playground like a sluggish caterpillar in whatever direction the participants chose.

Had all the boys been built on the same frame and of the same size, the game could have been played with grace and beauty. Since such uniformity was absent in our student body, the progress of the leapfrog caterpillar was erratic. Heavy boys, built squat and close to the ground, had difficulty keeping the caterpillar moving. Braced as well as the crouched players were, not all were able to withstand the sudden onslaught of avoirdupois on the move, and so, ignominiously collapsed.

There were boys in the upper grades who never ceased to make life as miserable as possible for some of the underclassmen. Deliberately, with malice and aforethought, those eighth-grade giants calculated speed, direction, and the most advantageous placing of the hands on the back of an unfortunate fifth or sixth grader to topple him into the dirt as totally as possible. The laughter such a topple produced was signal for all playing to quickly turn and eye the vanquished before he could regain his dignity, and to join the tormentor in ridiculing him.

Such treatment seldom stopped the game, though it slowed it. The unfortunate victim was duty bound not to complain. It was a part of growing up. One kept a stiff upper lip no matter how mashed and smashed his underpinnings might be at the particular moment. However, worms tum. The fifth grader was aware that, after a few minutes, the big eighth grader was going to be the crouching body he would be leaping, frog fashion. There were ways of getting even! To jump short and land hard on the neck of the crouched player inflicted a pain which could last for days, and to land on the middle of the big broad back could possibly collapse even a huge croucher if he was caught off guard.

There was yet another possibility for retribution. On the next cycle, when that huge player was again about to jump over his victim, the victim might decide to stand up. A well-timed maneuver could devastate the jumper. Plan A or plan B, the stiff upper lip was forever coupled with the hope for revenge. Sooner or later, the score would be settled, though it sometimes took months or even years. Some big eighth graders had younger brothers who never could guess why that big ox of an eighth grader had it in for him from the very first time he played leapfrog with him. Elephants and leaping frogs have long memories!

Item seven: All big room boys made and ran spool tractors. We made them at home, played with them on the kitchen table, and packed them into our overall pockets in case we had time to kill after our assignments in school were finished.

Spool tractors were made of four things: 1) an empty wooden spool for thread; 2) a rubber band; 3) four or five brads; 4) a couple of slightly burned wooden match sticks; 5) a circular piece of paraffin wax a quarter of an inch thick and nearly as big around as the spool.

For our most efficient tractors, we notched the edges of the wooden spool with a sharp jackknife blade.

Assembly was simple. On one end of the spool, near the hole, pound two brads with a space the width of a burned matchstick between them. Directly across the hole pound in another set of brads. On the opposite end of the spool pound in a single brad near the edge of the spool.

Select a sturdy medium-weight rubber band slightly longer than the spool. Drop or shove the rubber band through the hole in the spool. Slip the short piece of matchstick through the end of the rubber band on the end of the spool having the four brads. Firmly wedge this stick into the spaces between the brads.

Slip the free end of the rubber band through the hole in the paraffin wax and insert into its loop one end of the full-length matchstick. Wind tight the rubber band, then hook the short end of the matchstick behind the brad on the end of the spool. Lay the spool on a relatively smooth surface with the long end of the matchstick held down onto the surface. If the band is wound properly, and the friction between it and the interior of the spool is adequate, and if the friction between the long matchstick and the end of the spool is as it should be, the spool will move slowly across the surface on which it has been placed like a tractor moves across a field.

Don't be surprised if the tractor, upon its release from your hands, suddenly and noisily jumps up from the surface and unwinds the rubber band in a split second. The next time you try, it might work perfectly. If not, try biting the tip of your tongue while you position the tractor for its performance. It seems that how one holds his face while running a spool tractor had a considerable bearing on its success.

Item eight: The middle of May marked the end of our school year, and it never came soon enough. By that time the days had begun to lengthen and were warm enough to make sitting in school a chore. Besides, our shoes were beginning to pinch our feet. Since September, we had worn them, and though they had been big enough and to spare, by the middle of May, our feet had grown to the point where walking in the shoes of September was painful.

When the sun had warmed the tan sand of our road to the point of invitation, we slipped off our shoes and socks as we walked that last mile home from school, luxuriating in the feel of the gritty grains between our toes.

Oh, but our feet were tender! We felt each pea sized gravel stone embedded in the sand of the tire tracks. Larger stones produced pain in proportion to the set of our lips, but the joy of freedom far exceeded the misery of the tenderfoot.

School rules insisted we wear shoes while on school property and inside the school building. Besides, the sandbur-laden sand of the schoolyard and the crushed-rock surface of the half mile road past the school did not invite bare feet. School and shoes was a combination that had to be.

Once summer came, once school was over, shoes were forgotten for the duration. Our feet got tough, almost as tough as the leather of our shoes. We pulled weeds in the garden and

in the corn and potato fields with bare feet. We walked through the stubble of a newly mown hay field with bare feet. We milked cows in our bare feet. We drove tractor with bare feet. Only in the morning when the cold dews combated creature comfort did we slip on something to make the getting of the cows from the pasture endurable.

Yes, we did step on thistles, and they did embed themselves into the thick calluses of our soles, and we did stop long enough to sit down and pull them out, but they were more nuisance than pain. The real pain came when a new September rolled around and the school doors opened again.

It seems that no one has yet made a pair of shoes that accurately fits the contours of the human foot. No shoes came close to containing our toes without producing a degree of misery. Though our parents advised the shoe salesman to be sure the new shoes were big enough to last till spring, the contours of the rounded leather deprived our sprawling toes of the freedom to which they had become accustomed.

Barefoot! What a vision of freedom that one word BAREFOOT produces in the memories of those of us who wore no shoes all summer long--except on Sundays. The pain of squeezing freedom feet into dress shoes no doubt prevented us from sleeping so long as we had those shoes on our feet!

High School

In the late 1930s, less than twenty percent of grade school graduates went on to high school. Legally, a person could quit school after earning an eighth-grade diploma or attaining sixteen years of age. Most of my peers chose not to go beyond the eighth grade. Early in the 1940s, attitudes toward higher education changed so rapidly that a high school education became a given for many in our family.

After I had finished the ninth grade in our local elementary school, Dad decreed that my formal education had come to an end. I was needed on the farm, and there was not enough money for me to go on. Though my response was a begrudging acquiescence, there was an anger in my heart and my mind was already responding, “We will see about that!” I stayed home and helped on the farm for two years during which I had the opportunity to gain some maturity. Since I was only thirteen when I finished the ninth grade, those two years at home were probably the best thing that could have happened to me.

Farm life in general failed to attract me. I had time for hunting and fishing, which I enjoyed. That made farm life tolerable, but my real interests were in the world of books and learning. At the end of two years, I requested and received permission to return to school. An improvement in the economic situation, plus the maturation of my younger brothers

helped make my return possible. Besides, Gert was old enough now to stay home and help Ma in the house. Sorry to say, my parents were never as convinced of the need for higher education for women as for men.

In September of 1941, I walked a half mile south across the fields where several of us caught an ancient red, white, and blue school bus to ride to the Lucas Christian School, located across the road from the Lucas Christian Reformed Church near Stoney Corners. This was the same school my mother had attended for the last of her school years. It had been an eight and then a nine-grade school for more than twenty years, and was now in the process of becoming a twelve-grade school.

The plan was to add one grade per year. Grade eleven was new when I entered grade ten.

Our classes were held in the west two classrooms on the ground floor and in the two basement classrooms below them. A tiny typing room and lab were also squeezed into the basement. The plant was far from impressive. Even our toilet facilities were of the outdoor flushless variety. We had capable teachers who worked hard to give us as good an education as possible under the circumstances. Our student body was there to learn--at least we were intent on learning most of the time, though we did have our moments of diversion.

Waiting with me at the bus stop were Wilma (Billy) Holwerda who lived with her uncle and aunt, Barney and Gertie Vanderveen, a few De Haans, and a Sikkema or two. Down the road a mile were the sons and daughter of our minister, Rev. Betten. We picked up the Bolkemas a mile and a half beyond Highland Corners.

The bus itself was an unusual vehicle. It was past both retirement age and quality performance by several years. That it held together for the two more years of service demanded of it was a minor miracle. Charlie Doornbos, the driver, must have contributed something to its longevity by the way he nursed the ancient vehicle around its course. Before he drove our route, he had already delivered to the school a load of students from east of McBain. On the cold, stormy mornings of mid-winter we never knew how long we would have to wait for it to finally make its appearance and take us into its shelter from the biting cold. Many were the mornings the heater failed and the seats were cold and the windows frosted except for enough of the windshield for Charlie to see through to drive.

Some mornings Charlie didn't make it. The bus had failed him or the drifts had blown too deep, and finally Gertie Vander Veen would call out the news that the bus wasn't coming. Somebody had phoned her to let her know. School would be held unless the call had included a notice of cancellation, freeing us to return home, which did happen several times a winter. Most of the time when the bus didn't come, we were to make our own way to

school. Usually, one of our parents came with a car and we crammed into it for the trip. The word cozy fails to describe our circumstance as we packed into those cars. If no car was available, we hitch-hiked, which meant we walked at least half of the five miles to school, which meant we got to school late, but getting late was better than not getting there.

Our high school experience broadened our social horizons. We had known only the people in our own little Highland community. Now we made friends with those living as far east of McBain as we lived west of the little town. We learned that not everyone had to pick stones before they planted crops, and not everyone grew potatoes and picked pickles. Some people grew sugar beets! Since we were of a stage of maturity to have developed a lively interest in the “opposite sex” we enjoyed a far wider variety of choice than that offered by our limited community. We did not complain!

To say we got a wonderful education in our fledgling high school would be a lie. Had we not gone to Christian High, we would have gone to McBain Public Agricultural School. The quality of the education we received was quite on a par with that of the public high school.

The course offerings were fewer, though the courses taught were taught quite well. Dedicated teachers determined the quality of the courses. Those of us who went on to college found we were as well prepared as most of our peers.

For two years the school board had tried to find a larger, more centrally located plant for the high school. In the spring of 1943, a huge old house in McBain, built during the lumbering era, became vacant and was offered for sale. The owner, a man named Kloet, was willing to sell it for an interestingly small figure. The deal was completed, and the remodeling of the house into a school begun. Kloet's College was the unofficial name given the building; Northern Michigan Christian High School became its official name.

Much of the remodeling was accomplished by donated labor. Our family contributed many hours to the project. Partitions had to be torn out, peeling paint scraped, and a multitude of odd jobs had to be done before the conversion was complete. In our spare moments we volunteers disappeared into the attic to dig through cobwebs and heaps of old newspapers for an occasional letter or scrap of discarded history. The most interesting find was a faded yellowing letter, hidden in a wall behind a plaster lathe and written nearly fifty years earlier, when lumber was king and wandering lumber jacks sometimes made mistakes. We were never able to tie the names of the people in the letter with any person whose residence in McBain was recorded, but it contained the threat of death to the person addressed if he did not cease and desist from his activities, whatever they might have been.

Classes began in the new facility in the fall of 1943. What a blessing to have ample room and indoor plumbing. We even had a few acres of land on which to play baseball and

soccer. We had a bus garage and a new, worthy bus. However, we students from Highland were provided our own means of transportation, a panel truck which we ourselves painted the school bus colors of red, white, and blue. It was blessed with a wooden bench along either side the gloomy interior. We could ride to and from school without depending on a vehicle that had to come from the other side of McBain!

We had no gym. The board promised one as soon as possible, along with the promise to eventually create a building recognizable as a school, promises that have been kept.

Today's teachers would likely rebel if faced with the challenges accepted by those who taught us in those years of the beginnings of our Christian high school. Our science teacher taught biology, chemistry, and physics, and was coerced into teaching some math besides. Our English teacher managed grammar and literature, somehow juggling the four classes to fit all our needs. Local ministers came in to teach us Latin and church history. Some of them were teachers, some were not. From some, we learned, from others, we gained endurance and patience.

Martin Seven, our English man, taught speech and built a forensic team to compete with other schools in the area. He and Mr. De Blaey engineered the production of a school play, “An Old-Fashioned Mother,” in the spring of 1944. We who participated will never forget the evenings spent in rehearsal, first at the school, then in the Lucas Town Hall where the production was staged.

My Uncle, Fred Westmaas, began his teaching at Northern Christian the year the school moved to McBain. He was our neighbor, and the driver of the panel truck in which we from Highland rode to and from school. Though his major field was science, he also taught music and directed the choir. Such choirs as Northern Christian eventually produced under his leadership were the pride of our community and the envy of much larger communities.

World War II influenced our educational experiences tremendously. Older brothers were off to the military. The probability of our own military service after graduation shared the horizon with college. Gas and tire rationing curtailed our extra-curricular activities. We lived under the shadow of what information was given us about the ebb and flow of the tides of battle. Banners on which one or more stars were proudly displayed hung in the front windows of many of the homes in our community as they did from windows of homes across our nation.

Servicemen's banners displaying a star for each person gone from that particular congregation were hung in each of our churches. Gold stars among the blue stars named servicemen who would never return to worship.

Some of us enlisted while still in high school, accepted to join the military immediately upon graduation. Some waited to be drafted. Some sought other ways to serve. The influence of the war on our high school experience had a double perspective. It was enriching in that it projected our thinking beyond horizons that would have otherwise been quite limited. It made us think thoughts beyond the maturity level we would have thought had there been no war. It made us grow up faster than we would have under peace time circumstances. It limited our activities only to a small extent. We were inventive. We found ways to get around or live with the limitations of rationed gas and no new tires.

We who went to high school during the early 40s realized that graduation from high school meant not only the end of our relationship with Northern Christian, but also the end of our direct relationship to the hills and hollows in which we had grown to maturity. We were intent on stepping out of the world that had nourished us into a larger, inviting, challenging world, and we were ready to have a go at that world, come war or come peace.

Our school was small. Our graduation class of 1944, the largest in the three-year history of the school, had fewer than twenty members, welded into a closely knit body with loyalties and allegiances impossible for a larger body. We knew each other, our strengths and our weaknesses, and we accepted each other in spite of them because we had shared so much for so long. We knew unity!

Odds and Ends

Reprieve

How rare in the tableaux of human experience do we make a mistake that doesn't cost us. I had bought a .22 rifle and was taught how to use it when I was ten. How I used it! It became almost as much a part of me as my right arm. Three years later, when I thought I was more than careful with that .22, it happened!

It happened in the middle of a winter afternoon. I had walked alone from the house to the barn and entered it through the little arched east door, my .22 cradled in my left arm. The only sounds I heard were sparrows, tens of sparrows, chipping and chirping away as if their lives depended on the volume of their song. I had leave to kill any sparrow I could. The sparrows had learned that fact. Usually, when one of them saw me with my rifle in hand, he left for some haven on the other side of anything convenient.

When I came into the barn that afternoon, one sparrow was so involved in his song he didn't notice me as he sat on the knot-tying mechanism of the binder, which had, for some unusual reason, been parked for the winter in the north end of the barn floor. As quietly as I could, I cocked the bolt of my single shot rifle, sighted it on the bird, and shot. That ended its song and its life. One less sparrow to plague us!

No sooner had that sparrow fallen dead on the barn floor than a horrible, terrible fear grabbed my stomach. Across the barn floor, on the other side of an inch thick tamarack partition, in the direct line of fire from my rifle, was the stable and its row of ten cows. There was no way to escape the fact that one of those cows had taken the bullet after it had gone through the sparrow and through the board wall. I was in trouble!

Muscles tense as stretched rubber bands propelled me into and across the barn floor. I shut my eyes as I fingered the latch of the cow stable door and squeezed it open ever so slowly and quietly, knowing with everything in me that what I was about to see would be my doom. To my total amazement, every one of those ten cows was lying down, chewing her cud. I couldn't believe it! Not a single cow was in my line of fire! I could have screamed for joy. Maybe I did!

After my heart had slowed nearly to its normal rhythm I traced the route of the bullet. On the east end of the stable, at a height a foot lower than the hip of a standing cow, was a neat bullet hole. On the west wall of the stables, at a height slightly lower than the hip of a standing cow, was another bullet hole. I opened the west barn door and looked at the red painted exterior surface of the wall, that double layer of inch thick boards. The bullet had gone through both boards, leaving a single splinter of wood on exiting. I slid back into the

stable, closed the door, found a milk stool and sat for a few minutes. My legs were weak, my breath short.

The bullet holes were small enough not to attract attention. Most of the boards on the lower parts of our barn had so many nail holes in them that one more or one less hole the size of a nail would not be noticeable. I alone knew what had happened that winter afternoon. I was so thankful for the respite given me that I did not share my experience with anyone for years and years. But I had learned a lesson. Maybe two. I had learned never to shoot a rifle without taking into consideration as many of the consequences of firing that shell as is possible to consider. I think that I have also learned how humanly impossible it is to weigh consequences in the face of inviting opportunity.

Airplanes

One year after I was born Charles Lindbergh made his historic solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean. He became our hero. His book “We" was in our school library. Every one of us had read through that book at least once. Whenever we heard an airplane, we wondered whether perhaps it might be piloted by Lindy, our hero.

If we were in the house when we heard an airplane, we rushed out to see it. Unless we were in our seats in school or in a church service, we dropped what we were doing and scanned the skies to find that droning plane. The sound of a plane instantly emptied all of the chairs around the dinner table. Even the throne in a privy was known to be hurriedly vacated, and overall bib half up, suspenders still flapping in the process, some male rushed out to follow the flight path of a plane until it slipped out of sight. Sometimes a plane flew over as often as twice a month! What a sight to see!

Highland was nowhere near a commercial air route, so we saw few planes except during the early years of our involvement in World War II. Our area in Michigan has a topography similar to that of western Europe. Our hills of mixed farm lands and woodlots had much in common with areas our boys would fly over in France and Germany. Our air force assigned training flights called hedgehopping over our hills and hollows.

One quiet spring morning, I was plowing with the riding plow (pulled by our three aging horses) the field on the west edge of our land, half way up the farm. To the west, across the lane to the back pasture, lay more than twenty acres of hardwood. The sun was shining in its full glory. The larks and song sparrows were singing their welcome to the season. We were moving away from the woods toward the east on a comparatively level stretch of ground. Suddenly, with a blast of sound from its four engines, a B24 at tree-top height split the air over our heads and sailed across the hollow, up over the rise, and out of sight and sound, over our east line fence. I think the tail gunner waved to me as he passed overhead.

The horses didn't know about the war or about airplanes. They didn't know what to make of the ear shattering sound or that mammoth thing overhead. They stopped. They reared and pawed the air. They backed away from that horrible shape disappearing ahead of them. One of them whinnied. All of them danced a strange, frightened dance. Then suddenly, as if nothing had happened, all was as it had been. The sun shone, the breeze whispered, and the larks and sparrows picked up their songs on the notes they had left hanging in the air.

It took time for the hair on the back of my head to lay down. I found myself standing behind the plow, hanging onto the lines of the three-horse team for all I was worth. They had gotten their legs all scrambled in each other's tugs and traces. There was nothing to do but to unhook every tug from its singletree, slide the neckyoke off the end of the tongue and walk the horses away from the plow, bring them back to it again, and rehitch them to their proper places. But I had good reason to consider myself lucky. A younger, more spirited team would have run away with the plow and all, and who knows what damage they would have done. Airplanes and horses didn't mix.

Running Boards

Running boards are making a comeback, but only on light trucks. We thought they had forever disappeared from the history of the motor vehicle. For us who grew up among the hills and hollows of Highland, running boards were a fact of life. Every car had running boards. How was one expected to get into or out of a car if it didn't have running boards? The wheels were large, and the chassis was mounted high above the wheels. Running boards were the necessary step to entering or leaving a car. But running boards were much more than steps.

When a person driving down a country road caught up with a person walking in the same direction, human decency and good manners insisted the driver slow down, nearly to a stop, and ask the walker if he or she would like a lift. If the invitation was accepted, more often than not the driver would say, "Hop on," and the walker would step onto the running board. With one arm through the open window, he grasped the top door frame for support and stability as the driver let out the clutch, and they were on their way.

As they traveled, the driver would ascertain at what point the rider would like to be dropped off. When that point was reached, the driver slowed the car until the rider considered the speed slow enough to safely step off the car, jog a step or two, and again begin walking.

Without stopping, the driver continued on his way.

Or, if and when the interior of the car was filled to capacity and there were yet more bodies wishing transportation, and if the distance to be transported was short, four people could

easily find room on the running boards of a car, two on each side. Riding the running board to the pickle field from the house was far better than walking. Riding the running board to or from a ball game was far faster than walking.

Naturally, the driver of the car had always to take into consideration the fact that some of his passengers were outside the car. Sudden turns or quick stops were out, unless the driver was blessed with a contorted sense of humor.

On hot, sticky summer days, the best place to ride was the running board, where the moving air could blow your hair back and provide a few minutes of a cool impossible to find in any other way.

Progress demands its dues. What a sad day it was when Grandpa got a new car and one of my brothers lamentingly noted, “Hey! Grandpa's car ain't got no running boards!”

Holidays

We expended far less time and effort on our celebrations of holidays in the decades of the 1930s and 1940s than we do today. Holiday travel was out. We were tied to our chores, so we celebrated within the community, going only as far as Grandpa Westmaas for Thanksgiving dinner and to the picnic woods on the Fourth of July. But we did celebrate.

Christmas was our most durable celebration, due to the fact that a large part of it was the children's program given in the church for which we had practiced for hours at school. The children of the congregation who didn't attend the Christian School were included in the program in one way or another, though their practice with us was limited to the Catechism hour on the last two Saturdays before Christmas. Their part was so minimal they felt they didn't really fit in.

A first grader recited a welcome to kick off the program. I had that honor the year I qualified. I got through the welcome in fine style, but as I walked down the steps of the platform the oversize staple which held the rod which held the rubber runner onto the second step chose to pull out, allowing the runner to slide under my foot as I stepped on the tread. I landed hard! The whole church laughed. I didn't! Later I learned the proverb “Pride cometh before destruction.”

Acrostics, songs by various age groups, recited poems, and finally a group of Christmas Carols, sung by the entire assemblage of school age children, rounded out the hour planned by our good teachers with the assistance and advice of our pastor. The climax of the program was the presentation of a bag of mixed candy and peanuts to each participating youngster, a present from the consistory of the church. We had already received a present from the school board on the last day of school before Christmas. We

each got a pencil and an orange. The pencil was better than a penny pencil, painted on the outside, and sporting a brass cap holding a red eraser on the end opposite its point. How we cherished those two articles! More than likely, the orange would be the one and only orange we would eat during the entire year. Only when the years of the Depression began to wind down were we blessed with more expensive presents which we probably appreciated less than those pencils and oranges.

Family Christmas presents were very limited if they existed at all. I cannot recall that I ever received from or gave a Christmas present to my parents or to my siblings during most of the years I lived at home. If we did exchange presents, they must have been of a kind easily forgotten. The only present I can actually recall came from my Aunt Jenny when she was working as a nurse in Cutlerville. That Christmas, probably when I was three or four, was a cold, snowy day in a cold, snowy, early winter. The roads were blocked for cars, so we took our platform sleigh, such as it was, to Grandpa and Grandma Westmaas to have Christmas chicken dinner with them. Aunt Jenny, home from Cutlerville, had a present for each of us. Mine was a bow and arrow. On the way home the arrow slipped from the bed of the sleigh to be forever lost in the snow. We tried to make an arrow but never succeeded in making a workable one. That poor lonely bow was a reminder of that particular Christmas for several years.

I do recall receiving both a “sparkler” and a set of watercolors for my birthday early in January, so I suspect the absence of Christmas presents within our family was mostly an issue of philosophy or tradition.

We celebrated Easter, though our celebration would seem in our day a bit strange.

Apparently, everyone in our tradition and community celebrated the way we as a family did, for in church on Easter morning the topic of greatest interest was not the fact of the Resurrection, nor the power of the pastor's sermon, but was the number of eggs we had eaten for breakfast.

On Easter morning, Ma boiled a huge kettle full of eggs. Five minutes she boiled them, until there was a line of blue around the yolks. Ma used a slotted stirring spoon to pile them into a couple of white china bowls, which she placed on both ends of the table, and we set to them in great style. Of course, there were the side dishes of home-made bread and cereal, but it was the eggs that captivated our attention. We ate eggs until the thought of another egg gagged us. Then we counted the empty shells we had amassed, double counted, had the accuracy of our count verified by our siblings, got ready, and went to church with the tally firmly fixed in our minds, so as to last until the service was over and we could compare our accomplishments with those of our peers. One Easter, a young man boasted of having

consumed fifteen eggs. We doubted his word, but his sister backed him up. And who is to say? Maybe he did.

The Fourth of July was the red-letter day on all our calendars. Our day began with a literal bang. Dad enjoyed walking a stick of dynamite up the hill behind the toilet and blasting it as *Reveille* on the morning of the Fourth. If he didn't have a stick of dynamite on hand, he substituted his double barreled twelve-gauge shotgun, discharged much closer to the house.

After morning chores, we mowed a five acre piece of hay--the beginning of the hay harvest was part of the celebration of the Fourth. We spent a couple hours at the ball game at the Ouwinga diamond near the church, then packed the picnic dinner Ma had worked on all morning (she had baked the pies a day or two earlier), and traveled four miles to the picnic woods behind the East Side Christian School. There were no picnic tables. We took blankets and tablecloths to spread on the tall grass, and, with our extended families, sat on the ground around the spread cloths to share the good food and company. By the time Grandpa and Grandma Westmaas, Uncle Adam's, Uncle Bill's, Uncle Abe's, Uncle Jerry's, and Uncle Perry's had spread all their food on the cloths and were seated, we took up a significant area. We ate until we could eat no more.

Potato salad, wieners, baked beans, Jell-O, and pie were the annual staples. When we walked away from the dents our posteriors had made in the grass of the picnic grounds, we were sure we would not be able to down another bite until supper time, but before we knew it, we were at the canteen, buying a banana, an ice cream cone, a paddle pop, or a bottle of orange or grape soda, or a root beer.

Each year, the canteen was run by one of our three local grocers, each in turn. Since canteen trade was hectic and since the grocer in charge accepted untrained volunteer help, cash was not used, only tickets, priced at a nickel each and available only from a nearby table manned by a couple of volunteers who could handle making change. One ticket bought a candy bar, an ice cream cone, or a bottle of soda pop. Other luxuries cost two or even three tickets, but they were out of our price range except for firecrackers. Some years we splurged and bought three tickets worth of Zebras!

Our Fourth of July celebration had a peculiar twist to it. The cause which brought us to the picnic woods was not patriotism. Rather, it was the cause of denominational missions.

Promptly at two o'clock, the Mission Fest proper began. A temporary platform had been put together the night before the Fourth in a rather open spot within the wooded area. A pump organ graced one side of the platform and a speaker's podium front and center. Facing the podium were rows of planks on cement blocks to form the pews for the service. The three

congregations of McBain, Lucas, and Highland cooperated to create the festival. The three local ministers chaired the service, local singers sang duets, trios, and quartets, and the entire audience sang missionary hymns, always including “From Greenland's Icy Mountains” and “Far and Near the Fields are Teeming.” Sandwiched between all this fine music were the speakers, missionaries home on furlough from foreign fields in China and Nigeria, or from the home mission fields of the Indian Southwest or the inner cities within Chicago and New York.

On the fringes of the audience were those more interested in how the corn was growing than how the Indians were receiving the gospel. A bit farther from the audience were the adolescents who had yet to be convinced that, during such a sacred production, they should cease from lighting firecrackers and chasing each other from one clump of trees to another. Beyond were the groups of young people, enjoying each other's company, years away from accepting the adult responsibilities of listening while missionaries recounted their experiences.

The canteen closed during the long two hours of official Mission Fest time. After the “program,” everyone was free to talk and visit. Late in the afternoon, the men and boys went home to take care of the chores. For a while, the woods were rather quiet, but not for long. The chore boys came back hungry and finished off what food there was left in the picnic baskets. By that time, the potato salad was rather warm and probably well on its way to becoming poisonous, but it was still food and there was no sense in letting it go to waste.

An evening session at the stage, a shorter and lighter repetition of the afternoon session, concluded the day. The same speakers spoke, the same singers sang, but the atmosphere was never as serious. By the time that session was finished, even the adolescents had expended their energy and were ready to go home. Only the couples, now in their cars far beyond the sounds of the organ, the speakers, or the singers, carried on. There was the theater or the Roller Rink in Cadillac, or perhaps the fireworks in Lake City, and here and there was a lonely spot on some two-track, where the stars and the moon shone, and only we two to enjoy them.

One memory of the Fourth of July remains impressive. Our three churches had produced a men's barbershop style quartet which was superb. No Fourth went by but that they sang several songs, and when they sang, people listened. A pitch pipe started them at the desired note on the scale. From there, on they blended their voices to produce renditions of spirituals and hymns performed in the highest degree of perfection. What a blessing these men were to our community. Their names? Abe Lucas, Pete Smits, Clarence Van Houten, and Adam Westmaas.

The Thanksgiving Day celebration for our family was always at Grandpa and Grandma Westmaas. The day, after morning chores, began with a church service. Where else could Thanksgiving find its impetus than in church? We went to our church in Highland. Grandpa and Grandma went to theirs in Lucas. While we were worshipping, my mother's brothers were hunting our Thanksgiving dinner. Chicken was far too prosaic a meat around which to build a Thanksgiving meal. Turkey was not yet associated with our Thanksgiving. Rabbits were abundant, and besides, Grandma cooked rabbit with such a flair that it could not be equaled by any other meat. Rabbits were a must for Thanksgiving!

By the time church was over, the boys had harvested and dressed enough cottontails to satisfy our needs and more. Grandma changed out of her Sunday best into her everyday best, topped with a neatly pressed apron and her ever present dust cap, and went to work on the rabbits. First, she fried them in a hot, black, cast-iron skillet, sealing in all of their juices. Then she flooded the pan with hot water and boiled the seared flesh until it was tender to the bone. How she flavored her pot I have no idea. It seems the recipe has died with her, for try as they may, none of her daughters ever produced as tasty a pot as was Grandma's rabbit!

While the rabbit was cooking, the potatoes were boiled, the beans heated, the pies brought out from the separator room in the northeast corner of the house and cut into huge wedges, and the coffee perked. All the preparations came to the point of readiness at the same time. The table was set, the menfolk allowed into the kitchen from their smoky seats in the living room, and the reason for getting together on Thanksgiving Day was realized.

The meal began with a silent prayer. Grandpa never prayed aloud, and he never delegated the prayer to anyone. During the prayer the only sound was the melodic draining of the water pipe from the windmill into the low level of water in the yellow wooden barrel in the corner of the kitchen. Each elevation of the pump rods of the windmill produced its singular tune beginning at high C, dropping down whole tone by whole tone to F and then rising whole tone by whole tone back to C. Then Grandpa cleared his throat, and the sound-filled silence was exchanged by the noise of an extended family engaged in luxurious eating.

After the meal was finished, the women cleaned up the kitchen. No man was expected to help; no man was allowed to help. The kitchen was the domain of the women, and Grandma breached no breaking of that tradition. The men brought carom and checker boards into the living room. Grandpa, from his leather chair in the far corner of the room, took time out from his pipe and Summertime tobacco to tell the boys where to find them, but he need not have bothered, they knew from last year and the year before. After a pipe and a wee nap, he would play carom with the best of them, though he refused to use a stick

to shoot. A snap of his index finger shot his shooter with deadly accuracy. The games didn't stop until almost dark when it was time to do chores again. One by one, the married couples and their children squeezed into their cars and said their goodbyes. Grandpa and Uncle Bill, milk pails hanging from their hands and arms, headed for the barns and their chores. When the house finally got empty and quiet, Sport crawled out from his preserve behind the kitchen cook stove. Time to quit dreaming of bringing round the rabbits. Time to beg from Grandma a left-over bone as she opened the back door and shooed him out with her lusty Dutch, "Foet a met!."[2]

Memorial Day (Decoration Day to us) and Labor Day were only red numbers on our calendars, on a par with the numbers marking the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln. Mother's Day and Father's Day were not yet printed on the calendars. If they had been, they also would have received only red number recognition.

New Years Day was the only other holiday celebrated in our family, and that was because, as family, we had special cause to celebrate. It was my parents' wedding anniversary. A church service in the morning welcomed the new year. (A church service the previous afternoon or evening had closed out the old year.) Our house was an open house every New Year's afternoon. Relatives and friends were welcome to come at any time and to stay as long as they wished. There was molasses cake, and ice-box cookies, and coffee or tea, for any and all, and if you liked and were old enough to legally enjoy it, there was a bit of *Boeren Jonges*[3] for you. Even during the heart of the Depression, Dad found enough money to buy a fifth of whiskey and a couple of pounds of raisins. Two weeks before the day, he combined those ingredients with sugar and water to make a couple quarts of the traditional Dutch drink. For my folks' anniversary on New Year's Day, Dad's *Boeren Jonges* really hit the spot.

The Party Line

The wooden telephone box on the wall of our kitchen was our communications pass to our community and beyond. We were part of the McBain exchange, made up of several party lines. Our line was number 62. We shared it with some twenty families. Our phone was number 25, two long rings, five short rings. Grandpa Westmaas' line was numbered 51, their phone, number two. When Ma wanted to call Grandma, she would lift the receiver off the hook, near the top of the left-hand side of the wooden box, and listen to learn whether or not the line was in use. If it was, she had two options. She could keep the receiver to her ear and take in the ongoing conversation, which might contain something worth learning,

[2] "Get out of here"

[3] Two translations of this Dutch name are common. a) literally, "Farm Boys" b) figuratively, "Rascals"

though, more than likely, it was only over-the-back-fence chatting. Or she could hang up the receiver and wait five or more minutes and try again for a clear line.

Once she had the open line, she cranked a single ring by twirling the magneto handle on the right side of the phone box. The bells on the top of the front of the box (and all the bells on the fronts of all the boxes on our line) responded to every ring. The bell in the switchboard office in McBain also rang, and "Central," the girl at the switchboard, responded by asking politely, "Number please." Ma would answer, "51 F 2, please," and the girl pressed twice the button on line 51 and plugged in the connecting cord between the two lines. When Grandma answered, she and Ma visited for five or ten minutes, unless there was a special reason for the call. Then it lasted only a minute or two. Central kept listening now and then to see if they were still talking. If they had finished, she disconnected the two lines.

Winter afternoons were lonely for many farm women, especially those whose families were in school or out of the house. Every ring on the line was a temptation to relieve the boredom by listening. True, when she picked the receiver off the hook it did create a click on the line, and there was a chance the parties talking might hear that click, but then, if she had intended to make a call, she would have made a legitimate click, and besides, nobody could tell who it was that clicked, so she was ninety-percent sure that nobody would know it was she who listened.

If three or four people listened at the same time, their phones drained enough current from the line to make conversation difficult to hear. "Will you people who are listening get off the line so I can hear what my son is saying!" was the way one of our neighbors cleared the line late one night. The half-dozen clicks that followed improved the signal tremendously.

Calls made late in the evening or during the night were certain to attract listeners, even if they had to crawl out of a cozy bed into a cold house in the middle of the winter. Calls to the home of someone known to be ill attracted those who wanted to learn the latest. Every call to the parsonage gathered a cluster of ears.

Party lines did have the blessing of the long ring, the invitation for every person on the line to pick up the receiver and listen. Long rings were reserved for emergencies. They announced fires, deaths, accidents, and a need for help of many kinds. Central was expected to pass on to lines other than the one originating the long ring whatever information people on other lines could use. It was amazing how quickly so many people responded when summoned by the long ring. Bucket brigades to help fight a fire were in action in an amazingly short time after the long ring was given. If the building was doomed, at least the respondents could carry out the furnishings and belongings of the family within minutes. Party lines meant togetherness.

How many people were on a single party line? That varied according to geography. Our line began a half-mile east of our house with Fred Veldsma--#2, Van Houtens--#24, Grandpa Vredevoogd--#14, the Fredricks whose number I cannot recall, Corneal Bos--#6, the Ouwinga store--#51, the parsonage, the Kuipers, the Van Dykes, and many more west of the store, whose numbers have faded from memory except for one, number 13. The lady of that house always knew more about anything happening in Highland than any other single person. She truly fit the name given to the perpetual party line eaves dropper: “rubber neck.”

Home Brew

Dad and Ma were almost teetotalers, but not quite. Dad liked a bottle of beer during the heat of haying and bindering. Ma knew from experience what alcohol could do to a person, and she had little tolerance for even an occasional bottle. Early in my memory, Dad made some home brew. The brown bottles waited in the cellar. The bottle capper and the box of new caps were in the back kitchen cupboard. The recipe was in Dad's head.

I never tasted any of the stuff. Ma saw to that, and I was too young to care. The last batch didn't tum out the way it was supposed to. It had too much kick. When Clarence Sikkema, our hired man, began prying the cap off the bottle, the brew shot it out of his fingers and against the wainscot ceiling of the back kitchen. Then the liquid inside the bottle turned to foam and sizzled out of the neck. He got his mouth around the neck and captured most of it, but he and everyone else were laughing so hard he couldn't swallow much of it. They opened the next bottle inside an inverted milk pail, but that didn't totally solve the problem. Shortly thereafter, some of the bottles in the basement popped without human help.

Ma didn't like the smell of the beer in the back kitchen, let alone down the fruit cellar. She called a halt to making home brew. The fact that we kids were growing up probably helped her win her crusade. From that time, the only beer we made was root beer. We bought a few bottles of extract every summer and turned it into cases of drink for hot days and sultry nights. The bottle capper worked as well for root beer as it did for the alcoholic brew. If we had only been able to chill it farther than the temperature of the fruit cellar, it would have tasted better and made everyone more completely satisfied with it.

Emptying the Wash Machine

Our wash machines were many and well used. The first I recall was an ancient Thor. It had a wooden basket for the clothes which revolved through the wash water. Its power was a thirty-two-volt Delco motor. The last I recall was an almost new Speed Queen, with an agitator, one which featured a wringer with rubber rollers at least four inches in diameter and safety shut-off. Never did the folks buy a new machine. When Ma complained that her

machine was no longer functioning as it ought, and when Dad had done everything for the machine that his mechanical genius could produce, he went to the next auction sale and came home with another machine. The old one was dumped into a deep washout northwest of the barn.

Often, the machines had a hose or a hose connection by which the used wash water could be either emptied into pails or run through a garden hose for disposal out the back kitchen door. One machine had a hose connection so misused it no longer functioned, which meant we had to empty the machine from the top, using a kitchen pan and a milk pails. Ma enlisted the muscles of her older boys to empty the machine, boys who detested that job because they knew there was an easier way.

Necessity may be the mother of invention, but laziness is her stepmother. We boys knew what siphons were. We had used them often to transfer gas from the car to a gas can when the gasoline engine tank ran dry. Usually, the hose used to siphon was half the diameter of a garden hose, but the principle was the same. We reasoned, “Why not drape one end of a short length of garden hose into the wash machine, suck the air out of the other end, and, presto! the water would flow out the machine and out the back door.”

To get a short length of garden hose was no problem. At least two of us worked at the project, one holding one end of the hose under the water in the machine, the other sucking the air out. I did the sucking. I could feel that I was making headway, but a garden hose has more cubic feet of air in it than the gasoline tubes and all of the air had to be removed to coax the water through the hose. I had to do my sucking from a level lower than the water in the wash machine, so I was quite bent over. With one last, huge suck, I got the last of the air out of the hose.

Immediately, the water streamed out, much more quickly than I could turn off my sucking or pull my head out the way of the soapy, scummy wash water. Before I could stop anything, I had swallowed some of the vile stuff.

I dropped the end of the hose, gagged, and headed for the out of doors. The water didn't stay down long. Along with it came the remains of the last meal I had eaten. But the siphon worked! That tubful of water emptied with no further exertion of energy. But we never used that siphon again. My stomach said it wasn't worth the grief.

Washing The Cream Separator

The daily (six days a week) washing of the cream separator was Ma's job, at least until Gert was old enough and capable enough of doing a thoroughly reliable job of it. The job involved washing with soapy water and rinsing with clean water the supply tank, the bowl,

and the spout arrangement of the machine. The bowl was the fussy part. It had to be taken apart for the operation. Taking it apart meant a) screwing a retaining cap off the top (which had been put on and tightened with a wrench, so a wrench had to be used to remove it). b) lifting off the outer top shell. c) removing an inner retaining shell. d) inserting a metal frame through aligned holes in the discs and sliding them onto the frame. e) removing the rubber "o" ring on the inside bottom of the main frame of the bowl.

The first act of cleaning was the removal, from the inside of the top shell of the bowl, of a layer of solids extracted from the milk and collected as a tough layer a quarter-inch thick. A kitchen knife scraped the layer out of the shell, except when Ma forgot to take the knife along from the kitchen. Then a stiff forefinger did the job. The cats knew the routine. As soon as they heard the rattle of the separator parts, they came from the far parts of the barn, each to fight for a fair share of that layer of solids.

Each disc required a careful cleaning of all solids sticking to it, and a thorough rinsing of the soap scum produced by the washing. But the disks had to be kept exactly in the order in which they were stacked on the bowl core. Ma slid them off the frame into the water guardedly. She handled each carefully and replaced them on the frame in the precise order in which they had come off.

Once the various parts had been washed, she hung them on their proper hooks, nails which Dad had pounded into the wall on the east side of the barn, where they would stay until chore time when the bowl was re-assembled and each place properly arranged on the cream separator proper.

When the weather got too cold to wash the separator out of doors, Dad carried the pieces into the back kitchen of the house after morning chores. Sometime during the course of the day Ma would take the pieces into the kitchen and wash them, using the same pans as had been used to wash the dishes. Then they were relegated to the back kitchen until the next chore time.

After evening chores, Dad took the bowl apart, scraped out the layer of solids, rinsed the disks in clean water, and hung them to dry until morning. On Sunday he used the same "half-way" cleansing after each chore time. The bacteria in the bowl were controlled by the same Lord who had ordered Sabbath rest.

Buttermilk

During the years when we ran the milk from our herd through the cream separator, we churned our own butter. Churning was painful on two accounts. First was the fact that we could not sell the cream we had so carefully stored in the ten-gallon can in the back

kitchen after every milking. The second was the time and effort required to turn that cream into butter.

Ours was a large churn, though it was made from a small wooden keg or barrel, mounted on a stand, and fitted with a handle by which the entire barrel was turned. There were no baffles inside the barrel. After pouring a couple of gallons of cream into the barrel, one of us turned the crank, which sloshed the cream from one end of the barrel to the other often enough to coagulate the fatty solids in the liquid into a semi-solid mass of several pounds. During the last minutes, the lump of butter all but tipped the barrel over and out of its stand as it plopped from end to end inside the barrel. Had the stand not been built to take the strain, and had the lid of the barrel itself not been screwed down tightly, the contents would certainly have been lost. Churning took at least a half hour, and we considered it a most tedious job.

Once the butter was made, we opened a special drain faucet and slowly drained from it the remaining liquid, the buttermilk. With the buttermilk gone from the churn, we unscrewed its cap, tipped it bottom side up, and dropped the lump of butter into a small dish pan. The lump was a nearly tasteless anemic yellow. Ma turned it into butter by adding a couple of teaspoons of salt and a few drops of yellow food coloring. With a wooden spoon, she more or less kneaded the two through the lump until it was uniform in color. Satisfied with the product, she forced the butter into several empty wooden rectangular receptacles that shaped the soft substance into the pound-shapes of butter familiar wherever butter is sold. Whatever fraction of a pound remained was slid onto a saucer for immediate use. The full pounds were brought down the cool fruit cellar to await consumption.

At times, Ma didn't think it proper to go through the mess and hassle of producing several pounds of butter. And, sometimes, she found it hard to get one of the kids to turn the chum. Or was it that we needed the money a couple gallons of cream would bring? Regardless, sometimes, she took only a small two quarts of cream, and sealed it tightly into a two-quart mason jar. Shortly, the baby, whichever of my siblings it was who fit the description at the time, needed to be put to sleep, either by being rocked in the cradle or by being wheeled back and forth in the baby carriage. When the time came, she imbedded the two-quart jar in the blankets covering the baby, and whoever got the job of putting the baby to sleep also turned the cream into butter. Should the baby sleep before the butter was finished, too bad. The rocking action was not to be stopped until the lump was clearly evident through the glass walls of the jar.

But we were talking about buttermilk. Ma used some of the liquid in baking. Both Ma and Dad drank some of the rest of it. None of us kids could, or would, down it. It seemed that the tongue had to acquire a taste for buttermilk. Dutch people everywhere, as far as I can

determine, combined the buttermilk with barley and often with raisins, and turned it into a rather thick soup called “Soep en Brei.”[4] They served it piping hot, layered with sugar, preferably brown sugar, and eagerly ate it. Both my parents loved it! None of us kids could stomach it! The very smell of the soup nauseated us. I believe there was no other single thing on which the unanimity of us kids was as evident as was our refusal to have anything to do with *Soep en Brei*.

Yeast

Two or three times a week, Ma baked bread. Two or three times a week she kneaded yeast into the batch of dough to make it rise, ready for the oven. Two or three times a week we were reminded of the preciousness of the yeast.

Yeast was the mug of a frothy, bubbly, somewhat yellow substance kept forever in the warming oven of the kitchen range, the mug that needed a spoon or two of sugar and a bit of fresh water every day. A sniff assured the nose that the yeast was alive and well.

On bread baking day, Ma measured out a half cup of the brew and dumped it into the batch of dough already blended and shaped in the dishpan. She kneaded the batch until the yeast permeated the lump. She covered the pan with a dish towel and set the batch on top of the reservoir of the range to wait until the lump grew to totally fill the dish pan. Again, she kneaded the dough, working it down to half the size of the pan. Again, she covered it and set it on the back of the range. When it had again grown to fill the dishpan and more, she plopped it out on the flour dusted bread board on the kitchen table, shaped it into loaves, and put each loaf into a greased bread tin. Each loaf filled the tin two-thirds full. Ten or twelve tins used up the entire batch. They too were placed on the back of the range until each loaf was higher than the top of its tin. Then Ma put the loaves into the oven of the range, pre-heated to a specified degree as noted on the thermometer on the oven door. A half-hour later she removed the raised baked loaves from the oven, coated their baked brown crowns with a thin layer of lard, and stored them until they were needed.

The yeast that Ma had not used was fed and returned to the warming oven for the next batch of bread. But yeast was cantankerous. Should the room be cooler than usual, and should the warming oven be either hotter than the norm or cooler than the norm, the yeast reacted in ways all its own. Sometimes it was overly ambitious, creating too many “holes the baker crawled through” in the finished loaves of bread. Sometimes the yeast was sluggish, the dough slow to rise in the dish pan or loaf tins, and when taken from the oven, the loaves were smallish and denser than Ma could tolerate.

[4] Pronounced Soup and Bri, with a long “i.”

The day came when we had enough money to buy yeast from the store. Or was it that the grocer finally realized there was a need for packaged yeast, and made it available to the families of Highland. Whatever the cause, Ma's baking success was guaranteed to a much higher degree with her use of store-bought yeast.

The first packaged dry yeast came in either a granulated form in paper pouches or rectangular solids packed five or six to a sealed package. I recall that to use either, Ma would take the yeast from the package at breakfast, empty the packet or crush the rectangle into a drinking glass of warm, sweetened, water, and wait an hour or two for the yeast to activate.

Then she would use it as she had her perpetually saved mug in the warming oven.

Later, a semi-paste form of yeast was marketed in rectangular squares, each one wrapped separately and sold separately in a foil wrap. My memory is of a brand known as Red Star Yeast, the name printed over a red star emblazoned in the center of a square of white paper stuck to the top surface of the foil wrap. The advantage of this form of yeast was that it could be used almost as soon as it was taken from the wrapper. It was crumbled and dropped into a glass of warm water and stirred. Presto! It was ready to be kneaded into the lump. Once we had moved into the age of packaged yeast, Ma's record of successfully baked home-made bread was a sure thing.

Carpets and Rugs

We grew up without vacuum cleaners. We did have carpet sweepers, but alas, we had no carpets, though we didn't know it. We did have rugs, big nine-by-twelve rugs, that covered most of the square feet of the floors of our both our living room and dining room most of the time. By the end of the Depression, these rugs were very threadbare, but they were tough, and had seen us through hard times.

Our floors were constructed of pine boards, six inches wide, nailed to the sub floor as squeezed together as tightly as possible. We covered the board with linoleum in the kitchen and bedrooms, and around the rugs covering the major area of the other two rooms.

Though we had no vacuum cleaners, we did our best to keep our rugs clean. Once a week we took the carpet sweeper from the closet and ran it over the rugs. This removed most of hair, lint, and other foreign bodies. It failed to lift from it the sand tracked in by work shoes and kids' feet. To get at that sand, twice a year we emptied the two rooms of furniture, rolled up the rugs, and took them onto the lawn, laying them upside down on the grass, and beat them for all we were worth with brooms and carpet beaters. Clouds of dry dust attested the fact that our efforts made a difference.

Every scheduled Saturday cleaning, we ran a dust mop over the wood-grained linoleum border around the rugs. Twice a year, we mopped the linoleum. Only in the paths of high traffic was that mopping really necessary.

Linoleum-covered bedroom floors felt especially frigid in the cold Michigan winters. We usually were blessed with small throw rugs, hand-made by some local woman who owned a rug loom and created the rugs from worn-out dresses, shirts, and bedclothes. The 2' X 5' throws made getting out of bed in the morning a bit less painful. We also used throw rugs just inside each entry door into the kitchen. Work shoes field-tracked in a considerable amount of soil plus other unacceptable materials. As much in demand as throw rugs were, the price asked for them by the weavers was comparatively small. After all, the raw materials had been scrapped, and a woman's time and effort wasn't considered to be worth much.

Sleigh Bells

No transition from the colorful autumns of mid-Michigan to the silent white of winter was complete without the addition of sleigh bells to the harnesses of the horses who trotted through the white stuff to pull cutters and sleighs. The bells had hung silent on the walls of the horse stables throughout the three warm seasons, but with the first sleighing snow of the season, every farmer with a sense of artistry removed from their storage nails the leather strips, each adorned with brass bells, polished both the leather and the metal, and fixed them onto the higher straps of the horse harnesses.

The bells were hollow spheres two-thirds the size of a golf ball. Inside each sphere was a pea-sized metal ball. The bottom of the sphere was riveted onto a leather strap. The top of the sphere was a slotted plus sign a third of the circumference of the sphere. The number of bells per horse was some indication of the affluence of the horses' owner. Four bells was the minimum, a dozen the maximum per strip.

A walking horse produced little or no sound from the bells. A trotting horse set the bells to ring enthusiastically. Most of the time, the load inside the sleigh body was light enough so horses wanted to and did trot. Most of the time, the bells were delightful music in the silent, white world of winter snow.

Wish Books

Of wish books, we had three. In the order of importance, they were the *Sears Roebuck,* the *Montgomery Ward,* and the *Spiegel* catalogs The last was of lesser importance because its offerings were limited, but it was useful because the company specialized in credit.

Sometimes we needed credit. Seldom did the credit produce goods without headaches. Many a three-cent stamp was spent trying to iron out bookkeeping errors.

Seldom did we call the two most important producers of catalogs by their proper names.

In common parlance, Sears was “Sears and Sawhorse,” Montgomery Ward was “Monkey Ward.” Why? I have no idea, unless it was our way of taking down the mighty to our level.

Catalogs from the three mail-order houses arrived with neither charge nor obligation. We could see the springs sag on the mailman's car on those days when he delivered the catalogs. No doubt he was thankful all three were not shipped the same day.

During the most painful of the Depression years, we had little money with which to bless the mail-order houses, yet not a year went by that we failed to send out and receive orders for some of the commodities offered. We learned it was cheaper to send to Chicago for necessary items than to drive to Cadillac to buy the same item. And Chicago was sure to have the item in stock, more than could be said for the tiny Ward's store in Cadillac.

Aside from the practical reasons for making room in our home for the catalogs were the incidental reason. First of all, among them was wishful thinking. We had no money for ninety-nine percent of the items pictured in the catalogs, but we could dream. We spent hours dreaming. Our catalogs were read and re-read from cover to cover. We didn't talk to each other about the items that caught our eyes. That would only increase the misery of the knowledge that in our most fond dreams we were not going to be able to order the objects of our dreams. But it didn't cost anything to dream!

A second reason was the study of anatomy. The only source of accurate, specific pictures of the human body, male or female, though limited to parts not covered by the most intimate of wearing apparel, were the mail-order catalogs. Imagination did the rest. One does have to admit that for adolescents, mail-order catalogs filled an educational void.

The third reason for taking good care of the mail-order catalogs was the need for toilet paper. Most families were numerous enough that what was left of the daily and weekly newspapers after priority uses such as kindling fires in the stoves was not enough to provide a reliable source of toilet paper. Therefore, as soon as the new catalog arrived, the old catalog was relegated to the two-holer out in back. Slowly it was consumed, the thin black and white pages first because they were more effective, but eventually even the colored pages and lastly, those too thick for comfort.

None of the big three mail-order houses could possibly have made much money from our business, I'm sure, though when money became more abundant, we were faithful to them. Some young couples sent for dining room suites, dresser, and double beds from them.

Others I know sent to Sears for back-to-school outfits for their entire families. Some bought tractors, shipped in by freight, many bought tires. In the end, I'm certain that the persistence of the firms in supplying catalogs did turn a profit. We do confess, life in our hills and hollows would have been less bearable were it not for Sears and Sawhorse, Monkey Wards, and Spiegel.

Haircuts

Dad cut our hair, that is, the hair of his eight sons. From the time their crops of baby hair got too long to suit Ma, until we were in high school and became too vain to tolerate his style, Dad cut our hair. He was proud of his accomplishments as home-styled barber, though, at the completion of each effort, he did call Ma to give her critical evaluation of his product. Seldom did she offer corrective suggestions.

Photographs prove that Dad did a very decent job of barbering. Certainly, he was able to reproduce the current young male hair styles well enough that we didn't look out of place in any crowd. We had little to complain about in that department. We did complain about the pain he inflicted on us, pain resulting from the hand-powered clippers he used, in spite of their good condition. Before each use he took the clipper apart, cleaned it and lubricated it. But, it was hand powered. The squeeze-release process had to be executed perfectly to make the clipper perform as intended. An imperfect squeeze-release process caused the clipper to tug at the roots of the hair, rather than to painlessly clip it off its root.

Too often, Dad tried to cut our hair at the end of an already busy day. He was probably tired and had probably used his hands at many jobs in which the motions of his fingers were quite far removed from those demanded by the clippers. The result was that, too many times per head, Dad inflicted pain on the person being shorn. “Sit still!” Dad would order. “How can I cut your hair without digging to your scalp if you keep wiggling?” he would ask.

The answer from young heads was a burst of tears, and a time-consuming break in the operation, until Ma could dry the tears and keep the sobs from shaking the half-shorn head more than the jerking. The answer thrown angrily from older heads was, “How can I sit still when you keep pulling my hair? That hurts!”

Adding to the discomfort of the haircut was the fact that Dad imitated the local barbers one step beyond our happiness. The barbers in McBain and Cadillac to whom Dad went for his own haircuts were constant cigar smokers. Dad smoked. The fact that he saved the price of barbershop haircuts for his sons was excuse enough to spend a few nickels on cigars, cheap Crooks if possible. All the while he cut, he smoked.

We owned no barber chair. The only way to get the head high enough for comfortable cutting was to seat the victim on something higher than a kitchen chair. For the young, Dad used the highchair, but not its usual seat. Rather, he placed a two-foot length of one-by-ten across the wooden arms and seated the victim on that elevated throne. Older, taller victims were seated on inverted ten-gallon crock balanced atop a wooden kitchen chair. Neither seat was comfortable. Ma fastened a dish towel or baby diaper around our necks with a safety pin to keep most of the clipped hair from falling inside our shirt collars. Still, the amount of hair cut off at each cutting was significant, since the cuttings were usually at least a month apart. Which meant that we who were being shorn suffered from four distinct discomforts; a) the seat we sat on was neither comfortable nor stable; b) we felt as if as much hair was being pulled from our scalps as cut off it; c) the smoke of Dad's cigar nauseated us, and d) we were either being suffocated by the amount of hair we sucked into our nostrils or the itching sharp bits of hair down our necks..

Dad usually cut at least a half dozen heads of hair at a session, beginning with the youngest, working up to the oldest. I was the oldest. By the time he got to me, his quantity of patience had long since evaporated and his second or third cigar was totally rank. What I had seen and heard from those who had gone before me indicated that the role of the martyr was by far the most effective role for me to play while on the haircutting stool. Thankfully, my head of hair grew in such a way that later a professional barber confided that it was the kind of hair barbers love because it was all but impossible to make a mistake on it.

FDR

The people in our community were Republicans. Dyed-in-the-wool Republicans! One of the ministers in our church made the mistake of mentioning that he was going to vote Democratic in the next presidential election. His consistory almost ran him out of town. He talked fast to prevent it, explaining that his most recent charge had been in Iowa where the farmers were appreciative of everything Franklin Delano Roosevelt had done for them during the closing years of the Depression, and thus they voted solidly Democratic. Without investigating, he had assumed that the farmers in Michigan had been blest as had the farmers in Iowa, and that therefore they were Democrats. Nothing could have been farther from the truth. The very programs which had helped the corn and pig farmers in Iowa had damaged the dairy and general farmers of Michigan. At least, that was the opinion of the entire community.

FDR was vilified wherever the people of our area gathered. Had one collected the off-color jokes featuring FDR, orated only in the area's general stores on a Saturday night, he would have been able to fill a considerable book. Multiply that by the jokes told by Republican

auctioneers, in barber shops, and even at church meetings, the sum would have been rather staggering. People went beyond disagreeing with every aspect of his New Deal policies, they learned to hate the man himself!

Thankfully, we did have secret ballots. After the votes were tallied in Highland Township at the conclusion of a presidential election, the election board was forced to disclose the tally of the votes. In spite of all the spoken hatred, there were always a few votes cast for FDR. Our people knew quite well how many people in the township benefited from the New Deal in one way or another. But no matter how they tried, they could not account for a number of FDR votes. The mystery was never solved. The conclusion was that some who talked the loudest against FDR must have voted for him! Whoever the hypocrites were, they kept their identity a secret, much to the chagrin of those who would have given anything for the opportunity to change their minds.

Barbed Wire Fences

Fences were built to keep unwanted animals out of particular areas. Split rail and stone fences served our country's earliest citizens. Next on the scene were wire fences, woven in rectangular squares. Next came the barbed wire fence, effective, and much cheaper to build since making it took far less metal.

It was the barbs on the braided strands of wire that did the trick. Sharpened short lengths of metal wrapped around two strands of wire penetrated the hide of any animal who wanted to move his body into forbidden territory. In most cases the pain inflicted was enough to discourage the beast's desires.

Handling barbed wire while building or repairing the fences on a farm was wrought with danger. We wore leather gloves and often leather aprons to help protect our bodies from being slashed by the barbs. We rolled it on or played it off spools with extreme care. We tightened it with fence stretchers and nailed it to the posts supporting the fence with carefully calculated moves. Once in a while, we got in a hurry and forgot to be careful enough.

The deep scratches the barbs inflicted bled profusely and hurt even worse. Seldom did any of us put even a few hours at fence building without having been bitten by the barbs.

Untreated, the wounds were certain to become infected, so after we were finished with the fencing project, or at the next break for food or drink we did our best to fend off trouble. With the most potent of our soaps, we washed the wounds, then doused them with peroxide if we had it, with iodine if we didn't. Whichever we used, the result of the dousing

was a sharp, tooth gnawing shot of soul-deep agony lasting only seconds, but long enough to bring tears and groans, sometimes worse.

Scabs formed over the long wounds and the healing process began. Too often, we became impatient and picked at the scabs before the healing had been completed. Sometimes that meant new opportunity for infection to set in, which meant a repeated, painful application of iodine.

Those who picked the most often usually had scars to remind them of their foolishness.

Scars. Almost every clan in our community had one male member with hideous scars on his face. Those scars had come from barbed wire, but not from handling it during fencing operations. They came from riding sleds, toboggans, or even skis, down hills and into existing fences. Sometimes the accidents came when the victim missed an open gate, perhaps because it was too dark to see where it was, perhaps because he was unfamiliar with the territory.

Sometimes, the people involved in a wintry party became so interested in each other and the zest of youth they forgot caution until too late. Sometimes, wires broke and curled into positions where they had not lain on previous runs. Whatever the reason, faces sometimes got viciously slashed by barbed wire, not just one slash, but multiple slashes.

The pain these victims endured as the wounds were washed, antiseptically cleansed, and eventually sewn shut by a doctor is hard to imagine. But the pain went away. No matter how carefully the wounds were treated, the scars remained for life. Once a person had seen such scars on one face, he never needed to ask another person bearing similar scars their source. Barbed wire wrote an exceedingly singular signature.

The Neighbors

The neighbors were the people with whom we most often came into contact. Some were the people next-door, some were close friends with whom we visited often, some were relatives. All were people who influenced our lives in one way or another.

Uncle John and Aunt Gerty and family lived next door to the west of us, up the hill and across the road. He was gone most of the time, since he worked in a factory in Flint and came home only on some weekends. Wilmer, his oldest son and my cousin, was the only child of Uncle John's first wife, Winnie, my mother's sister. Aunt Gerty was his second wife. Their new family included three girls and an infant boy.

Wilmer and the older girls went to the Highland District #2 public school. Though two of the girls were close to my age, and though we did play together on occasion, we were never close. They were girls, I was a boy. About the time we became old enough to have an interest in each other, they moved to Grand Rapids. Their house and holdings were first rented to a Hendricks family. He taught in Highland District #2 for a few years. Then the place was bought by the Van Polens, an elderly “retired” couple who became members of our church.

Van Polens

Bob was the husband's name. We called him Old Man Van Polen. Fredericka was the wife's name. To us she was always Mrs. Van Polen. Their family of a dozen boys were all grown men. Some lived as far away as Chicago and Detroit. Several lived in the Grand Rapids area. One eventually came back to our area to farm. One was killed in the Normandy invasion.

The boys came home occasionally, on weekends and holidays, usually taking their growing families with them. Some of their children were of my age. Though I never knew any of them well, they seemed to me unusually interesting people.

Bob was a small man, bent with the weight of his years of farming. Mrs. Van Polen was heavy set, worn out from her years in the kitchen and in the barn. To walk across the room was for her a chore. On Sundays, Bob usually went to church. Fredericka seldom did. She couldn't manage the many steps into the building. Her life consisted of the making of meals for Bob and keeping the house somewhat in order, though, as a traditional Dutch housekeeper, she had long since been considered a total failure.

Two things about Bob impressed me. The first was his knowledge. He had only six years of formal education, but he was well educated. All his sons had gone through high school, and he gained nearly as much education from their schooling as they. Evenings, he and his

sons conjugated Latin verbs and recited geometric axioms to each other. He was acquainted with all of the principals of ancient history and knew a debit from a credit. Though he could not play a musical instrument, he could read music and enjoyed listening to good music. He had an ancient set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in his bookcase that he read to satisfy his mental thirst. To visit Bob was to immediately be invited to share whatever world he had most recently found between the covers of his encyclopedias.

His education had left him a bit critical of the ministers of our church at times. They kept a wary eye out for him. Most of the members of the congregation would never know the difference, should a minister misquote some authority to make a point in a sermon, but Bob did, and he didn't hesitate to call to task the minister who had not done his homework. Not that Bob didn't believe the message of the Gospel. Emphatically he did. But Bob questioned some theological interpretations and historical conclusions ministers made concerning specific passages in the Bible. Not all of our ministers appreciated Bob Van Polen.

A second impressive thing about Bob was his honey. Bob kept hundreds of hives of bees scattered on farms throughout the area. When Bob moved in next door, he still drove an ancient car. Each fall, his boys came home for a few days to help harvest the honey. They drove Bob's car from farm to farm, trailer in tow, on which they loaded the stacked supers, the upper stories of the hives, filled with their frames of wax and honey. Bob had installed his bee equipment in the building Uncle John had used as a garage. Central to the equipment was the honey extractor, a large metal drum into which a number of frames from the supers could be fitted at a time. With a special tool, Bob's boys shaved the caps off the cells of the honeycomb and placed the frames into the racks in the extractor. When it was filled, they bolted on the cap of the machine with its crank and gears. Turning the crank rotated the frames at such a speed as to expel the honey from the cells. Honey is sticky, so the process of extracting it from the combs took a bit of time. When the honeycombs were empty, they were returned to the supers. Next spring Bob would bring them to the hives to collect another crop of honey.

Bob and his boys filled jar after jar of honey from the faucet at the bottom of the extractor. A considerable clientele was waiting to buy the product of this annual honey flow in the romantically distant cities of Detroit and Chicago. The boys' fall trips to load the honey in their cars and to deliver it to various outlets were strictly business trips. They left their families behind. Their cars had no room for both family and the honey.

Bob finally realized he was no longer safe on the road, though traffic in our community was negligible. Besides, his old car had given out, and he didn't have the money to fix it, so he depended on his boys and on his neighbors for transportation. He caught rides to and from

church with neighbors with small families. We had no room for the man to ride with us to church. He didn't hesitate to call us, however, whenever someone had called him with news of a swarm of bees free for the taking. The swarm I recall the most vividly was hanging from the eaves of the Number Six School a mile and a half southeast of our home. School was in session. The teacher had sent one of her pupils to the neighbors to phone Bob, telling him that a swarm of bees was making life dangerous for her students and that she was scared to death of them. Bob called us to help. Dad was busy, so he told me to take the car and help Bob. I can't recall whether I was old enough to have a driver's license, but I did respond to Bob's plea with our '27 Chevy.

Into it, Bob loaded a cardboard box of a few cubic feet and a cedar shingle. We opened the windows of the back doors and strapped a sixteen-foot wooden ladder onto the car's fiber top. Bob had become so immune to the stings of bees that he no longer bothered with any kind of protective gear for himself, but he threw into the back seat a bee hat with a screen on the brim that could be fastened around the neck. He advised me to put it on should he need my help in any way. I had foresight enough to put on a long-sleeved shirt and to take along a pair of leather gloves. To say that I was brave and fearless as we drove the mile and a half to the school would be to lie. I was entering a world of which everything I had heard spelled pain!

Once at the school, we propped the ladder against the building, under and a bit to the side of the basketball-sized buzzing, living ball of bees. Their tone sounded angry as they protectingly surrounded their queen. Bob climbed the ladder, shingle in hand. I positioned the open cardboard box on the ground directly under the swarm. When he got close enough, Bob studied the swarm until he spotted the queen. “There she is,” he called out. With one quick swipe of the shingle he scooped her and several hundred of her protectors free from the eaves. They dropped into the cardboard box with a plop. “Close the lid! Close the lid!” Bob shouted to me. It took all the courage I had to reach down to that stinging mass and flip the cover flaps over them, but I did it. To my surprise, I didn't get a single sting.

The free bees flew wildly around the side of the school, desperately trying to find their queen. Finally, they landed on the box, found the gaps between the flaps of the lid, and squeezed through to rejoin their mistress. In minutes, the air around the school was almost totally free of bees. Bob pressed the flaps down a bit more tightly, picked up the box and carried it to the back seat of the car. “Better keep the windows open, and don't drive too fast,” Bob advised. “Any bees around here will try to keep up with us all way home.” He was right. The few remaining bees outside the box dutifully followed us the mile and a halfback to the Van Polen residence. Once there, Bob lifted the cardboard box from the back seat,

dumped it unceremoniously into a waiting hive, slapped the cover on it, waved a few angry bees away from his face, and calmly walked away, leaving well enough alone. Within a few hours the bees would adjust to their new home. Bob could then shut the entrance to the hive and at his convenience move it to the farm of his choice where the bees would fend for themselves and make honey for him. The cheery smile on Bob's wrinkled face communicated his satisfaction for a profitable morning far better than did his few words of thanks.

Van Houtens

The Art Van Houten family lived to the east of us on our side of the road, a short quarter of a mile down through the hollow and up a hill from which their house looked down on ours. Art was a widower by the time I came to know him. I vaguely recall that he had a wife, and can almost imagine that I can remember what she looked like, but probably this image was from her picture on his piano. Art's older children included John, who had been out of the house for several years, Rose who came home with her boyfriend a few times a year, and Pete, gone from home only a year or two. Earlier Dad had hired him to help in the fields on occasion, the last of which ended abruptly when Dad came home from wherever he had spent that day and found Pete sleeping alongside a stone pile “while the horses were resting.” The hoof prints under the horses led Dad to conclude they had been resting for a couple of hours. Dad took the horses to the barn. Pete cut across the fields to get home by the shortest route.

Pete was also responsible for killing the best cow dog our family ever owned. I remember shedding tears over the death of that dog. Dad later claimed that since he still owed Pete wages, he simply had taken the value of the dog off the amount paid, and Pete had never complained. He realized he shouldn't have been driving his car so fast past our house. It might have been one of us kids on the road instead of the dog. Pete didn't work for us anymore. He had moved to Grand Rapids to work at Keeler Brass or some other factory.

The Van Houten family I knew included three girls and another boy, all of whom were older than I. The girls, Lena, Jean, and Gezina were the housekeepers and meal makers. The boy, Bill, was Art's right-hand helper in the barn and on the farm. Bill and I worked together much of one winter making firewood out of the tops of the trees that the next neighbor down the road, Fred Veldsma, had cut and sold for lumber.

Art, who spoke only in short bursts, was an individual worth knowing. He was the sole male organist in our church. Though it was a well-known fact that he could not read a note of music, his repertoire included all the 150 Dutch Psalm tunes and a goodly number of hymns. Whenever he visited relatives in Grand Rapids, he carried back with him a new song

or two, songs he had heard in church and had fixed in his memory, from which he played them, though in his own fashion and style.

He owned a player-piano different from any other in the community. His didn't have the usual paper rolls that dictated which notes the piano played by perforations on the scroll that unrolled over a vacuum device at eye level in the front of the piano. His piano had a separate cabinet alongside the piano, attached to the piano by an electric cable. Exactly how the thin metallic scrolls fit onto the unit and how they made their music, I never had the chance to learn. The operation was performed under a lid which was opened only to take off the old scroll and put in the new.

Art also owned several phonographs (record players). With the coming of electricity to our farms, and when radios had become a part of our lives, Art got rid of some of his phonographs. He gave me an old Edison cylindrical record player, plus box of a couple dozen records. Included were the songs *Red Wing*, *Tipperary*, and *Shepherd's Dance*. It also included a half dozen Uncle Josh records that my parents promptly confiscated and destroyed. I had heard them all before and wouldn't have bothered to play them again anyway.

When I left home the phonograph stayed. At some point in time, one of my younger brothers decided it was important to learn how the machine worked, so he took it apart. He was never able to put it back together to make it work again. Neither could I. It stayed up in the attic for years. By the time it had become valuable, and I again became interested in trying to make it work, it had disappeared. Maybe it was just as well. I probably would have only become frustrated with it.

Art had a considerable mathematical talent. He could calculate nearly everything mentally. He could square any number less than a hundred in a matter of a second or two. He could produce the square root of any reasonable number in his head in a matter of a couple of seconds. He knew exactly how many hills of corn a ten-acre field contained if he was told on what grid it was planted. He could tell how many bushels of potatoes one should expect from a five-acre field planted two feet by thirty inches, each side of which could be expected to produce six salable potatoes.

Art read books. There wasn't a *Zane Grey* book published which he had not devoured.

He recalled the name of every character of every book he read, as well as the names of their horses. Books heavier than a *Zane Grey* novel were not for him. He wasn't interested. But *Horatio Alger* stories, *Heidi*, *The Girl of the Limberlost*, and even *Wuthering Heights* were all in his inventory. He was more than willing to loan us his books. Sometimes Dad and Ma made me bring them back to him unread. They had too many swear words in them.

The kitchen and back kitchen of the Van Houten house were painted a rather tame yellow high gloss paint. Inside the back kitchen of the Van Houten house was a most marvelous pump. Instead of the usual handle to be raised and lowered to produce water, this pump was built inside a wooden box a foot wide, four feet high, and three feet long. On its side was a cast iron wheel the size of a bicycle wheel, with a handle fixed on its rim. By turning the wheel, the rodded mechanism below the box was made to lower and raise and to produce water from a large spigot on the narrow end of the machine. The mechanism worked so smoothly I could hardly be convinced it transferred rotary motion to the vertical motion needed to pump water. Hook a pail on the spigot, turn the wheel twenty or thirty times, and you had a pail of clear, clean water without the erratic up and down action of any other pump in the country. Such a wonder!

The three Van Houten girls pampered me whenever I came to visit, which I did often when I was quite young. I had a head of curly hair with which they were fascinated. I recall the time they sent me home with straight hair. They had wet it and saturated it with “gooey,” the wave set they used in their hair. Ma was furious. I wasn't allowed to go back up the hill to visit for a month.

Art told a tale of how he had come close to an early death. When he bought his farm, many of its fields lacked a final clearing, as was true for most farms in the community at that time. The trees had been cut down, the wood cut and/or burned, and the soil surrounding the stumps had been plowed and planted, but the stumps had yet to be blasted out so the fields could be worked to an advantage.

According to Art's story, one day he had set a charge of dynamite under a stump, lit it, and had trotted off to await the blast, but nothing happened. He waited as long as deemed necessary after a failed charge, then walked to the stump, looked everything over and decided the charge needed a new length of fuse and a new cap. Before he began the work, he sat on the stump to load and light his pipe. As he struck the match to light the tobacco, the charge of dynamite finally went off. According to Art, the blast lifted him and the stump several feet off the ground and plumped them both back onto it with little dignity and no ceremony. The stump had shielded him from severe physical damage, though his hearing was never the same. At least that is what he attributed his deafness to. He showed us a pipe bowl in which sand was embedded and claimed that he had collected as much sand under his “hide” as the bowl of the pipe still held. We never doubted his word, though there wasn't anyone around who had seen it happen and could verify his story.

Vredevoogd Grandparents

Across the road from the Van Houtens was the home of my Grandparents. Grandpa himself had built the house and the four chicken coops on the place. He was proud of his work and rightly so. The house boasted a bathroom on the main floor and a garage in the walk-out basement. Ma claimed she could always smell gasoline when we visited there, but it never bothered the rest of us. On Friday mornings, the garage provided a comfortable place for loading into the car the eggs Grandma had stored in the recesses of the basement to peddle in Cadillac.

Though Grandpa spent much time with his chickens, he still found plenty of time to read. His library was the envy of many of our young ministers. Active as he was in church affairs, he felt obliged to keep up with the goings on within and beyond the denomination. His books on Bible study and theology were impressive, as were the books of Dutch history. His two volumes of *Motley's History of the Netherlands* were well lovingly worn. Every week he read from cover to cover *The Banner* and *De Wachter*, the English and the Dutch publications of our denomination. Every month he read *The Missionary Monthly*. He also subscribed to the *Michigan Farmer* and the *Hoard's Dairyman*, and, for lighter reading, bought the *Grit*. He kept a couple of seed catalogues in his magazine rack as a cure for winter blues.

Though capable of expressing himself well in English, Grandpa always prayed at the table in Dutch. I listened to him recite the Lord's Prayer in Dutch so often that at one time I could repeat it word for word. My grandparents tried to teach us the Dutch language, but we weren't very interested.

Both Grandpa and Grandma loved flowers. They had a fenced-in flower garden to the east of his house. Since the house was built on a hilltop, going to the flower garden was to go down several steps from the door of the built-in porch and then down a steep slope for some twenty feet to a metal gate on the southwest corner of the garden. The fence kept out the chickens that were otherwise allowed the run of the place.

Hollyhocks were the most noticeable flowers, but there were also several kinds of roses, peonies, dahlias, and Canterbury Bells, as well as the more common iris, glads, tulips, hyacinths, lilies of the valley, and zinnias. A four-foot-high castor bean hedge covered the entire north end of the garden. Each year Grandma saved ripe castor beans as seed for the next spring. I discovered them one winter day and ate a few, to my regret. I learned firsthand the source of castor oil. A garden on the west side of the house provided the vegetables for the couple. It was far enough from the chicken coops so there was little need to fence the chickens out of it.

A lawn surrounded three sides of Grandpa's house. To the best of my recollection, theirs, and the parsonage lawns, and that of Dave De Boer were the only regularly mowed lawns in Highland. Grandpa pushed a reel type mower to clip the native June grass that grew prolifically as long as the rains came.

Near the center of the lawn on the north side of the house, Grandpa had built an arbor, sheltering a home-made two-seat wooden swing that squeaked admirably when we sat in it and rocked. Grandma sat in that arbor on hot summer days to crochet, knit, or make her elaborate hooked rugs, and sometimes just to read. We loved to sit opposite her and keep the swing moving to keep us cool. If and when it got too hot to sit in the arbor and swing, there was the cooler front porch on the north side of the house, so sheltered by maple trees and spirea bushes that it was always cool.

As soon as electricity became available to them (1936), Grandpa and Grandma bought an electric stove and a refrigerator. On hot summer days, Grandma often made ice cream in the little ice cube compartment of the refrigerator. It wasn't as good as the homemade ice cream we made at in the bucket freezer at Grandpa Westmaas, but that freezer had to be cranked for a long time before the ice in the bucket turned the liquid inside the canister to ice cream. Grandma Vredevoogd had only to put a mixture of milk, eggs, sugar, and vanilla flavor in the little freezer compartment and wait for it to freeze. It flaked as it froze, so it wasn't smooth, but on a hot summer day, who minded a few ice crystals?

Grandma used a gasoline iron. Ma had a sad iron and heated its thick iron boats on the cook stove until they spit when she flicked water on them from the tips of her fingers. Then she locked them one at a time into their wooden and metal handle and with them pressed our shirts and skirts on the ironing board she had laid on the kitchen table. Grandma had an iron with a hollow metal ball containing gasoline on its back end. A pump handle stuck out of the top of the ball. Grandma pumped the tank full of air, turned a black knob at the bottom of the tank, lit a match and stuck it into a special hole along the top side of the iron under the handle. The burning gas-air mixture hissed and sizzled as it heated the bottom slab of metal hot enough to press Grandpa's Sunday shirts, her dresses and aprons, and even the bed sheets.

Grandma kept Dicky, her yellow and black canary, in a cage in the kitchen. It kept her company. She didn't have the modern miracles of radio, television, or CD players, but she did have her Dicky, who sang her heart out for a bit of food, a drink of water now and then, and Grandma's praise and attention all the while she worked in the kitchen. Sometimes Grandma let her out of her cage for an hour or two. I think she did it to tease me when I came over, because I couldn't stand the feel of the bird's claws on my shoulder or on the top of my head, and Grandma knew it.

Every day, we poured a half gallon of whole milk from the supply tank of the separator into a metal pail for Grandpa and Grandma. Every day except Sunday, one of us brought the pail up the hill. On Sunday, Grandpa picked up the milk on the way home from church. On Sunday, the pail they left for the next day's milk had in it a candy bar for us to divide into as many pieces as there were mouths to share the treat. The milk not used by the end of each day Grandma poured into a pan on the back of the kitchen stove to slowly sour and curdle into cottage cheese. Nothing ought to go to waste, you know!

Grandpa and Grandma tried to give their grandchildren an ever-increasing knowledge of parts of the State of Michigan. When each of us neared ten years of age, we, with our cousins of like age, were invited to share the back seat of Grandpa's current Chevy and were taken to some point of interest on the west shore of our state. Each of us had two or three turns before we were too old to take along. We visited Traverse City, where we ate sandwiches in the park and enjoyed the display of a miniature Traverse City. Another day we spent at Frankfort, watching sail planes silently soar on the air currents created by the water, the shore, and the dunes. We spent another day at Ludington, watching the car ferry unload and load.

Before we went on such a trip, our parents coached us to the point of fear about how much noise we might make in the back seat, and not to dare to ask for candy bars or ice cream. Those were Spartan days, and we were told how thankful we had to be for Grandparents who considered us worthy to take a trip with them. Never on our trips did Grandpa and Grandma splurge to the point of taking us to a restaurant. There were roadside tables and parks, and Grandma had packed sandwiches and lemonade plus some recently ripened Transparent apples from their own orchard. Who needed a restaurant?

To my regret, the cousins closest to me in age were all girls. We rode three in the back seat, except one time when we were packed four in the seat. My interest in girls was still stuck in the stage of dislike, so I did my best to keep to my corner of the seat very quietly, attracting the attention of as few people in the car as was possible. Most of the time I ambitiously studied the continually varying landscape.

Grandpa was more deaf than he admitted, which often gave all of us a bit of entertainment regardless of our gender. 1930s cars had stick shifts, since automatic transmissions had yet to be invented. Grandpa heard too little of the sound of the engine to know when he should begin to let the clutch out to put his car into motion. He took no chances on stalling the engine. He fed the engine enough gas to tum the eyes of bystanders in our direction, wondering if he had intentions of flying the car. As soon as the clutch began to take hold, it jerked the car ahead with a thrust powerful enough to shove all occupants including Grandpa against the backs of their seats. This action totally engaged the clutch. Sand and

gravel flew out from under the rear wheels as the car lurched ahead onto whatever bit of road or highway toward which Grandpa had it aimed.

We in the back seat knew what was coming, but we never dared to laugh, though we did look at each other with knowing looks as soon as Grandpa turned the key, started the engine, and made ready for the take-off. We exchanged knowing looks while our heads snapped back against the cushioned seat, and we exchanged knowing looks while our heads snapped forward and back again before finally settling down to a measure of stability. We wore ear-to-ear grins and our bellies shook with bottled mirth, but we let not a single sound out of our mouths. At every new start, Grandma firmly set her jaw and looked straight ahead. She knew better than to turn and throw glances into the grinning faces in the back seat.

Grandpa lived to be seventy. He knew, and we knew, that he suffered from high blood pressure. He wasn't allowed to eat any salt, but he did eat lots of onions and garlic because they were supposed to be good for high blood pressure, and often he had experienced serious nose bleeds. One day he had a stroke. He suffered on his bed in their bedroom for a few days. The doctor said there was nothing to do for him and assured us that he didn't know he was suffering. Dad took me to see him, lying on his bed, breathing in long, uneven, rasping breaths, pausing so long between breaths that we thought with each that he had died. Finally, he did.

Grandma, Aunt Tena, Uncle Jake, Dad, and Aunt Betty were all at his bedside when he died. Probably most of the in-laws were present as well, I don't recall. He died late in the morning of a day during the pickle season. We pickle-picking kids had been sent out to pick them. The morning was sad and sober until some of our cousins came over, dropped off by their parents as they went to be at Grandpa's bedside. The cousins younger than I, too young for the solemnity of the situation to have impressed them. It wasn't long before my younger siblings and the cousins were totally involved in a pickle battle. No adult was there to say no to them, and I didn't have enough authority to make stick anything I might have said. The contrast between the hilarity of the pickle field and the sadness of the bedroom “up the hill” was almost too much for me. I picked pickles angrily and rapidly, putting as much distance as I could between me and my callous cousins.

To say, in so many words, that Grandpa and I were close, as we have come to know close relationships today, would be an exaggeration. We had a deep respect for each other. I looked up to him because I sensed he was a man who had the respect of the community. He had tremendous anticipation for my future and took advantage of every opportunity to challenge me. He urged me to read books and magazines I would never have read except for him. He dangled the carrot of prestige and honor before me when I learned to play the

organ and piano, assuring me that one day I would certainly play in church. We talked about current events covering everything from our Highland happenings to the affairs of Europe, Asia, and Africa, but we seldom talked about the nitty-gritty day-to-day issues of life.

One day, I happened into the chicken coop he was cleaning. At the time, we denizens of our two-mile road were dissatisfied with the service the county highway department was providing. I opened the door from the feed storage room into the chicken coop to see him standing beside his wheelbarrow, leaning on his five-tine fork, vehemently rehearsing what he intended to say to the county highway commissioner that afternoon. He never knew I had witnessed his rehearsal. If my memory serves me right, that speech, however vividly it must have been delivered, accomplished as little at the county seat as it had in the chicken coop.

After Grandpa was gone, Grandma tried to carry on with the chickens with help from me, my siblings, and some of our cousins. Since I was old enough to handle most of the actual work, I spent several hours a week in Grandpa's chicken coops, but Grandma's efforts weren't enough. Dad helped with the egg route, but the farm was too busy for him to take a whole day off every week for the eggs, and Grandma couldn't afford to pay him for that day. Anyway, after a year or so, she finally sold the chickens, sold the place, and moved in with Aunt Betty in Grand Rapids.

Even though it was my Uncle Fred and Aunt Irene and their family who moved into Grandpa's house, things there were never the same. I didn't like to go into the house because everything was so different. The beautiful dining room table with its carved lion's feet was gone. The beautiful wooden chairs in the living room with their well-worn but comfortable cushions were gone. The bookcases filled with books were gone. Even the smell of the house was different.

Veldsmas

Our next neighbors to the east on the north side of the road were Mr. and Mrs. Fred Veldsma. Never on this side of the polders of The Netherlands could you find a set of farm buildings more neat and more clean. The cliche, “A place for everything and everything in its place,” could well have been coined about the Veldsmas. Their three children were grown and gone, though Tressa, their only daughter, lived on a farm only a half-mile away. At times during the growing season, Fred needed some extra help around the farm, and sometimes he called on one of us boys to help him. I worked there often. He always paid the same day that we worked. I liked that.

Fred was never in a hurry. Hurry is contrary to neatness. It takes time to be neat. Fred had all the time in the world, but he did get things done. To see him stroll from the house to the barn, one would think the chores would take him forever, but he was an efficient worker.

Seldom did he make a mismove. His barn was very like ours in design, because Gerrit Bierma had drawn the plans for both. His cow stables were on the main floor, as were ours, but they were so much neater and cleaner than ours. We claimed he must have had his cows trained not to pollute the walk as they went in and out, but we knew better. He just had a lot better broom to clean up after them!

His root cellar was beneath the northwest corner of his barn. It wasn't as large as ours, but just as cool. An elevator was the only access to the cellar, but it was quite different from the elevator we had. The person riding it grasped a rope looped down into the cage from the mechanism above it, and by pulling the rope hand over hand in one direction the elevator was made to ease down to the floor of the cellar. Reversing the direction of the pull on the rope slowly brought one back up to the level of the barn floor. It didn't take a lot of muscle to pull the rope. It did take time for the elevator to make its descent and ascent, but Fred was never in a hurry.

Fred grew five acres of potatoes a year. For several years I helped plant his potatoes.

Fred rented the same planter we did. I never minded riding the back end of the planter at Veldsmas. That little elevator that demanded a potato in each slot as it endlessly rolled around on its gears could go terribly fast when the person driving the team of horses was in a hurry. Fred was never in a hurry. I never missed a slot when I worked for Fred.

Fred had problems getting enough people to help him pick the potatoes when he dug them, since most of the kids were busy on their own farms and his family was grown and gone. But he was patient. When the neighbors had their potatoes out and picked, they came over to help Fred. We did too.

Meals at the Veldsmas were not the high point of the day for me when I worked there.

Neither Fred nor his wife were large of frame, and neither carried extra weight. Their meals spoke the reason for such fitness. The quality of the food was excellent. It was the quantity that I couldn't get used to. I always went away from their table a little hungry, and I'm sure Fred did too, especially after a hard morning of work, but he never complained. What his wife served he ate, and no more. He carried his proper weight erectly. His quiet assurance that he had everything and anything he might need to meet whatever the demands life showed in the way he held high his full head of pure white hair and looked the world full in its face.

Next door to the east of the Fred Veldsmas and on the same north side of the road was Fred's older brother Martin and his wife. They were totally retired and certainly seemed old enough for the role. He had a small barn on his forty acres with a cow or two to supply their milk. Keeping those cows and tending his tiny garden were the limit of Martin's activities, except for the making of a pair of wooden shoes for one of the neighbors now and then.

We didn't have much to do with Martin and his wife. When I stopped there to sell Cloverine Salve or flower seeds, they always had all they needed already, but they were pleasant old people. If they had more money than it appeared, they were conserving it to last the rest of their lives.

In their prime, both Fred and Martin (and Harry, a third brother) were known for their building skills. They had planned and built an excellent potato house in Park Lake, engineered to require as little effort as possible to carry on the business of storing potatoes and shipping them by railroad box car. When a fire burned down the potato house, and its owner decided he would rather move his operation to Canada than to rebuild in the ghost town Park Lake had become, he hired some of the Veldsmas to come with him for however long it would take them to design and build a similar facility in Canada.

Hibmas

Further to the east, nearly a mile from our farm and on the same north side of the road, was the Hibma farm. The Hibmas were as Dutch as we were, but they weren't church people. Rumor had it they had come to Highland from either the Leroy or the Luther area which was some fifteen miles south and west of Highland. Rumor also had it that their move to Highland was a case of necessity--something about the law. Or was it that they had to leave The Netherlands because of some kind of illegal activity? Those were the questions we didn't ask and answers we weren't given. Since they weren't “our kind of people” we had little to do with them.

We knew that their talk was punctuated by cursing and swearing, that they spent a good deal of time in the saloons and bars of Park Lake and Marion, and we wondered where else.

They did take excellent care of their property. Their buildings were painted white and trimmed with dark green, more often and to a higher degree of perfection than most in the area. Their frontage along the road was totally fenced with ornamental wooden fencing, complete with an imposing gate which was nearly always kept shut.

The family boasted four boys. Sieb, the oldest, married, and moved a few miles to the south and had a family of his own. The other three remained bachelors. There was John and Johannes (some claimed that one of the two was a brother of Mr. Hibma, not his son), and

then there was Hein who stayed at home when his parents became old to take care of them until they died. I don't recall who died first, but within a couple of years both were gone. My parents told that the funerals were conducted in the home by the funeral director from Marion. There was no minister. There was no church service. There was no singing or praying. I only know what my folks told me. They felt they had to attend because, after all, they were neighbors, and Hein, now alone, was close in age to my folks. Occasionally, years ago, Dad and Hein had gone places and done things together and lately had helped each other thresh and with the cattle.

There was the year when Hein didn't have enough help to keep the threshing machine fed as fast as the crew insisted, so Hein had called each of the neighbors between him and us in turn, but none of them chose to help. When finally he called us, Dad and I both went. It was a hot day, and Hein thought he should treat the crew to something to keep them cool while they worked, so be broke into his store of Apple Jack, home-made hard cider. I was too young to have any. Dad and the rest of the crew weren't.

Apparently, the stuff was potent, because by the time the stacks had been reduced nearly to ground level and the bundles had to be pitched up into the maw of the threshing machine, the aim of those pitching was quite on the wide side. Often a bundle would flop off the carrier and onto the belt, riding it halfway to the steam engine before it toppled off onto the ground. I got the job of bringing the stray bundles back to the threshing machine. Why such poor aim should have made everyone laugh as they did was beyond me at the time. And why the men pitching had such trouble keeping their balance and such a huge fear of the edge of what was left of the yard-high stacks was also a puzzle. I had no problems with either my balance or my aim. Nor did I comprehend why everyone but me should find so much to laugh so hilariously about. I had lived such a sheltered life!

After his folks had died, Hein had more to do with us than ever before. He became interested enough in religion to accept a Bible and to read it somewhat, and he visited church a few times, though obviously he felt out of place. Some of the services were still conducted in the Holland language at the time, and Hein's Dutch was of little use. He had forgotten more than he remembered. At the time he died, he insisted, as he had insisted throughout his life, that all God expected of a man was to live a good life and not to treat anyone badly. That was the sum total of his religion, and he lived by what he believed.

Veddlers

Across the road from the Hibmas were the Veddlers. They had as little as possible to do with the Hibmas. It seems that years ago there had been friction between the two families.

Maybe it was the result of the language the Hibmas used when they were angry with each other or when they had more than enough to drink. Maybe it had something to do with cows getting out and into other people's gardens or corn. Whatever the cause, the two families were farther apart than the distance across the narrow road.

We had little to do with the Veddlers since they went to the McBain church and we went to Highland. They were good people. I sold them several boxes of Cloverine Salve, and I could always count on them to buy some flower seeds. They had a flower garden in the middle of their front lawn, though they didn't cut the grass of the lawn more often than we did which was but a couple times a summer. Their flowers we pretty enough, but they didn't show much from the road.

The Veddlers were younger than my parents, and their children were younger than we.

They had a productive farm. The soil of their hills and hollows was heavier than ours, and they had a swamp and a creek in the south end of their land with some kind of a pond on or near it. Their house was painted a yellow with brown trim, different from any of the other houses on our road. It did look good in those colors.

Eisingas

The Eisinga farm on the north side of the road was the last one on our road. The Eisingas went to our church and their younger children, John and Agnes, went to our school. Their older children had gone to the Number Six public school a half-mile to the south of their farm. The two and a half mile walk to the Christian School was a challenge for John and Agnes, but our school would have been the less for it had they not attended.

The Eisinga family was one of the most Dutch families in our neighborhood. They could speak English, but most of the time they didn't. Once, I had gone home with John on a Sunday noon for dinner, but I didn't like the experience. I felt I was being talked about more than talked to. I could understand some Dutch, but not the dialect nor the speed the Eisingas used. With them, everything was rushed. They worked hard and fast. They ate fast and plentifully. Their play was rough and tumble. Their frames were lean and sinewy, their muscles hard and powerful. Coupled with the determination that seems to have been the earmark of all immigrant families, they were bound to succeed, and succeed they did.

The oldest of the Eisinga offspring were recently married or were marrying when I began to notice they existed. Each found a farm somewhere within the radius of our church family and set up for himself, and each did well. The younger family members moved to Grand Rapids when they grew up, since they could find in Highland neither a mate nor an available farm on which to settle.

Fredericks

You have already met the Van Polens, our immediate neighbors to the west. Beyond them and on the opposite side of the road was the Ed Fredricks farm. The couple was nearly as old as my grandparents, but much more active. Ed was a short man with a lively step and a happy disposition. Never can I recall Ed being angry, depressed, or frustrated. His walk announced joviality. His wife seemed quite different. Regardless what I did, I could never quite please her. She bought Cloverine Salve from me, but only after she bawled me out for not shutting the back kitchen door tightly enough when I came through it. When Jess Heeringa and I were asked by Ed to shoot some of the hundreds of pigeons that were making cleanliness impossible on the farm, she chewed us out for not killing one of them dead on the first shot. He had fluttered to the ground, and he fluttered around for a full half minute before he finally died, and that was terrible!

Perhaps my perspective of Mrs. Fredricks was flavored by an incident at a time I came to their house to sell flower seeds. It was still early in the morning, and the family was at the breakfast table. The weather was warm and the doors and windows were open. I stepped into the back kitchen of the house without being noticed by anyone except the dog who had come running to me to lick my fingers. No more had I entered than a verbal storm broke loose in the kitchen. Mrs. Fredricks unleashed a torrent of angry words at her husband, sentence after invective sentence.

I didn't stick around to hear Ed's reply, nor to hear whether the daughters who no doubt were sitting at the table joined in on either side of the discussion. I had witnessed enough discussions in similar tones in our own home to know that this was neither the time nor the place to try to sell anything. The dog and I made rapid but silent tracks toward the road.

Ed's family was large and spread over a span of years. By the time I learned about them, the older ones, as old as my parents, had married and moved out. The youngest, Margaret and Wilma, were but a few years older than I. They helped their mother in the house. Ed worked the barn and the farm largely by himself.

Ed was a horseman, and proud of the fact. He had six of the most beautiful horses in the community, and he loved to work with them. The soil of his farm was a bit on the light side, but he knew how to keep it in place, preventing it from running down the hills and into the hollows as so much soil did in the days before soil conservation practices were considered important.

Ed also loved big cars, Buicks, Pontiacs, or Dodges, cars that looked better and rode more smoothly than Chevys or Fords. He took care of his vehicles and they took care of him.

The silo-filling company to which he belonged depended on him to provide it with reliable power to run the fillers. He differed in his choice of fillers from Dad. A Papec wouldn't do what he wanted. He chose the Blizzard, even though it took more belt power. With the help of Uncle John, he had mounted an old Dodge six-cylinder engine on a wooden sled, replaced the driveshaft with a pulley, and attached to it a governor to control its speed, and dared anyone to shove enough corn down the maw of that Blizzard silo filler fast enough to stall the engine.

Though he usually worked alone, Ed always had time to keep things neat. He painted all of his buildings himself, and the job he did was most excellent. The peak of the south side of his barn, the side with a walk-out basement and silo, was high enough to require the full length of a twenty foot extension ladder and more, but Ed never hesitated to paint that peak. In fact, he appeared to thoroughly enjoy the scenery from that height.

The Fredricks attended the Reformed Church in the village of Lucas, a five-mile drive from Highland. To get there, they passed two Christian Reformed churches. They disagreed with the Christian Reformed insistence on Christian Education. To them, the public schools were good enough, and to take all the Christian children out of the public school would only serve to weaken the already weakening Christian influence in the community. Besides, Christian Schools cost a lot of money, more money than was good for a family to spend on education.

Though we disagreed with the Fredricks on this point, our relationship with them was cordial. We exchanged help when needed, though Ed was much a self-made man and got along with a minimum of outside help. His 120 acres of farmland was on both the north and the south sides of the road. Those acres had raised a large family and had kept the boys and Ed busy for many long years. They had done him well and he had done them well.

Many were the mornings the coincidence of Ed walking to the barn after breakfast and my walking to school occasioned an exchange of greetings between us. He never satisfied himself by calling out a cheerful “Good morning!” He always accented his voice by a powerful waving of his cap in such a loop as to describe the modulation of his words. Ed was one happy man!

Heukers

To the west of the Fredricks, on the north side of the road, was the farm of Henry and Frances Heuker (pronounced Hooker, an Americanization of an impossible Dutch pronunciation). They were younger than my folks by only a couple of years. They attended our church, as did both sets of their parents. Their children went to our Christian School, so we walked to and from school with them often.

Harm, Elsie, Harold, Jim, and Mildred were the older children of the family, with a few younger members I never knew by name. We seldom saw eye to eye with them about anything. They were Ford people, we were Chevy people. They were horse people, we were tractor people. When we walked home from school with them, we argued. Sometimes our arguing became physical.

The Heukers had a fine garden across a fence from the road. Ripe tomatoes hanging from their vines in the fall were an open invitation to leave the road, step over the fence into the garden and pick a luscious red one to eat on the way home. Their apple orchard was near the road, too. We helped ourselves. Hank's hunting hounds usually announced our presence, and they sometimes forced themselves out of their perpetual naps along the sunny side the front porch of the house long enough to nuzzle us and snarl a little, but they didn't mean anything by it.

The Heuker family was nearly as busy as ours. What with a house full of young children, Frances didn't have much time to spend outdoors or in the barn. We saw her hanging out the wash when we walked by on the way to school, and we always called out hello and she always answered. We didn't have that much to do with her in any other way, but she was always friendly. Hank was a good farmer, and his land and buildings testified to the fact.

Bos

Directly across the road from the Heukers was the farm of Corneal and Minnie Bos, with four girls and Lou, their only boy. The girls, Betty, Sally, and Gert were all older than I, plus Nell, in my grade. We knew the older girls quite well because, when Ma needed help in the house and none of her sisters could come, she called on the Bos girls. It was usually Sally who came. She helped with the cooking, the washing, and the cleaning when many of my brothers and sisters were born and at odd times between birthings.

The Bos farm was one of the hilliest around, and its soil was light. How Corneal ever coaxed from it the fine crops he did was a mystery. He had to work hard and plan well to succeed, but succeed he did. To watch him walk was to know he would succeed. For a short man, his stride was as long as that of any six-footer. From a quarter of a mile off, anyone could recognize his walk. We jokingly claimed it was the result of necessity, climbing up and down those hills. We were wrong. It was his walk that conquered those hills!

Corneal was almost as neat as Fred Veldsma. His red barn was a two-story building, thirty feet tall, with mows taking up almost all the main floor. The cattle barn and horse stables were in the basement that opened to the south. It was the barn floor that I recall the best. No matter how much in a hurry Corneal was, after the chores were done, the cattle fed, and the stables cleaned, he swept the barn floor. Not a wisp of hay, not a stalk of straw

stayed on that barn floor overnight. The neatness of his granary, tool shed, and chicken coop matched the neatness of that clean swept barn floor.

Corneal owned an antique that impressed me. He had more, like the cradle he had once used to cut grain and the scythes which hung in the tool shed but were seldom used. The item that fastened itself in my mind was a Civil War muzzle-loading rifle, setting on its wooden stock along the east wall, ramrod and all, oiled and polished and ready for inspection. Occasionally, when Jess Heeringa and I were roaming the country looking for something to hunt or trap or just killing time on a chilly winter afternoon, we'd stop in and “chew the fat” with Lou. A couple of times, he showed us that gun. We dreamed of being able to locate black powder, balls, and caps so we could shoot it, but we were years and miles away from such exotic possibilities.

Minnie's house, white trimmed with green, and her garden were as neat as the barn floor of which her husband boasted. In her parlor was a pump organ with an ornate top, carved and spindled, a fine mirror in the center of it all. The red velvet cushioned top of the organ stool matched the red cloth backing behind the wooden scroll work below the keyboard and alongside the music rack. Betty played both that organ and the pipe organ in church.

The rest of the furniture in the parlor was as remarkable as the organ. A mohair overstuffed sofa and chair, set on a colorful oriental type of rug, distinguishing the room from any in the community. All the house was as free from dust and grime as the girls and Minnie could keep it, ready for a white glove inspection any day of the week.

For many years Corneal was one of the pillars of the church. Many a time, he had the honor (obligation) of reading sermons to our congregation when our church was without a pastor and couldn't arrange for one to fill the pulpit on a given Sunday. His voice was rather weak and quavering, and his ability to read was far from faultless, but he did the best he could, and everyone respected him for doing so. He was, it seemed, always in the consistory, the ruling body of the church, and he was often the vice president. During those periods of time when our congregation was seeking a pastor, he also taught catechism. He was far from fluent, certainly not a trained teacher, but we knew the man well enough to know that when Corneal said something, he meant it. Sincerity was his middle name, and we were willing to listen to what he had to say. Others at times tried to teach us our catechism. When they did, we got away with frivolities behind the backs of students in the row ahead of us. When Corneal taught, we gave him the honor of our respect.

Jake Vredevoogds

Around the corner and to the north of our road, on the west side of the road was the farm of Uncle Jake and Aunt Bertha and their family. The family included the three older girls, Sally, Evelyn, and Louise, sons Nick and Lawrence, and a younger daughter Carrie.

The house was of red-orange brick, built to stand the test of time. The unpainted barn was sturdy but Spartan. The soil of the farm light and poor. The family had been in the process of paying for the farm, but the Depression made that impossible. After Uncle Jake lost the farm, a succession of families lived on it for a number of years, some who farmed, some who just needed a roof over their heads. Eventually the Abe Kuiper family moved there.

Uncle Jake was a great storyteller. When we were young, he mesmerized us with his tall tales. The only one I actually recall was about a cat that he had decided to get rid of. His efforts were frustrated by the fact that cats have nine lives. He had tried one thing after another, but always the cat managed to survive. Finally, in desperation, he decided to waste a shot gun shell on the animal, so he took it behind the barn, put a shell in the chamber of his gun, aimed, pulled the trigger, and shot the head off the cat. The cat was dead. But, said he, “The next morning when I walked from the house to the barn with milk pails hanging from both my hands, there came that cat around the corner of the barn, carrying his head in his mouth. And, you know, I never was able to get rid of that cat!”

Kuipers

The Kuiper family that moved onto Uncle Jake's farm had lived across the field to the northwest of our farm. Their older boys, Al and John, sometimes worked for us on the farm, and we visited back and forth with the family, yet there was a reserved distance between us. Abe was a hulk of a man, whose Sunday pants needed suspenders to keep them up. Nellie was a frail, diminutive person. They had nearly the same number of children as my folks did, though they started on their family ten years earlier.

The Kuipers were hurting financially during their early years. Abe worked in the blacksmith shop in McBain part time to help make ends meet. They attended our church and Christian school, but how they managed to pay tuition and budget was more than we could imagine. They had to be scraping bottom all the while. Their farm was only forty acres, the soil was good, though some of it was terribly stony. The buildings were dilapidated. Winter breezes waved the lace curtains on the windows in the living room. The house didn't have running water. I recall that, on a Sunday noon when I shared their table at the invitation of Nelson or

Pete, the older boys in the family went out to the well and pumped water to set in pails beside the kitchen sink from which we dipped water to wash our hands and to fill the glasses at the place settings on the table.

The barn was even more worn than was the house. Cattle could hardly keep warm in the stables in the cold of winter. The road they lived on was little more than two tracks cut through the native June grass into the soil by the wheels of the wagons and cars that sometimes traveled it. The road had its claim to notoriety, however. One summer afternoon in the 1930s, a car no one in the area had ever seen before, a powerful black expensive model, sped down that road. It turned at the end of the road and sped past our farm. We saw it and wondered. Later, we learned that the Cadillac State Bank had been robbed. Apparently, the culprits had scouted the community for the least traveled roads out of Cadillac and had chosen that two-track as part of their escape route.

Abe went to Men's Society regularly. He was one of the faithful who, during the winter months, laid aside his chores and his farming activities every Tuesday afternoon to walk to church for a couple hours of theology. He was one of the most talkative of the men as they walked home from church after the meeting, walking with us as we walked home from school. The smoke from the corn cob pipe he clutched within the digits on his hand to keep them warm curled around his face as he continued to question the high points of the formal discussion begun in the church basement with Corneal Bos, Henry Heuker, and sometimes my Dad. Abe's walk was a heavy, plodding walk, but his mind was agile.

We were happy for the Kuiper family when they were able to move off their tired forty acres next door to take up residency in Uncle Jake's old place.

Joe Mouse

Those were the close neighbors, the men and women whose lives most often touched our lives. Other members of our community are impossible to forget, and they ought not to be forgotten. Joe Mouse comes to mind immediately. His father was Tys Mys. Joe was the “black sheep” of the Mys family, an individualist and a loner. Hence the surname name Mys (pronounced Mice) didn't fit him. He became Joe Mouse. He had left home at an early age to work on the railroad in one of the western states. Eventually, a heavy section of rail had landed on one of his feet, cutting off his toes. That ended his career on the railroad.

He had learned the cobbler trade to keep body and soul together. The necessity of having a special shoe for his toeless foot may have had something to do with his choice.

Regardless, he lived in a two-room shack on the north side of the road a bit to the east of the general store at Highland Corners. We brought all of our shoe problems to Joe Mouse

and he fixed them. Usually, we visited him during school noon hours. He would be finishing his noon meal when we came. Sometimes, we had to wait for him to take a last bite. We noticed that he never read the Bible nor prayed when he was finished, as we did in all of our homes. He simply scraped his chair back on the wooden floor from the table, set on the floor the dirty plate and the pans he had used in cooking, along with whatever silverware and other tools he had used. His cat licked them clean. He boasted he never washed dishes. His cat, he claimed, was his only maid, and she was good enough for him.

He had his sturdy sewing machine, last, hammers, and nails in the part of the room closest to the road. It didn't take long for him to put on a new set of soles or heels, or to resew the tongue to the uppers, or to sew up the back strip of leather to the main part of the uppers. For a quarter, he did anything needed to make our shoes right again, and all that within the noon hour of a school day. Our parents never allowed girls to visit Joe. If they needed a shoe fixed, we boys had to take it to him. We never saw Joe in church.

Hann Heuker

One couple we never failed to see in church were Mr. and Mrs. Hann Heuker. They were the parents of Henry Heuker, our near neighbor, and parents of several other members of our church. Though they were getting on in years, they were not yet retired. They lived a long half mile east of church on the south side of the road. Their farm buildings were impressive. The white house trimmed with dark green and their well-kept red barn trimmed in white set back from the road a bit and parallel to it were neatly kept.

One thing that made the couple memorable was their entry into the church each worship service. They came into the sanctuary together through the back southeast corner door, but once inside they parted ways. He walked to the center of the church and took the center aisle to a pew almost to the front, sitting close to the aisle. She walked down the side aisle along the windows to the same pew, entered it from the far end and walked down it until she sat down next to her husband. Their full-throttled pace gave even the most solemn of worshippers cause to smile. Had they walked faster they would have been running. If there was some bit of history behind so unique an entry into the sanctuary as they made, none of us discovered it.

Ouwingas

The Ouwinga family certainly influenced us in many ways. John and Sarah were the owners and operators of the corner grocery store for most of my years on our family farm. Sarah was a daughter of Ed Fredricks, our next-door neighbor, and was nearly the same age as Dad and Ma. John was a son of the “Old Ouwingas,” whom I remember only after they moved off their farm and son Minard and his wife Mary took it over. “Old Ouwingas” lived in

a large house south of the store, on the east side of the road where the Coffee family had lived until they closed down their sawmill and moved out. A field a short way east of the house was the most nearly-level spot in all of Highland, and the only field available for a baseball diamond. It doubled as a cow pasture when we weren't playing ball on it, but we didn't mind too much. We cleaned the “cow pies” off it and considered ourselves fortunate to have a ball diamond.

Two of the Ouwinga sons, Menko and Paul, were ministers in our denomination. Paul was young enough to have taught me in Sunday School for a year or two. He came home during the summers of his college days to earn money for his education, and, during those summer days, he spent part of his Sundays teaching us. John taught Sunday School for many more years. His voice had a particularly resonant monotone quality that militated against the content of the lesson. Since we had sat through a lengthy church service before Sunday School, we had to fight to stay wake through the lesson. The content of John's lessons were worth fighting for.

Menko preached in our church on several occasions when I was young. He had interesting sermons and a good delivery. People said he was going to go places, and the members of the congregations he served as pastor claim he lived up to their expectations.

Between Menko and Paul was Mart. His ball playing expertise made him a hero of the diamond, until eventually he left for Grand Rapids and an opportunity to make a better living than Highland offered.

Ellens

Another family to remember was that of Harry and Minnie Ellens. They lived a long mile southwest of the church. Since they were only a few years younger than my parents, we visited back and forth on Sunday nights often. They had a few goats who enjoyed walking on the roofs of the various farm sheds, and occasionally clambered onto car roofs, though they knew they weren't supposed to. Since car roofs were, for the largest part, a tough fabric stretched over a framework of wood and coated with a tar-like waterproofing, people didn't appreciate the mountaineering of the goats. Usually no damage was done, but there were days when, after an evening visit with the Ellens family, we spent time sewing and tarring the roof of the car as best we could, grumbling and complaining about the nerve of some people's kids!

Minnie, though cheerfully robust, didn't always appreciate the methods and efforts of the teachers in our school. Several times during any given school year, the routine of the day was punctuated by an unannounced visit from Minnie to complain to the teacher, usually in the hall between the two rooms. Since Minnie had a penetrating voice, at least half of the

conversation was audible in the classroom. It took new teachers a bit of time to learn that her bark was much worse than her bite and that given a little time, differences could be settled, peace could again reign, and the educational process could go on unimpeded. We did feel, and with a certain amount of justification, that the Ellens' kids were given temporary preferential treatment after each of Minnie's visits.

Harry was a rather tall, lank figure, hardworking and capable. Like Dad, he was forced to find other things than farming by which to keep the wolf from his door. He was one of the first in our community to recognize that Cadillac offered profitable job opportunities. He spent many of his years working in Cadillac and encouraged others to follow his example. Many did.

Heeringas

To the north and west of our farm, located in the northwest corner of the same square mile of land on which our farm was located was the Heeringa farm. Wiebe, his wife, and most of their family were recent immigrants. She spoke no English and could understand very little of it. He did much better, but the family was more comfortable when talking their Vries (pronounced "Freese") dialect of the Dutch language than not.

The four Heeringa children were George, a couple years older than I, Jess, my age and in my grade in school, Pete, a few years younger than I, and Sadie, young enough when we were growing up not to get in the way of our ambitious plans. Jess and I were close friends during our school days and somewhat later. He had more free time than I did, mostly due to the comparatively small size of their family. BB gun in hand, he walked the long mile across the fields to our home almost every Saturday, so we could spend an hour or two playing together during the years we were in grade school. Often, he had to wait for me to get finished with the housework and/or the chores before I could join him in whatever activity we had planned. We fished together in the marl pits and the creek, east off the road, just north of the Number Six public school, though we never caught any fish. Perhaps the rotting chicken meat Grandpa donated as bait didn't suit the fancy of any fish. We hunted together, first with BB guns, then with our .22 caliber rifles, and finally with our shotguns. Mostly we shot rabbits and squirrels, with a partridge or two thrown in for good measure.

Partridge hunting was especially challenging. Those birds flush out of cover so fast and with so much noise that one has almost to shoot from the hip to hit one, especially if the cover has any amount of brush and trees in it. Jess became expert at shooting from the hip. That expertise turned sour the day we were hunting in the swamp northwest of Number Six School when, much to our surprise, we flushed a pheasant. Jess got his shot away before the bird was six feet off the ground. The poor pheasant didn't have a chance. It took the full

charge of the pellets instead of the usual three or four when shot from a respectable distance. When Jess tried to pick up the dead bird by one of its legs, the leg came off He tried the other with the same result.

Finally, he cradled the bird in his hands and stuffed it into his game pouch. Later, when he tried to clean the bird, he found it so pulverized with shot that there was nothing to do but bury it. What a pity! Pheasant meat was a step up from partridge meat, and this rare one went to waste.

Wiebe Heeringa was a most diligent farmer, up before daylight, in the field and working by seven every morning of the growing season. His farm was neat and clean, and his wife was more than his match in making the house everything a Dutch farm home should be. They took particularly good care of their '32 Model A Ford. It had to have been the most washed and the most often cleaned car on the church parking lot, bar none, the product of the care of Mrs. Heeringa and her boys.

I ate many a Sunday noon dinner at the Heeringa home. If I had any needs or desires, the boys interpreted them to their mother. She coached her boys to ask repeatedly whether there was anything else I would like to have, and if there was, she saw to it that I was treated to it. She had no mercy on her own children if they did or said something that they knew was beyond their restrictions. Though she spouted Dutch at them, I was able to understand enough of it to know how bad the infraction was considered, and could quite well gauge what kind of penalty was being meted out. Sometimes they got punished for doing a thing that I had also done, but since they knew the rules and I didn't, they were the ones who suffered. It took me a long time to overcome feelings of guilt on such occasions.

Dad and I cut the oats on the Heeringa farm the first year we had a tractor. After we had it cut and had put the traveling wheels on the binder to take it down the road, Wiebe came up to Dad and said something to the effect that, now he could understand how it could be that, though Dad never got out in the field before eight in the morning, an hour after Wiebe had begun a hard day's work, when quitting time came, Dad had done more work than he had. As well as Wiebe liked horses, he certainly came to appreciate the amount of work a tractor could do in less time.

One late spring day, a storm swept down out of the northwest onto the Heeringa farm and flattened their barn. The debris was scattered to the south and east of the foundations on which the barn had stood and was distributed in more of a straight line than would have been the case had the wind been a tornado. During the early summer months, Joe Schierbeek, a local carpenter, got everything ready for the rebuilding of the barn, and, on an advertised day, the entire community joined in an old-fashioned barn raising. What a time

we had! The precut timbers, joists, rafters, roof boards, and siding all fit together according to plan, and by the time the sun went down that evening there was precious little left to do to complete the building of the barn, shingles and all.

The neighbor women brought food from their own homes and helped Mrs. Heeringa make what had to be made on location to provide coffee for the crew in mid-morning, a noon dinner, and a lunch break in mid-afternoon. The men complained that they could hardly eat all the women had made for them, but they managed. We turned back the clock a generation for that barn-raising, but we had the privilege of tasting the kind of satisfaction cooperation produced. Perhaps the inspiration of that event was what prompted both Jess and Pete to choose careers as builders.

Koetjes

Some two miles to the south and east of Highland Corners was the Koetje community. Three brothers, John, Corneal, and Ed, began their farming careers within a mile of each other. We never shared much with these families, probably because the Koetje boys were enough older than Dad and Ma to create a distance between them. We seldom, if ever, visited back and forth with them on Sunday evenings, and I can recall only a time or two that I spent a Sunday noon with any of the families, though some of the boys in each were of my age.

A few things about each of these families in one way or another impacted our lives.

Most of John's family was older than ours, and I presume John was ten or more years older than Dad. Mike was only a year older than I. One September, Mike came back to school with one of his fingers shorter than it had been when he left school in the spring, clipped off by a blade of the mowing machine. We never asked for details, and he wasn't about to tell us, but we were well aware of his loss.

Within a year of that event, Mike's father died. We were told that, after eating supper in the evening (they did all of their chores including the milking before they ate), he had gone into the “other room,” other meaning neither kitchen nor bedroom, to read the paper while the rest of the family was washing the dishes and cleaning the kitchen. After they had finished, they came into the room and found him slumped down in his chair, dead of an apparent heart attack.

A death at such an early age shocked all of us. Three days later, we sat in school and tried to study while the funeral was being conducted in the church next door. Our bodies were in our seats, but our minds and hearts were in church with Mike and his family. When the church bell began to toll as the funeral procession traveled the half-mile west from the

church to the cemetery, we counted. How sad that a life had been taken when it had only attained a total tolling of fifty-one! A short time after the funeral, the family moved from Highland to town, where work was available for more members of the family.

Ed Koetje had experienced his share of grief before my memory kept records. His first wife, a dark-complexioned woman and the mother of his older children, had died. The youngest of this family, a daughter Bina, was probably more than five years my senior. I remember that she too left home, first to work in Grand Rapids and then to marry. By that time, Ed had remarried. His new wife, Grace, was younger than he and quite different from his first wife, a woman of light complexion, hardworking, and very plain. Talk was that since she was so different from their mother, his older children would have little to do with her.

It didn't take long for Ed and Grace to begin a second family. Case, the oldest, was my age, followed quickly by Harold, Gezina, Jim, and younger children whose names I never knew. The household was always lively. I did spend an occasional Sunday noon with Case, and, later, I gave music lessons to both Harold and Gezina, so I got to know them quite well.

Corneal Koetje had married a schoolteacher. That was the end of her teaching career, for married women were not allowed to continue their educational profession. Throughout her life, she retained the bearing of a “school ma’am,” straight of posture, precise of words and actions. Two boys were the product of that marriage, Wilbert (Whip) and Casper (Cap), one older and one younger than I. We went to school together and got along well, but somehow close friendship never developed between us. I recall spending one Sunday noon with Cap, and I think that was the only time I was ever in their home. We had differing interests in life.

Drachts

Near the Koetje farms was the farm of Ed Dracht and his wife Winnie. Winnie was my mother's cousin, a Scripsema by birth, as was my mother's mother. Since we were of the same blood, we had a rather close relationship with the Drachts. Their children were close in age to us in our family, and we visited back and forth often. They lived in a stone house that we considered unique. Ed had mechanical interests that paralleled those of Dad. He had bought his Silver King tractor as early as we bought our Allis Chalmers. Their older children, Kay, Eleanor, Nell, Wilma, and Torn were our match for inventiveness in games to play when our families visited together. That they lived too far away from the Christian School to attend made little difference to us. We knew them from church, and we knew them as relatives, and we had hilarious times together.

Ed was a venturesome farmer, always trying the untried and unproven, and not always totally successful. Adventure was in his blood, and he pursued adventures in farming on his clay soil. Farmers who didn't share his spirit shook their heads when he decided to

plant cabbages instead of potatoes but he weathered the experiment and may even have made more money those years than if he had planted potatoes. Who was to tell? I do think his lithe frame spoke of his huge expenditure of energy he spent on his ventures. In the end, he had neither more nor less money than those who farmed more conventionally, but he had a twinkle in his eye the conventional farmers couldn't match.

Konyndyks

The Konyndyk family lived about a mile directly south of the church. Of all the farms of the members of our congregation, theirs must have been the least productive. The soil of the farm was poor by any standards, sandy, and far from fertile. The buildings on the farm were in horrible condition. No barn in the community was less worthy of housing animals than was theirs. How those critters managed to keep from freezing during the winter storms was a miracle. There was room for only about a half dozen milk cows and a couple of horses. If I recall, their stalls were on the south side of the barn, which no doubt aided their survival. At least those poor animals got whatever warm rays of the sun as were available.

The house was little better than the barn. Insulation was totally lacking, and the windows had long since ceased to lock out the winds and the cold. The Round Oak stove in the “other room” and the range in the kitchen were the only means by which the house was heated, and such stoves were never known to hold their fire overnight. How cold that house must have been on a frigid winter morning!

Life in the Konyndyk household was never so preoccupied with the business of earning a living that it didn't have time for the pleasurable, whatever that might have been at the moment. Before electricity came to the Konyndyk household, they had the Victrola to keep them company. Their supply of Uncle Josh records they played and replayed was unending, and each repeated playing of its vaudeville variety of jokes produced as much laughter as it had the first time they came through the tinny amplifier of the machine.

The two or three hound dogs, who had the run of the place, told of the enjoyment Jim and his boys found in hunting. I recall eating more rabbits than chicken when I visited Joe on Sunday noons, not all of them shot during the hunting season.

Jim had lost some of his fingers in a hunting accident, if what his sons told was true. It seems he had stopped to chat with someone he met, more or less leaning on his shotgun, its stock on the ground, his fingers over the end of the barrel. According to the story, his dog became impatient to be on with the hunt and began pawing at Jim's pant leg. In the process it pulled back the open hammer of the gun. Since the gun was an early model without the protection of safety mechanisms, when the dog's foot slid off the hammer, the hammer

snapped against the firing pin and fired the round in the barrel. The blast took with it some of Jim's fingers.

Though there was not a level area large enough for a ball diamond in the farmyard at the Konyndyk home, there were enough of us to make up an impromptu ball team on the summer Sunday noons I visited there, especially if one of the other members of the family had taken company along, too. Pa and Ma Konyndyk more often than not took their places on the team. He had more energy for a game of ball played on a shrunken, tilted diamond than he had to pursue the frustrating work of trying to grow crops from the miserably uncooperative soil of his farm!

Westmaas

Some two miles southwest of our church at Highland Corners was the farm of Uncle Adam and Aunt Tena. Uncle Adam was my mother's brother, and Aunt Tena was my father's sister. That made us and their children double cousins. Evelyn, Gert, Marvin, Claressa, Rich, and Ken were very much like us in many ways. The first two were older than I, the rest somewhat younger. They attended both our school and our church. Uncle Adam had a strong singing voice and loved music. He led a Singing School in church, a school that met one night a week during the part of the year that wasn't overly busy with farm work. He read music well, but didn't play an instrument.

My earliest recollection of Uncle Adam's family comes in two installments. One had to do with a large portrait, hanging in an oval frame on the wall of their living room, a portrait of a child, a daughter, who had died when only a couple of years old. At that time, the affluence of all of our families was such that all young children had their portraits made professionally when they were a year or two old. Uncle Adam and Aunt Tena were so thankful that they had the portrait to remind them of the child they had lost.

The second thing that I recall was that a fire had destroyed their home. I didn't see the fire. By the time we got there, the house had burned down and only the basement walls were left. Smoke still came from the remains of the wooden furniture lying in the thick ashes on the basement floor. Near them were the twisted metal bedsteads, the furnace, and the cook stove.

The family moved the furniture they had salvaged, and that which had been given to them by friends and neighbors, into the two-stall garage they had built a few years prior to the fire.

Blankets and sheets hung from clothes lines strung across the garage to furnish a degree of privacy for the members of the family. A kerosene stove produced heat for cooking.

The house bad burned in the spring when everyone in the farming community was too busy with farm work to get involved in the building of a new house, so Uncle Adam hired relatives from Grand Rapids who boarded by other relatives. Rebuilding didn't take long. The debris was cleaned from the old basement, and the new house was built on the same foundation and basement walls.

It took several years before a visit with the family could be accomplished without hearing some references of comparison of the new house with the old one. There may have been a bit of envy and of pride involved in the whole thing. Few families in our community had the privilege of living in a new house.

Feeringas

Another family deserves notice, that of Louwe and Sepke Feeringa, the janitors of our church during the years I recall the best. They lived in a house on the north side of the road just east of the Ouwinga Store on Highland Corners. They had retired and sold their farm and farmhouse near Stoney Corners and had moved into a house built for them by their son-in-law, Corneal Bos.

We knew the couple only as Mr. and Mrs. Feeringa. Even my parents spoke of them only as Mr. and Mrs., a rare thing in that day. As janitor, he fired the furnace in the winter, opened the windows in the summer, and the two of them cleaned and dusted between times. He also shooed us boys out of the church barns when we weren't supposed to be in them (or when our play in them got rough to the point that he was afraid we would hurt ourselves). Even when he shooed us out, he showed patience and tolerance. We regarded him as a likable man, but one to avoid if possible.

We knew nothing of the remarkable history of this couple. I heard it only a few years ago, but my memories of the man and women as real people makes the story very believable.

The couple had come to Michigan directly from the Netherlands, settling near the town of Leroy, some fifteen miles south of Cadillac. On their way to Leroy, they had contracted with a gentleman in Grand Rapids to cut, load, and ship by rail to Grand Rapids timbers such as might turned into railroad ties. Upon the receipt of each carload, he would send payment to the Feeringas.

They marked out a homestead, built a crude cabin, and set to work cutting the wood and shipping it as agreed, keeping their end of the bargain. The gentleman failed to keep his part. They received no money, and the supply of money they had brought with them from the old country was quite gone.

Winter came, and with it the need for food and supplies. Hoping against hope, Mr. Feeringa made one more trip into Leroy, to the post office in the general store to see if the money might possibly be there. On the way he was joined by a stranger. As they walked, Mr. Feeringa told the man the story of his sad plight. The man listened attentively.

Once in the store, Louwe found there was no money. He had to bring home food and a few other things but there was no way he could pay for them, and the storekeeper would extend him no credit. At that point the man who had joined him on his walk stepped up to the counter and told the owner to give Mr. Feeringa everything he needed. He would pay cash for whatever it took to see the couple through until better times. Mr. Feeringa gladly accepted the offer. How could he do anything but accept? He stowed them into the bag he had brought with him, thanked his benefactor profusely, shouldered the bag and began the walk back home.

On the return trip he began mulling over all that had happened. He felt as if he were awakening from a dream. He knew exactly where the man who paid for the groceries had met him and had begun walking with him, but nowhere in the snow could he find footprints other than his own. The farther he walked, the more certain he became that whoever the man was, he had to have been other than mortal. At that time, neither Louwe nor Sepke claimed to have any religion. Quite the opposite. They had been brought up in godless homes, and their walk and talk reflected the fact. Never had they gone to church.

With the coming of spring, the immigrant couple decided they had to move out of the Leroy area. They had heard that to the north was a group of Dutch immigrants, so they decided to investigate. They had nothing to lose.

Finding both acceptance and work in the community, they allowed themselves a cautious interest in things spiritual and began occasionally to attend church services. Bit by bit their spirituality grew until they professed their faith in Christ, were baptized, and took their place in the church community. At the time, they told no one the tale of the man who had paid for their groceries but had left no footprints to prove his presence. Who would have believed them? Later, much later in their lives, they finally dared tell about their experience to their children who in turn have passed it on to theirs.

All the families in our community influenced us during our formative years. To recall each of the sixty and more families who attended our church and the spectrum of their influences would take more pages than this record affords.

There is, however, one aspect of our lives that must be explained. Since we lived in a community where everyone knew everyone, and since we lived in a day when we had little knowledge of events going on in the world outside our community, there was little to talk

about except what happened within our close circle. That fact did not create a healthy atmosphere. We heard far too many critical things about far too many people.

Case in point: At one time or another, someone heard a wife and mother in our congregation make the statement that she was so glad when she and her husband could go to Cadillac to shop on Saturday because then her children could go along and they would always come home with more things than when just she and her husband went shopped. Whoever it was that heard her statement passed it on to a pair of eager ears along with an editorialized comment to the effect that the children of this family had “long fingers” and that the mother condoned their shoplifting. Nothing could have been further from the intent of the statement, nor from the truth of the matter, but the misinterpretation lived on far longer than the woman who originated the statement. It raised questions about the integrity of that family in the minds of the people in our church community for years. Sad that such a thing should happen in a community that ought to have been marked by its love for all in the community, but such is the destructive power of our human sinfulness.

Aspects of individuality that mark us as different from those around us make life interesting without detracting from the value of those who are different, for we are all different, thank God. It is when differences are accentuated to the belittling of people that everyone gets hurt.

Frank Prince, one of the men of our silo-filling company, recited often enough to burn into my memory a quotation he had read and memorized. It went something like this, “There is so much bad in the good of us, and so much good in the bad of us, that it won't do for any of us to talk about the rest of us.” Regardless who the sage might be who ought to receive credit for such a priceless bit of wisdom, we do him honor when we put it into practice.

Final Bits and Pieces

Haywire

Haywire was for us a most useful material. It came to our farm as a bonus around the hay bales we bought when the supply of hay in our mow was short of keeping the cattle and horses fed during late spring months when the weather wouldn't warm up to grow pasture grass. It hurt to have to buy hay, but, without it, we would never have had haywire.

While most hay balers manufactured and sold in the early 1940s used baler twine instead of haywire and baled the hay from the windrow. All hay baled earlier was compressed on site, more often than not, during cold winter months and in a barn. Farmers with excess hay called whoever in the community made a business of baling, buying, and selling other people's hay, and invited him to buy and bale it. The baler was stationery and required, besides those who fed hay into its maw, two men on its rear to tie the bales with wire. A plunger folded and rammed the hay through a rectangular chute against a set amount of tension. When enough hay had been compressed to make up the bale, a set of wooden frames was inserted and the finished bale, still in the chute, moved on, toward the back of the machine. The two men at the rear of the baler fed pre-cut lengths of wire through slots in the wood frames in such a way that the ends of the wire met on the sides of the bale. With a couple of deft movements, they took a straight loose end and fed it through the looped loose end, bent the straight end around several times, and allowed the bale to continue through the remainder of the chute until it was pushed out of the baler all together.

Bales were approximately two feet high, three feet wide, four feet long, and weighed 125 pounds. When we fed the hay from those wire-tied bales to the cattle, we had to loosen what the men on the baler had fastened, removing the wires to release the hay, so we could carry it through the alley at the front of the cattle and into their mangers. We saved the wire, hanging it on a nail on the barn floor wall until we had collected enough lengths to make it worthwhile to store them in the engine room.

What was haywire good for? Anything necessity and imagination decreed. So a rivet pulled out of a part of the harness of a horse. The quickest and most convenient repair was a six-inch length of hay wire pushed repeatedly through the holes in the two leather straps, the ends brought together and bent around each other, first by finger power, but finished with a pliers. A patched harness was guaranteed to see a horse through till winter.

Logging chains that we used for pulling almost anything you could name often had a weak link that broke when most needed. Never did one go into the field or into the woods with a

chain and not carry along a length of haywire with which to splice it should a link prove defective. It took twenty or more loops of haywire to replace the link, but it kept a person in business when the chips were down.

The wooden handles on plows and cultivators sometimes broke, usually when the implement contacted a stone firmly embedded in the subsoil. Since wood does not break sharply across, but rather along the slanting angle of its grain, the two pieces could be brought together rather well. Wrapped with haywire snugged into place by the ever-present pair of pliers, such a repair would probably outlast the rest of the implement. As long as the splice was tight and the wire didn't rust too badly, the odds were it had become a permanent part of the equipment.

Since haywire was twice as thick as the wire of a medium size paper clip, and since it was fairly stiff, it could be used to clean out holes or to run through tubes. Gas lines on engines sometimes clogged. A length of haywire forced through the line usually removed the foreign matter. A BB jammed in the barrel of a BB gun, as the old uncoated lead BBs were prone to do. Haywire rammed it loose. The stem of the corncob pipe didn't draw like it used to? A bit of carbon or sludge lodged in it somewhere? The stem of timothy hay you tried bent and broke but didn't clean the pipe stem? Try haywire!

From hay racks to cattle stanchions, from broken basket handles to car mufflers, haywire found its purpose and function in our lives. Those of us who moved off the farm often wished in vain for a piece of haywire to fix whatever we found broken, but alas, we had left the farm, and haywire was a part of that farm.

One thing about haywire has been and remains a puzzle to me. When a thing went wrong, very wrong, and nothing seemed able to make it right, people said it had gone haywire. Whoever authored that judgmental cliche had no idea of how haywire blessed our lives.

Halloween

Those of us who grew up on the farm during the years when our country was either preparing for or was involved in World War II were cheated out of Halloween. Gas rationing and the lack of the particular brand of manpower essential to a successful Halloween sharply curtailed our celebration of the day.

A few outhouses got tipped over every year, some that were occupied at the time.

Windows were soaped, but only by those too young to get involved in the true mischief of the night. The burning of car tires in the middle of intersections had not yet been invented, and it was considered unpatriotic to destroy anything useful just for the sake of a frivolity. We had to be satisfied with the tales of glorious Halloweens past.

There was the tale of the farm in Highland where some inventive Brom Bones had, in the dead of night, tied with a fish line the tail of a stabled horse to the clapper of a dinner bell on its post near the house. Every time the horse switched his tail the bell would ring, on its own, at totally irregular intervals not with a full-fledged ring, just a weak, specter-like tap!

We were told of wagons hauled to the top of barns and perched precariously, two wheels on each side of the peak. Or of plows and mowing machines pulled out of storage sheds, down the road, and into a creek or a swamp.

We were told of a caper pulled in the horse and buggy days--the removing of a single log from a stretch of corduroy road. Since those who rode buggies home in the dark of the night usually trusted the horse to go home while the rider slept, the first indication that anything was amiss was when one or more of the wheels of his buggy shattered, leaving the conveyance more a primitive sled than a wheeled vehicle.

We were told, but we were short-changed. We could only imagine what it had been like to celebrate Halloween in such fashion. Our most inventive buddies were in uniform, and the number of us left behind was so thin that we took a bye, and when the world returned to normal we were too old to indulge or had moved on to other climes.

Charivari

The word is pronounced “shiv' a ree.” The dictionary claims it is a French word naming a mock serenade made by batting on kettles, pans, and the like. That definition is far too mild to describe the charivaris in which we were involved.

The event of a charivari was a wedding, traditionally held on Friday evenings in the home of the bride, though by our generation a few weddings were held in a church. That fact did not stop a charivari, though it placed a limit on the kinds of noise produced.

Naturally, the couple being wed would have liked to invite all the young people of the community to their wedding, but no house could hold that large a group, and no budget allowed such extravagant expenditure. Therefore, the charivari party was composed of young men and young ladies not invited to the wedding. Word of mouth advertised the meeting place of all interested parties shortly before dark. Once the group was gathered, a captain of the evening was elected by acclamation. It was his duty to make certain there was enough noise making equipment and to assign particular people to particular equipment. It was his duty to confer with the groom or the best man during the charivari, presenting to him the monetary demands of the gathered mob and to handle the money once it had been proffered.

Two things had to ascertained before a sound was to be made. The first was that the ceremony had been completed and the couple was officially man and wife. The second was that it was dark enough that the identity of those making the noise was not too easily determined.

Those prerequisites met, the motley crew quietly surrounded the home in which the ceremony was taking place and on a pre-arranged signal the noise making began at full tilt. The effect was stunning. The catalog of noise making equipment included shot guns, buzz saws, wash tubs, scalding tanks, *aooga* car horns, and often a stick or two of dynamite. Such pounding, banging, and hollering as twenty to thirty young people could make was enough to jolt the coffee out of the cups balanced on the plates of those enjoying the wedding supper. The continuation of the noise raised the level of spoken communication between the bride and groom to shouts.

After five to ten minutes of din, the noise was stopped and the captain and best man conferred. Should the offer satisfy the captain, the charivari party packed up and left. Should it not be enough, or should the best man desire to make the party work for their money, the noise would take up on the beat it left off. Usually it didn't last long. The women in the house had delicate ears, and after ten minutes of pure cacophony, insisted the best man and captain come to terms and end the negotiations.

Once the money was in the hands of the captain, the party left for the entertainment of the evening, located perhaps in a hollow on some lonely road, or better yet, in some schoolyard, deserted at night and sure of non-interference. Money in hand, the captain and a helper or two left to visit the nearest town, in our case McBain or Marion. They exchanged some for pints of ice cream, candy bars, and bottles of soda pop in the drug store and for bottles of beer and various kinds of stronger alcoholic beverages in the tavern.

By the time they returned, a bonfire had been kindled, using split chunks of wood brought by car or discovered in fence rows or in the woodshed or the school woodpile. Other chunks of wood set on end circled the bonfire to support tired bodies. The captain was the sole determiner of who got what of the booty. Young participants were limited to soda pop, ice cream and candy bars, of which there was plenty, while the older participants were also treated to the drinks. Jumbo bottles of beer were passed around from one mouth to another, and sometimes a mouth too young for the brew slipped into the ring. Wine and whiskey were distributed the same way, but under much closer regulation by the captain. His challenge was to determine how many swigs of the heavy stuff a party member could drink and still be able to make his way home. Sometimes, he miscalculated and a participant who had drunk a wee bit too much had to be carried to a car and from the car up to bed. Seldom did such a helpful gesture disturb the young person's sleeping parents,

though it took three or four friends to do what had to be done. If the inevitable noise and scuffling did awaken the parents, they were generous enough to recognize what was going on and to be silently thankful for the act of kindness.

The charivari party was not limited to eating and drinking. There were stories to tell, pranks to play, and frivolities to be engaged in. Humored by a bit of liquor, dares were made and challenges laid. Most were harmless enough. “I'll bet I can take you down in two minutes!” was challenge enough to immediately clear an area where the two banties could have a go at each other, the timing left to the captain. Foot races to and from a particular spot visible to all was a common challenge. Jumping over the bonfire was also common, but was not as harmless an activity as most. We all had heard of the two young men, now full grown with families, who still bore the scars of having met midair from opposite sides of a bonfire. The shock of the meeting knocked both of them out and dropped them into the glowing embers. Though friends pulled them out immediately, they were burned badly enough to require hospitalization.

Another of our charivari parties came close enough to tragedy. One young man turned into a screaming banshee after he had drunk an ounce too much alcohol. On this particular night we were in the yard of one of the area schools where a number of maple poles were available, poles some fifteen feet long and perhaps two and a half inches in diameter at their base. The young man picked up a pole and began swinging it at anyone within the radius of its reach. At first, we though it funny though stupid, but soon we realized the poor fellow was beside himself.

He was trying his best to hit us and to do us damage, screaming at the top of his lungs all the while he swung the poles.

We were sober enough and agile enough to move out of the reach of his swing, though some of his efforts came close to success. Finally, after ten or fifteen minutes of exertion, he collapsed in the middle of a swing, his pole dropping on his feet and legs. He was out! We waited for nearly a half hour for him to awaken, but he didn't. Nothing we did pulled him out of his stupor. His breath was long and deep, so we hoisted him into the back seat of one of our cars, drove him home, and carried him to his upstairs bed. Thankfully, most charivari parties ended on a much more cheerful note.

Park Lake Skating

Our winter sports were not limited to school day experiences. The years of our youth included evening toboggan, sledding, skiing, and skating parties. Sometimes our winter parties were church-related, organized by the Young People's Society. More often they were

thrown by a few cooperating families who announced that the party would be, come if you like, and a good time was to be had by all.

A couple of hours of cold, fresh air in the clean, clear atmosphere of mid-Michigan and the enjoyment of God's gift of snow was an experience of pure exhilaration. Add to it the romantic element of youth with all of its uncertainties, possibilities, and hopes, plus some hot chocolate, sandwiches, and cake, and what more could anyone ask? Such superb camaraderie was to be found only where there was a unity built around a family farm community. It was beautiful. It was memorable.

One cold winter night, we boys decided on a skating party on Park Lake, about three miles south and east of our farm. The ice on the lake was covered by some six inches of snow, so, before we could skate, we had to clear an area with shovels and wooden snow pushers of our own design and manufacture. After a half hour of hard, sweaty work, we had cleared an area half the size of a football field. The heaps of relocated snow marked the boundaries of the cleared ice.

Our skates ranged in style from blades mounted on shoes to the wooden-based strap-on skates our ancestors had taken from The Netherlands. We weren't good skaters. We skated simply for the fun of skating for a while, then decided to play our version of hockey, using as a puck a squashed tin can we had found on the ice and whatever sticks we could find in the brush around the lake.

We were well into the game when suddenly someone called out, “Where's Jess?” At that moment each of us realized he hadn't seen Jess for quite a while. We checked and double checked. It was true, Jess was missing. In the silence of realization, through the ear flaps and earmuffs we wore, we heard a low moan. It took us a few minutes to home in on it and to follow it to the far end of the cleared area. There, beyond the snow boundary, Jess lay in a heap, groaning in pain. He was hurting. One of his ankles was swollen so badly that we knew he needed medical attention.

We stripped off our skates and slid on our shoes and boots, got Jess's skates off, and carried him to his car. There was no use driving him home. His folks were long since in bed, and Jess needed a doctor. We might as well take him straight to Dr. Masselink in McBain.

The light was on in Doc's house. We knocked on the door, he answered. We told him what happened, and he invited us to take Jess into his living room for an immediate examination.

By twisting, pushing, and pulling, the doctor concluded the bones were not broken, but the tendons and muscles of his ankle had been stressed to the point where he would be off his foot for a couple of months. He wrapped the ankle in a bandage and gave Jess a pair of crutches and some pain pills. We drove him home and helped him into the house.

In getting him into the house we made enough noise to bring his parents out from their bed. Jess's dad expressed his thanks along with his regret of the loss of a worker on the farm, but in the same breath said he was glad it was winter when the workload was comparatively light.

True to the expectations of Dr. Masselink, the time it took to heal that injured ankle was long, longer than if a bone had been broken, but Jess never voiced any regrets for having gone skating on Park Lake.

Berry Picking

Not much in life on the family farm was free. Berries were. At least, the wild huckleberries and blackberries that grew on state land were free for the picking. Huckleberries ripened during haying. We found time to pick them when it had rained and the hay was too wet to work.

The patches of huckleberries we knew best were located between Blodgett Corners and Jennings. Since this was state-owned public land, the berries were public domain, and we were allowed to use strippers if we wished. We only had one. Dad got to use it. It was a rectangular sheet-metal box, twice the size of a cigar box, with a handle on top, and an open narrow end to which a row of four-inch-long metal teeth, half the thickness of a lead pencil, had been welded. An experienced stripper could, with a single calculated sweep glean several handfuls of berries.

With the berries came a collection of leaves. Not all the stripped berries were ripe, so the cleaning of stripped berries took much longer than the cleaning of those picked by hand, but Dad considered it profitable to use the stripper. But he never helped to clean the berries he stripped.

Usually, we went huckleberrying as a family, though sometimes we invited relatives to come with us in their cars. We picked in nothing smaller than a ten-quart milk pail, and we collected what we picked in a ten-gallon cream can. Overly ambitious as this may sound, most of our berrying expeditions produced at least one full cream can plus a filled buckets per picker. In the years when late frosts hadn't killed the blossoms and the rains had fallen on schedule, the huckleberries produced cluster after cluster of berries a third the size of a grape and twice as sweet as domestic blueberries.

Dad refused to pick bushes that had been picked by others within a day or two before we were there. If we wanted to pick them and waste half of our time, that was up to us. From the point where we parked the car on the dirt two-track, Dad began walking over the acres and acres of scrub trees, clumped bushes, and the uneven marshy turf on which the

bushes grew until he found virgin berries. Only then would he stoop and begin to fill his bucket. If we were wise enough to tag along with him, we shared the good picking. If we took the easy way and stayed close to the car, we got only “slim pickings.”

We carried no compass. If we did not follow Dad immediately, and so depend on his sense of direction, we were stuck with either staying fairly close to the car or striking out on our own. Sometimes we got lost for a while, but eventually we learned to trust our abilities to memorize landmarks and to constantly be aware of the four points of the compass and not to panic at the first fear we might be lost. Days in the huckleberry brush were a welcome change from the routine of the work of the farm. A picnic lunch, augmented by a can or two of pork and beans, a ring of bologna, and a tin of sardines in mustard sauce bought from a general store on the way to the berries, created memories of special days and special enjoyments.

The day after berry picking was also devoted to berries. We made the work as easy and as fast as possible by using a home-made cleaning board. We padded a ten-inch by five-foot plank with several layers of coarse cloth, then nailed a two-inch lat against each side of the board. We propped it at an angle, placed a large kettle under its low end, soaked the pad with water, and slowly poured the berries onto the high end. Gravity rolled the berries down the ramp and into the kettle. Leaves stuck on the damp pad. As the berries rolled down, we picked out the green ones. Weather permitting, we set up our cleaning station on the porch and cistern top on the west side of the house, just outside the kitchen door. As well as our cleaning board worked, it still took hours to fill the quart cans we had thoroughly washed and rinsed. Ten gallons of berries filled nearly forty one-quart mason jars. Whatever we had taken home in our buckets filled more mason jars. Ma didn't feel comfortable facing a winter with much less than eighty quarts of huckleberries.

We added a couple teaspoons of sugar to the top of each filled jar, stretched onto its neck a rubber ring, and screwed on the zinc cap snugly but not tight, and packed twenty-one jars at a time into the wash boiler for a twenty-minute boil. When we took them out, we turned the lids tight. Four boilers full made quite a collection on the back kitchen table where they set to cool until we carried them down to the fruit cellar to await the days when we enjoyed them as dessert.

Blackberry picking produced as many or more jars of fruit than huckleberries. Picking them was quite a different procedure. Usually we traveled either to Stittsville, north and east of Lake City, or south of Highland toward Evart near one of the Long Lakes. Our choice was determined by the rumors of how much rain had fallen in each area and of how good the berries were according to the people we knew who bad been picking berries before we had time to go.

Blackberries grow on vines six to ten feet tall, vines fully equipped with briars as formidable as found on any rose bush. Poets have regaled the contrast between the thorns and the petals of roses. Perhaps poets have never harvested blackberries. Some poet really ought to preserve a poetic description of the luscious seeded fruits, two inches long and as thick as a grown man's little finger, and the pain of picking them off briar studded vines.

We wore protective clothing. Ma and the girls borrowed overalls from us men and boys. Regardless how hot and muggy the dog days of August were, we wore long sleeved shirts under denim jackets. And we never went into the blackberry woods without a substantial hat or cap. The briars on tall bushes loved to reach out to fasten into human hair with unbelievable tenacity.

The chances of getting lost in a blackberry patch were a hundred times greater than in a blueberry marsh. Blackberries flourished in wooded areas thick with underbrush. A one-minute walk in any direction from a car parked off a two-track dirt trail was enough to provide total isolation, should that be what a berry picker had in mind.

Dad demanded isolation while picking blackberries. Without asking questions, as soon as he had the car parked and our picking buckets fitted with shoulder straps or twines, he picked up, put on his own bucket, said goodbye, and disappeared into the brush. He didn't invite us to go along with him. He was going to find the best berries, come what may. On occasion, when he found more berries than he could pick in the hours we would be in the woods, he would call, shouting above the songs of the birds and the chattering of the squirrels, inviting us to follow his voice and join him where the berries were really good. Most of the time we fended for ourselves, becoming a bit braver and a bit more profitable to the welfare of the family as we gained experience in the berry woods.

Bears were not uncommon in our part of the good state of Michigan. Bears love blackberries. In each of the patches we picked, bears had been seen within the past six months. Stories of berry pickers who had met bears and had shared the bushes with them were rife, but none of us ever saw a bear in the woods. We did see unmistakable evidence that bears were sharing the woods with us. Trampled bushes, spoor, and barren vines told the story. Sometimes, we heard creatures move through the brush beyond our view. Sometimes we called out, hoping to get a human answer. Sometimes we did. Sometimes all we heard were bear tracks. At least so we thought.

Chore time dictated how late we dared to stay in the berry patch. Often, the berries were so good we couldn't leave them when the cows began calling us. One afternoon, when we were picking near Long Lake, somewhere north and west of Evart, we stayed too long. It got dark before we got on the main road. When we did, we weren't sure which road we were on.

There were no street signs, there was no traffic, and clouds hid the moon and stars. Suddenly the road dipped extremely sharply down a long hill. A pitch that steep usually meant water at the bottom. The road was so poor we had no assurance there would be a bridge if there was water. Dad stopped the car, shut off the engine, got out and walked down beyond the range of the headlights. We waited, wishing we had used our discretion and gone home earlier. Finally, Dad returned. “I don't like it,” he said. “I hear running water, and, this road is so steep, if anything goes wrong down there, we'll never get out. I'm backing up.”

Back up he did. Door open, head turned on backwards, he guided the car the long way back to the top of hill. With difficulty, he managed to get it turned around. We soon found another road, that led to another road, that finally led us to something we recognized, and eventually home. We were relieved to be there. The cows were happy to have us relieve their straining udders. Finally, we ate our supper. I doubt that we really needed it. We had eaten many berries that day, as we did every day we went blackberry picking.

Blackberry picking at times became a group effort. Some neighbor, who was more socially inclined than most, organized it by calling Ralph Van Houten to reserve him and his cattle truck to transport fifteen or twenty people to the berry woods. Potato crates and planks became seats inside the rack, where we sat, squeezed between cream cans, milk pails, and lunch baskets. We may not have come home with as many berries per person on such an outing as if we had gone with only our family, but the fun we had with a truck load of berry pickers, men, women, and kids, fully decked out in denim gear, was worth the change.

Washday

Monday was washday. Always. Well, almost always. If Christmas and New Years came on Monday, the washing was postponed. If the Fourth of July came on Monday, we washed anyway. Washing on Monday got the work-a-day week off on the right foot.

Washday began when Ma got out of bed, a bit earlier on Monday than on any other day of the week. Dad already had kindled the cook stove. Ma added more wood and, while she made breakfast, fetched the copper wash boiler from a nail on the wall of the back kitchen, placed it on the hottest part of the stove and filled it with water.

By the time breakfast was finished, that water was heated almost to boiling, which was the time to put in the two bars of Fels Naphtha, which she pared into thin slices while holding the bars at shoulder height so the slices would fall directly into the hot water. Steam circled her hands, arms, and head. Occasionally she had to stop, even in the coldest winter mornings, to wipe the damp off her forehead. Later, after soaps were factory chipped or

flaked and sold by the box, she was easily converted to the use of a cup or two of such luxury.

Long before the breakfast dishes were washed, dried, and stored in the cupboard, we had hauled the wash machine from the back kitchen into the kitchen. The first machine I can recall was an old Thor, run by a 32-volt electric motor. The tub of the machine had a curved, horizontal bottom with flat ends. A hollow cylinder made of wooden slats and fitted with a removable lid tumbled the clothes in the soapy water of the tub. We were proud of old Thor. She worked much better than the hand powered wooden tubs our neighbors called wash machines. At the same time, we were somewhat envious of our grandparents who had Maytags with aluminum tubs and agitators which swished the clothes and the water back and forth. They were powered by air-cooled gasoline engines that made a lot of noise and had to be used where the exhaust could be piped outside. We used our Thor in the middle of the kitchen floor and heard only the hum of the motor and the sloshing of the water.

After the soap had totally dissolved in the copper wash boiler, one of us got the job of dipping most of it from the boiler into the wash machine. We were so young when we were first begged to do the job that we had to stand on a kitchen chair alongside the stove to reach the top of the boiler. We began transferring the water with small pans with stiff, straight handles. When the level of the water was low enough not to splash, we dipped into the boiler with a milk pail. When only an inch or two remained in the boiler we picked up the boiler itself, hooked one of its handles on the edge of the wash machine tank and tipped it empty into the machine

One wash boiler full of water was never enough. We added a couple pails of hot water from the reservoir of the kitchen stove. Then we refilled the empty boiler and again put it on the hot stove.

While we were busy filling the machine, Ma sorted the clothes from the hamper at the foot of the stairs. She added to them the dirty bedding from four or five beds, and all the dirty clothes she had found from wherever clothes hide. Socks slid under the beds, shirts dropped off our backs on the floor of our closets on Sunday night, overalls hanging on hooks behind the doors, anything dirty she dropped on the heap along the south wall of the kitchen. From that stack, Ma picked each article, classified it as to color and type of filth, and created a pile for each classification somewhere on the kitchen floor. By the time she had the sorting finished, there was certain to be eight or ten loads, each of which had to be run fifteen minutes. Mondays were long days.

Once the clothes had been sorted, and the first load, the white Sunday shirts and everything else that was white, was in the machine, the water in the boiler on the stove was

sufficiently heated to be of use. With it we filled the first of two tubs on a metal stand under the swivel wringer of the wash machine. After Thor had finished his work on the load, Ma used a short stick to lift each item from the hot wash water and run it through the wringer to drop into the tub of clear water tinted blue by a few drops from the bluing bottle.

After each load in turn had been emptied into this first rinse tub, the next dirty load was dumped into Thor. While that load ran, Ma hand rinsed each item in the tub and ran it through the wringer again into a final rinse tub of cold, clean water. After this final rinse, she ran them through the wringer a final time and pronounced them ready to hang.

Ma hung the clothes outside on the lines north of the house if at all possible. At all possible was when the air was clear of precipitation and the thermometer read more than twenty degrees Fahrenheit. Pinning wet the clothes to metal clothes lines with bare hands in freezing temperatures must have given arthritis to many of the women of the community, but they chose to hang the clothes out. To have them freeze board stiff, and then slowly, slowly, slowly become limp and dry, and flap in the cold breezes of winter was better than having them hung on the lines inside for a day or two until they finally dried.

When the weather wasn't good, she strung lines through the kitchen, the back kitchen, and through the large empty unfinished room at the head of the stairs. When the weather outside wasn't fit for drying clothes, we ducked under and around drying clothes to get most anywhere in the house.

Each batch of clothes added to the pollution of the water in Thor until by the time the overalls, the darkest and the dirtiest of all the clothes had been run through, it was a miracle the dirty water could actually make clothes come clean. When all the batches had been run through, usually in early afternoon, the water in Thor had to be drained, bucket by bucket and poured down the kitchen sink or flung out the back door.

The efficiency of the women of our community was judged by the hour and minute when they hung their first load of wash on the clothesline on Monday mornings. The earlier the clothes were hung, the better wife she was said to be. Ma never won any awards. What with a house full of “kids underfoot,” she didn't stand a chance. Inclement weather spoiled the competition. Who could anyone determine how early the good lady of the house had gotten her first load of wash on the line if she had hung them on the line in her back kitchen?

Back Kitchens

Most of the houses in our community had been built within the space of a few decades. The fashion of the day was to build homes with the usual kitchen plus a summer kitchen for the sake of comfort. Summers were hot. Summer was time to preserve vegetables and fruit, all

of which had to be done on the range in the kitchen. The amount of heat generated by the three hours required to properly preserve vegetables made the kitchens impossibly hot. Our women thanked whoever designed the “back kitchen,” the summer kitchen, for their comfort.

Our back kitchen had originally contained a small wood-burning stove on which Grandma could cook a meal. It also had a small oven, fit only for light baking. Grandpa had already replaced that woodburning stove with a kerosene stove, a marvel of coolness. Three hollow cylindrical pots contained at their bottoms circular wicks capable of regulating the amount of heat produced by being raised or lowered by a knob at the bottom of the cylinder. The wicks burned the kerosene stored in an inverted gallon glass jug mounted on the outside end of two of the legs of the stove and fed to the wicks through a half inch steel pipe. Kerosene stoves had no chimneys. Kerosene stoves smelled. The heat they produced was directly under whatever pot, kettle, or skillet was placed over the burner and did not allow much heat to escape into the rest of the room. Since it was summer, the doors and windows were open. No one complained about the odor of kerosene, and no one worried about carbon monoxide poisoning.

The back kitchen cupboard contained essentials for summertime cooking and a table setting. A table, quite inferior to the table in the kitchen, plus a set of wooden chairs with curved backs sufficient to seat the family, usually completed the accouterments of the back kitchen.

The Depression put a damper on the use of back kitchens. Kerosene was too dear to use. One by one the small wood stoves wore out and disappeared. The back kitchen became only a storage place for things for which we had no room in the kitchen. Ours boasted a table with wobbly legs, an ice box that seldom saw a block of ice, a wooden cupboard with doors of wainscot, and a few chairs. A metal flue cap in the chimney reminded us of where the wood stove had stood.

We endured the heat of the kitchen, even on those days when the wood-fed range heated the wash boiler filled with green and yellow beans; cooking time: three hours per twenty-one-can load! We had two windows on the east end of the kitchen, two windows and a door on the west end of the kitchen. Thankfully, we usually had a westerly breeze that sailed non-stop through the room.

When the power lines came, all back kitchens became storage areas. The kitchen range was either replaced by an electric range or supplemented by it. Many homes kept the old wood-burning range as a source of heat in the cold of winter but used electricity for cooking the rest of the year. Most kitchens were big enough to accommodate two stoves.

To be honest, I cannot recall having eaten a single meal in either our back kitchen or in the back kitchen of any other home, except at those times when we painted the kitchen floor or were papering the kitchen ceiling and walls. Back kitchens actually were used for their intended purpose for only a short time. They made excellent storm sheds and mud rooms and provided a marvelous place for that last lingering kiss on a date.

Radio

Both sets of my grandparents had radios before power lines energized our community. Grandpa Vredevoogd had an Atwater Kent, and Grandpa Westmaas, a Philco. Both were powered by batteries which eventually became totally discharged and needed replacement. They had the money to buy batteries. We didn't. We got along without a radio.

How fascinating it was to listen to those early radios. The realization that the music from the speaker, sitting on top the dial-and-knob-bedecked receiver, was coming all the way from Detroit or Pittsburgh, and that it was being performed at the self-same moment we were hearing it, was a marvel beyond accounting.

Stations were few, but powerful. Wire antennae (aerials), strung between the peak of the house and some other building or a windmill, fed the tiny signal into the receiving set.

Lightning arrestors prevented storm damage either to the house or the set.

In 1936, with the coming of the power lines, we got our first radio. This was about the same time we got our electric stove, a used white Universal with a raised oven that took up almost half of its top. On that raised oven, we planted our radio, a Coronado from the Gamble Store in Cadillac. We strung an aerial from the kitchen to the windmill, and from there to the barn, and it worked. We pulled in more stations than we knew existed, especially at night. We heard people talking from studios in the middle of Iowa! We listened to the broadcast of Tiger baseball games from Detroit and Cub games from Chicago. Our horizons enlarged exponentially!

Radio was a particular blessing for Ma. Due to some quirk in the topography of our area, our radio clearly pulled in WMBI, Chicago, the voice of the Moody Bible Institute. Their broadcast of sacred song and spiritual encouragement produced hours of daytime enjoyment and spiritual growth for her. Those who said she should stop listening to WMBI, since Moody wasn't particularly of the Reformed persuasion, were treated to smiles and to invitations to come over and hear for themselves what the station had to offer.

Ma did take time out for an hour or so in the afternoon to change the dial to WMAQ so she could hear such soap operas as *Ma Perkins*, *Mary Martin*, and *The Guiding Light*.

When the sun faded in the west, reception faded with it. Station mixed with station as the atmosphere allowed more distant signals to mix with those of closer frequency. That meant we had to hunt for a station close to us and away from the frequency of powerful distant stations to be received clearly. Our supper hours blended the intake of food with the absorption of hero stories. Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy, Captain Frank Hawk, the flying ace, and Don Winslow of the American Navy poured their adventures through the speaker, loudly enough so those of us who sat on the far side of the kitchen table would not miss a gunshot nor the call of the boatswain's whistle.

On weekends, when our heroes disappeared, we found a station from Nashville,

Tennessee, which carried Asher and Little Jimmie, a father and son singing pair, who sang mostly country gospel music, but once in a while sneaked in something totally secular. After chores were finished and we should have been reading or playing the piano, we spent part of the time listening to *Amos 'n Andy*, *Fibber McGee and Molly*, and *Lum and Abner*. By that late hour, the stations began mixing to the point of impossibility. There was nothing to do but turn off the radio and get on with the silence we had known before 1936.

I should not have listened to as much radio as I did. One program had more influence on me than I care to admit. It was the very last program we listened to on only one night a week, but it robbed me of hours of sleep and instilled in me a fear of violence which took years to shake. The program was *Gangbusters*. The stories it re-enacted before the microphones were true stories. Often the criminals who had perpetrated the crimes, described in bloody, bullet-riddled detail, were still at large. At the close of the program, we were encouraged to report any sightings of the criminals described to our local law enforcement officials.

My imagination placed me inside every car speeding away from the police, in every empty lot where gunmen and the law were exchanging shots, and inside the trunk of every car in which a kidnaped child was spirited away from his parents. I had too much imagination.

Immediately after *Gangbusters* was done, I had to go alone upstairs to my bedroom. As soon as I was in bed, I had to turn off the light by pulling the cord from my bedpost to the fixture on the wall. The room was directly above the dining room, in which we had been listening to *Gangbusters*, and through the floor register which allowed heat to come into my room during the winter, I could vaguely hear what was going on in the lower half of the house. At the same time, I was able to hear all sorts of things happening outside, or more fearful yet, in the attic and in the three vacant upstairs rooms. Fear kept me awake long after I should be have been sound asleep, fear that a late car speeding down our lonely road would stop at our house and that its occupants would perpetrate all sorts of mayhem.

But I couldn't stop listening to *Gangbusters*! It was such a good program! Radio pushed back our horizons. Reception of WJR, Detroit, was excellent in our area during the afternoon hours when the baseball games were played. We listened diligently at every opportunity. Within a few years of our first radio, we got a radio in the barn where we could hear news in the morning and sports in the afternoon. Often, we milked cows to the account of balls, strikes, wins and losses in Detroit. Hank Greenberg was our hero. Babe Ruth and Joe DiMaggio were our personal enemies. The Cleveland Indians were our rivals, especially during the 4th of July double header. Within a few years our cars were fitted with radios. Our little world began to change faster than anyone would have dared to predict.

The Ice House

Across the road from our buildings were what remained of set of earlier farm buildings, a tiny clapboard house, a log barn, and a small but tight log building. For a few years, Dad and Uncle Jake used that small log building as an ice house. During the depth of winter, the brothers harvested ice from Park Lake, cutting it into two-foot cubes with a crosscut saws with one of the two handles removed. With heavy ice tongs they fished the cubes out of the water, loaded them onto sleighs, and packed them in the sawdust of the ice house. Insulated, the cubes stayed frozen through much of the summer.

We might have used the ice house longer had not Uncle Jake broken his arm one Fourth of July morning while getting out a cube of ice. He had climbed into the house through the high hinged window on the north end of the building to free a block of ice. In the process of stepping off the ice and out of the window his foot slipped on the ice. He fell to the ground, snapping a bone in his arm. That spoiled the plans for making home made ice cream that day. Uncle Jake moved to town a year or two later, and Dad never tried harvesting ice on his own.

Waterless Cooking

One spring evening in the mid 1930s, our style of cooking went bottom up. A salesman pushing a brand of heavy aluminum cookware called Kitchen Kraft entered our community and changed our lives. He offered to cook and serve an entire evening meal for as many as Ma could crowd into our house if he could proclaim to them the merits of waterless cooking.

Ma's supply of pots and pans was deplorable. They had been soldered and adorned with pot menders to the point of disrespectability, and the prospects of buying new in Cadillac were Depression dim. If waterless cooking had merit, and if the man could sell sets to enough of the invited guests, our set would cost little. Ma made the date and Mr. Scharphoorn kept it.

Relatives, friends, and neighbors packed into our living room, dining room, and kitchen that evening. As they filed in, they were met with a spectrum of tantalizing cooking aromas enough to make them hungry, though they had eaten supper only a couple of hours earlier. As soon as everyone was seated, quieted, and introduced, the cookware chef began distributing a series of cooked dishes made from the kinds of foods common to our tables, explaining, as he served each, exactly how differently he had cooked that food as compared to the traditional Dutch methods used by all present. And all with little or no water, water which collected the rich minerals and vitamins with which God had blessed the food, water which would be poured down the sink drain along with necessities for healthy living.

The food was delicious. The lecture was convincing. Many of the gathered bought, and our set came Depression cheap. Ma was so grateful that she followed the recipe book to a T, which up-ended everything she knew about cooking. No longer was the big daily pot of potatoes peeled and covered with water. Now it was brushed and then cooked in only a half cup of water which disappeared during the cooking. We made our own cereal by grinding clean wheat in a coffee grinder, soaking it in water, and cooking it in a kettle until it was both tender and hot. We served it in cereal dishes, covered it with milk, and sweetened it with brown sugar, guaranteed to be much better for health than vitamin-starved, granulated white sugar.

From the same ground wheat, we baked on the top of the stove a dark yeastless bread, moist, tasty, and nutritious. Fresh vegetables preserved their store of vitamins during the short, nearly dry session on the stove top. Their flavor had never been better! Sorry to say, not much could be done with canned vegetables. We had to heat them and serve them according to tradition.

Mr. Scharphoorn plied his trade in our area for a few weeks and did a brisk business. He also became something of a hero in McBain. One afternoon, a freight train collided with a gasoline tanker truck at the main intersection of the town. We heard the explosion while working a field with our horses five miles away. We saw the pillar of black smoke rise into the sky, bent toward the east on the prevailing westerly breeze. Later, we heard that Mr. Scharphoorn was on the scene of the accident and had pulled the injured truck driver out of the cab of his vehicle moments before the wild flames reached and destroyed it. The salesman was modest. He claimed to have done what any civilized man would have done. He was there. He did what had to be done. There was nobody else there to do it.

Wallpapering

The only rooms in our house not wallpapered were the storage room at the head of the stairs and the back kitchen and back shed. The walls of the entire house had been plastered with what we knew as sand plaster, that is, a rough plaster without a finish coat to produce a hard, paintable surface. Wallpaper was more economical than finished plaster jobs.

I'm sure most of the paper I knew on the bedroom walls had been put on by Grandpa and Grandma. All were floral prints, some of them quite large and loud. The ceilings all wore a layer or two of plain, but faded, white paper, some bearing water marks that recorded ancient roof leaks. All the paper was of the overlap variety, that is, it was not butted, edge of one sheet to the edge of the next, but carried in the print at least a half inch of overlap that made the pattern match.

All the paper was true paper, without benefit of protective coatings to preserve the finish or to make it washable. When the paper in the kitchen and dining rooms, where wear and tear on the paper was both more likely and more public, showed its age, we bought a couple of cans of wallpaper cleaner, kneaded the stuff into balls the size of baseballs, and rubbed down the paper. The process took with it a layer of the kinds of dirt that would come off, never the imbedded grease from kid fingers or from accidents.

One such accident was my fault. The day was hot. A couple of my aunts had come over to help with a canning project. At a lunch break, we were seated around the kitchen table, enjoying a loaf of homemade bread, layered with freshly churned butter. We had been joshing and teasing about one thing or another. In the process, Aunt Tressa asked me to throw her the butter. I picked up the saucer, on which the quarter-pound rectangular solid of soft, sagging butter rested, and I made as if to toss it to her, but held onto the saucer. The butter didn't stop with the saucer, but sailed directly at my aunt. She ducked. The butter hit the wall behind her head, above and to the right of the light switch on the wall. We scraped the butter off the wall, but for several years there remained that blotch of grease, that silent record of another good idea gone wrong.

When the number of fly specks on the ceiling and greasy fingerprints above the wainscot or around the door casings reached the point of intolerability, Ma would insist that, next time Dad went to McBain, he visit the drug store to see what patterns of paper Tefft had on sale. If he found something useful, he should buy it and cover up the old.

Never did Dad give in to such a request when first announced. At least another six months would pass, and at least a half dozen repeated requests made before that marvelous day, coincidental with a slack time in Dad's work routine, when he came home with that which

would decorate the walls for several years. Always he had gotten a real bargain, ten cents per roll, ceiling paper and wallpaper alike, plain or printed. Ma made hurried phone calls to an aunt or two, asking their help. Within a day or two the paper was hung.

Dad hung the paper, that is, he did the actual work of applying the paper to the ceiling and wall surfaces. The night before the hanging, Ma and whoever of the kids was mature enough to be trusted with a scissors, attacked the double rolls of paper to cut off the “trim edge,” a half inch on both sides of each double roll, cut off at the lines indicating the true edge of the paper pattern. Those too young to be involved in the trimming sat on the floor and played with the mile-long half-inch curled strips of discarded paper. Those strips had served their purpose. They had protected the edges of the rolls from damage until the paper was sold.

Chores, breakfast, and dishes done, the kitchen table was cleared. All extra table boards were located and inserted to make the table as long as possible. Chairs were picked off the kitchen floor and carried into either the back kitchen or the side porch, depending on the weather. Ma took a milk pail back to the house after she washed the cream separator, found her big wooden stirring spoon, and began the process of making a bucket of wallpaper paste. The specially treated wheat flour had also come from the drug store. Dad had tried to mix paste, but each time he tried, the miserable stuff came out lumpy. Ma's product was as smooth as the daily contents of the gravy boat on the kitchen table.

Dad located the paste and smoothing brushes from one of the highest shelves in the back kitchen cupboard, the rickety step ladder from the engine room, and a clean 2 X 12 plank from its repository above the east walkway in the barn. A kitchen chair under both ends of the plank created an excellent walking board for hanging the strips on the ceiling. As soon as the aunts arrived to process could begin.

Newspapers spread on the kitchen table provided the matting on which the strips of unrolled paper could be pasted. Dad did the measuring and the tearing of the strips, laying them one on top of the other until he had enough to cover the entire ceiling. One aunt did the pasting, the other helped Ma lift, fold the paper, and slide it up so the rest of the strip could be pasted. The final fold was made, and the paper carried to Dad as he stood on the walking board. In his left hand he gathered the open end of the paper with which he would begin fastening the strip to the ceiling. With the other he plied the smoothing brush. Ma and the aunts controlled the other end, one on each side of the walking board. With luck, everything worked like clockwork. Dad usually got the first strip of relatively straight, without puncturing the flimsy paper with either his clumsy fingers or the smoothing brush, but when his aim was not as straight as it ought to have been, or when he punctured or tore

the sheet he had to pull the strip off, straighten it, repair it or replace it, and a second, sometimes a third attempt made until success crowned their efforts.

The first strip was always the hardest. Those following, provided the ever-present demons of frustration were kept at bay, went on more easily. Dad did have a short temper. Even though Ma's sisters were present, when a series of mishaps riled him to the boiling point, he was known to have released a series of verbosity fit to blister feminine ears.

The wallpaper of the day, at least the kind intended for use over sand plaster, was created for imprecision. The ends of the ceiling strips extended down the walls a few inches on both ends of the strip. These inches would be covered first by the top ends of the strips plastered onto the walls, and then, for added insulation, the border strip, strung along the tops of the wall strips. What accumulation of sins those border strips covered!

Once the ceiling above that part of the kitchen where the table wasn't had been papered, the table was rolled to the opposite end of the kitchen, the chairs and the plank arranged where the table had been, and the rest of the ceiling finished. If all had gone well, the ceiling paper was on in time for morning coffee, a required break for all involved. Catching one's breath over coffee was a well-timed interlude before beginning to attack the walls.

Plastered walls crack. The cracks break through the layers of wallpaper that covered them. Cracks are ugly. Each new layer of paper called for a renewed attempt to hide the cracks. The most effective method was to take strips of light but tough cloth and paste them over the crack, then cover them with the new strips of paper. This hid the crack for a short time, but when the cloth and the new paper were no longer strong enough to counter the cracking movement beneath, a new and uglier crack came through, and nothing could stop it.

Hanging the strips on the walls was both easier and harder the ceiling work. Dad discarded the walking board and used only the stepladder to reach the ceiling. However, he had to be more careful about the straightness of the first piece he hung. The paper for the walls had a pattern, and that pattern had to march around the room horizontally level. A person's reputation as a paper hanger hung on the results. Again, Dad ripped the strips off the rolls, careful to tear the top of each repeat exactly on the printed arrow on the edge of the strip that would be covered by the overlap of the next. Once the first strip was plumbed and in place, a little care with each strip so the paper would not “run” guaranteed satisfactory results. But the process took time. Noon came with its break for dinner, after which the stove was allowed to go out and cool, since the stove pipe had to be pulled from the wall and the stove moved away from it far enough so Dad could apply the paper behind it. How strange it looked to see the new strip of paper hide the hole in the chimney where the stove

pipe had entered it. But that lasted only for a few minutes. Dad took a knife and cut the hole through the paper, carefully trimming it back far enough from where the hot stove pipe would be that the pipe did not come into contact with the new paper. As soon as the strips behind the stove were dry, the stove was moved back to the wall, the stove pipe replaced, and the fire lit, though not before Dad had taken it out through the north door and dumped from it the inch thick layer of ash.

Papering the kitchen was a day's work, a long day's work, sometimes a frustrating day's work. When it was done, everyone was thankful. People working so closely with people, when things could and often did go wrong, was taxing. The result was rewarding. The look of clean ceilings and clean walls was a happy look. The smell of the paste combined with that of the new paper was a fresh, happy smell. But even at ten cents a roll, the cost of papering a room was nothing to be taken lightly. Small wonder that as long as I lived at home the paper in the bedrooms was never replaced.

Jaaack! Jaaaaaack!

Every farm family had its tale of lost children, the anguished hunt for them, and the relief of finding them. Our family's tale involved brother Jack.

One July afternoon Jack was gone. Totally gone! No amount of calling received an answer. Ma rounded up all the kids available to hunt for Jack everywhere she could think of hunting. The water tank behind the barn. The empty pit of the silo. The hay mows. The stables. The root cellar. No Jack! Finally, Ma called Dad from his work in the field to help find Jack. She made him check the covers of the cisterns to the point of taking the covers off and looking in to see if miraculously he could have lifted a cover, fallen in, and had the cover cover him again.

Still no Jack.

We looked in the gulleys behind the barn. We looked in the woods west of the barn. We looked in the orchard to the east of the house. We looked in the brooder coop behind the lilac bush. We looked everywhere, but we could not find Jack. We looked for a couple of immensely long hours, and still couldn't find Jack. We were worried. Ma was frantic!

We never did find him. He found us. I don't remember who it was who first saw him walking toward the house over the knoll to the north of the farm buildings, rubbing sleepy eyes, ambling along as if nothing in the world had happened. I think it was his tousled hair that gave us the first clue to what had happened. Truth was that Jack had decided to take a walk into the fields to the north of the farm buildings, had wandered off the beaten trail by which traffic normally flowed through the fields, but left the trail and wandered into the tall quack

grass of the first hollow he came to. The day was warm. The soft matting of quack roots was inviting. Jack had, in his younger days, something of the nature Rip Van Winkle enjoyed, so he sat down, then laid down, and stared at the puffy white clouds as they wandered overhead until he slipped off into the land of Morpheus, blissfully unaware of the anguish he had created.

He may not remember the incident, but he does remember that it happened. Certainly, he has been told of the many gray hairs he added to Ma's already hard-earned collection. And just as certainly he has added to the smiles on the faces of those who do remember as we reminisce about our years on the farm in the hills and hollows of Highland.

Car Bodies

To the west of our barnyard, hidden from the road by a dip in the land and several trees, rested the rusting bodies of two cars. Many of the farm families of the day had a car body or two hidden out of sight or as a crown on a nearby stone pile. Those rusting, resting bodies were wonderful toys for growing girls and boys.

The bodies were of the style called the “touring car.” Today we would likely call them rag tops. They were of solid metal construction up to the top of the doors with nothing above that except for a pole-like metal framework, on which, at one time, a semi-solid top had rested. From that top to the doors, curtains of canvas and isinglass had completed the enclosure. These curtains were removed during warm seasons and closed with a series of snaps when the weather was wet or cold. A windshield was part of the body, but in most cases the glass from the car bodies had been removed.

With the coming of enclosed sedan body style, car owners were eager to make their cars more comfortable during the long cold seasons of our part of Michigan. For far less money that would be required to trade in the old and buy a new car, one could buy a replacement body of the same make car. If the engine and running gear of the old touring model was still in good shape, the life of the car could be extended with a small investment. The actual removing of one body and the installation of the new body was no more than a day's work. Removing bolts, disconnecting wires, and hoisting with a block and tackle removed the old. Hoisting the new, squaring the old chassis under it, and reversing the process completed the job.

There was no market for a used body. The only thing to do with it was to hitch the team to it and move it out of the way. The body had doors that worked. It had seats that could be sat on. It had a steering wheel that turned, it had a hood the sides of which could be raised to view the dead grass where once the engine had been located, and it had the metal shroud that had protected the radiator of the previous engine. Head lights permanently put out

connected the radiator shroud with the fenders. On the front of the radiator shroud was proudly displayed the identifying logo of the car it once was.

But oh the miles we put onto those car bodies back behind the barn! When company came, and dolls and jackknives had become old hat, what better way was there to spend an hour or three than to take a trip to nowhere in those rusting, resting bodies behind the barn.

A Human Bellow

The first time I heard Uncle Jerry bellow, I was so shocked my hair stood on end and chills raced up and down my spine. We were picking blackberries in a dense area where we could see nothing but blackberry bushes, tree tops, and a partly cloudy sky overhead. The berries had been good, but we had picked what there was to pick at that spot, and suddenly we realized that we had been so absorbed in our picking that no longer could we hear voices or the rustling of vegetation anywhere around us. The two of us, Uncle Jerry and I, were alone in our little world. Clouds had hidden the sun and we had no idea which way was which. We walked the perimeter of the area we had picked, found trails leading to and from the area in a half a dozen places, but had no idea where the rest of the clan had gone. I was young and inexperienced at being “lost” in the brush. Had I been alone, I certainly would have panicked. That Uncle Jerry was with me kept me rational, but within limits.

Uncle Jerry wasn't anywhere near panic. In his simple, straightforward way he stated, “Well, I guess I better do a little calling.” With that he lifted his head toward the clouds, cupped a free hand to one side of his mouth, and produced a wordless bellow, strong enough to cause the leaves on the branches over his head to tremble. He stopped, drew a long breath, and let go another long, powerful bellow. Again, he stopped, breathed, and again blasted the quiet with his vocal chords. “There! Now be quiet,” he ordered.

We listened, and sure enough, to our right, far enough away that, had we not been totally quiet, we would not have heard, there came a faint reply to his call. Straining to see through the tree tops, we spotted the tallest tree in the direction from which we had heard the response and picked our way through the brush until we had found it. By that time, we could hear voices of the clan as they chatted while they picked.

I often wondered what would have happened if I had found myself alone and isolated from everyone else. A call from my puny voice would never have carried far enough to have gotten through to the clan. Try as I might, I never learned how to bellow like Uncle Jerry. Nor could anyone I knew.

Greasing the Windmill

Dad hated heights. The climb to the peak of the barn to change the pulleys on the hay cart was torture. The climb to the top of the empty silo and the walk across the two-by-twelve plank to the open window, to pull up the top end of the pipe to fill the silo, was a nightmare for him. Worse still was the annual greasing of the gear box, thirty-five feet above the ground, at the top of the windmill.

He waited for the spring day when the temperature was neither too hot nor too cold and the wind was absolutely calm. I think he wished that day could be forever postponed, yet he knew the job had to be done. The only thing worse than making that climb was the thought of sending one of us kids to do the job while he stood on the ground watching. Eventually that day came, but until then, Dad forced himself to make the awful climb.

Though no wind blew, he shut off the mill by turning the chest high crank on one of the legs of the windmill. This swung the tail of the mill parallel to the open face of the bladed wheel. Should a breeze suddenly blow, this would prevent the wheel from facing into the breeze and turning. When nothing more could be done to prepare for the task, Dad slid a tin can half full of axle grease into one back pocket, an oil can with its tapered spout into the other, and began climbing the metal ladder, scaling the center of one side of the quadrangle of angle irons forming the legs of the mill. While he climbed, he kept his eye only on the wooden platform at the top of the tower, just under the machinery between the wheel and the tail, not daring to look down at the ground. Once at the top, he forced himself through the square opening at the center of the platform and sat on it, resting before doing the job he had come to do.

The grease cups on the machinery were out of the reach of a person sitting on the platform. Knowing that, if he sat too long, he would lose what little nerve he had, after a brief moment of rest, he forced himself to a standing position, his feet straddling the center opening, one eye on the stationery wheel, hoping and praying that a breeze wouldn't come to swing the tail around and knock him off the platform. Heart pounding, he raised his right hand to the half-dollar sized cap of the grease cup and unscrewed it. Steadying himself against the main cluster of gears, he reached into his hip pocket for the can of grease, managed to hold it in his left hand while with his right hand he immersed the cap into it, filled the cap with the grease, slowly returned the can to his hip pocket, and carefully screwed the cap onto its stem. As he did so, for just a moment, everything swam before his eyes. The strain of the tense sidewise movement did something to the flow of blood to his head and toyed with his sense of balance, making him again to grasp the gears for support.

Now he turned his attention to those moving parts not lubricated by the grease cup. He pulled the oil can from his other hip pocket, grasped it in his right hand in such a way that his thumb could put pressure on the flat bottom of the can, reached up, and pointed the end of the tapered spout at each place where oil was needed. At each place, his thumb pressed several drops of oil out of the spout onto the metal surfaces. After each press, his thumb released the pressure on the can bottom, allowing it to snap back flat, awaiting the next push. A half dozen squirts of oil completed the job. Carefully he slid the oil can back into his hip pocket, rejecting the temptation to toss the can to the ground, lest in the tossing of it, he himself should follow the can in a fatal plunge.

Eyes fixed on the machinery and the clouds above it, he slowly let his right foot feel its way into the square hole at the center of the platform. Slowly, he lowered his body to a sitting position, all the while keeping his hands tightly grasping the unfamiliar metal surfaces of the air motor. With one huge sigh he finally settled onto the platform. The job was done! All that remained was the descent on the thin metal of the permanent ladder.

Still not daring to look at the ground, he forced his eyes to look to the top steps.

Grasping two of the angle irons forming the peak of the tower two feet above the platform, he lowered his right foot until his toes felt the top rung of the ladder. Lowering his left foot to the next lower rung he began his slow, cautious descent, one foot edging downward after the other. Not until he had reached the lowest cross-member of the tower did he dare to let his eyes glance to the ground below him. Only then did his body relax to the point where his descent became painless and without strain.

The last time a windstorm blew over that windmill provoked a mixture of sadness and rejoicing from Dad. He knew he would never rebuild the mill. The insurance money would go for a pump jack, engines, and finally electric motors by which the water would be pumped. They would cost money. Money was painfully hard to come by. But this equipment was at ground level. No more would Dad have to climb the windmill to grease it once a year! That was cause for rejoicing!

Muzzles

We were well aware of the Biblical injunction not to muzzle the ox that treads the grain. We didn't farm with oxen. We did farm with horses. Horses have insatiable appetites. They can and they will eat, anytime, anywhere.

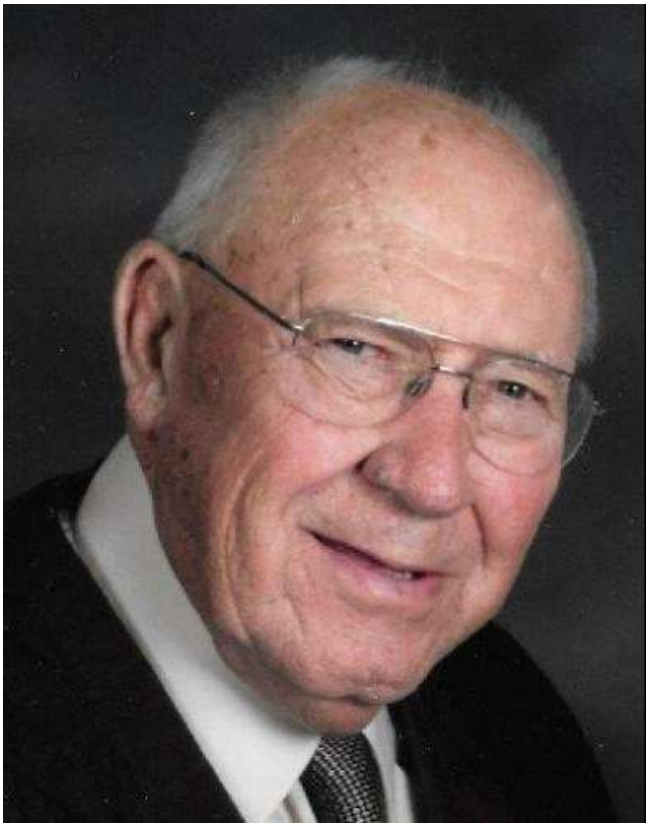
A cow, given the opportunity, will eat her fill of grain, tum away from it, lie down, and chew her cud in contentment. A horse, given the opportunity, will continue to eat grain until he literally eats himself to death.

A working horse whose mouth comes close enough to anything edible, will swing its head at every opportunity to grab a bite of whatever the edible substance is, and chew it down. When we cultivated corn, we usually used one horse and a single-row cultivator. Any time after the corn was knee high, the horse we used displayed in incurable tendency to reach down with its mouth every two or three horse-lengths, and grab the top, tender leaves. The action of the head of the horse surged through the tugs to the cultivator, causing it to lurch ahead unsteadily, then to slow so quickly the person walking behind the tool banged his middle into the cross bar between the handles.

Yes, we knew the Bible. But we were also practical. What applied to oxen did not apply to horses. We used muzzles. These were wire-mesh baskets hung on slender ropes or leather straps that fitted over the ears of the horse to keep the basket on its nose. They were efficient. The horses hated them. We saw to it they wore them, not only for cultivating corn or beans, but also for mowing and bindering. We didn't use muzzles when the horses were near potatoes or beans. These plants never tempted the horse palate.

A Concluding Thought

We who lived on the hills and in the hollows and among the stones of the Highland community experienced a keyhole in history, a slot in time so unique that we ourselves fail to realize the contrast between the way we lived and the lifestyles of others in different places and in different times. And we haven't told half the story. The telling has been a pleasure, for in the telling we have shared something of ourselves. We cannot go back to those years and we don't want to. We can only relate some of that which has shaped us, something of what we hope future generations will recognize as important. In the telling, we bear witness to the faithfulness of our God. We played the roles he called us to play on the stage of the history of Highland. It was God who wrote the script and directed our doings to fulfill his purposes, not ours. When we, nourished as we were on the bosom of Highland's hills, stop to consider how our lives, lived mostly far from our roots, have influenced for good the lives of so many, it makes us humble and thankful. We testify that our God has been so very good to us, in spite of our own selves. To Him be the honor, the glory, and the praise.



Clarence Vredevoogd (1926-2006)

In 1869, two Dutchmen settled in the center of the Michigan mitten, in the area of what would become Vogel Center and Lucas, Michigan. Here they cut timber, farmed the land, and reared their families. The community grew around the churches in the area, and the railroad, which came through the area in the early 1870s, helped populate the area considerably.

In the early 1900s, the Vredevoogd family moved to land outside Highland, Michigan, near Vogel Center and Lucas. On the farm, three generations of Vredevoogds farmed the land and raised livestock. *Sunday, Church Day; Monday, Wash Day* is the memoir of Clarence Vredevoogd, one of the third generation to grow up on that family farm.

In *Sunday, Church Day; Monday, Wash Day*, Clarence vividly portrays life on the farm and the surrounding community as he grew up and eventually left the farm. Local Dutch customs still flourish, even as the community has become more urbanized and less agricultural.

Anyone remotely interested in agricultural life in general, and Dutch Michigan life in particular, is sure to enjoy *Sunday, Church Day; Monday, Wash Day.*