MEMOIRS OF A COUNTRY GIRL

by Ruth Stimson Bovenmyer

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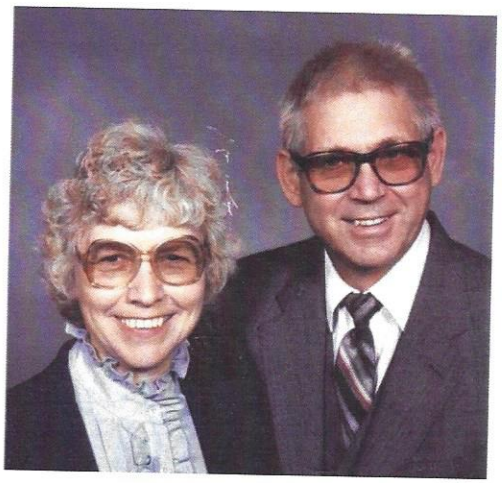
Leon and Ruth (Stimson) Bovenmyer

Compiled for the Buchanan County Heritage Book in 1990

Both Leon and Ruth come from families with a long history in Iowa. Leon's maternal great-great-grandfather, William Abbe, was the first white settler in Linn Co. Iowa, and his paternal great-great-grandfather, Samuel Bovenmyer settled in Howard Township in Tama County, Iowa, in 1856. Leon was born on this family farm on December 25, 1926 to Howard (Steve) Bovenmyer and Leona (Mathern) Bovenmyer.



When hard times forced them off that farm in 1930, they moved to a farm near Buck Creek, Iowa. When he was in 5th grade, they moved to Buchanan County, living on three different farms in Middlefield Township, where he attended school, graduating from Winthrop High School. He has three sisters: Barbara, Mary, Betty Nellist, and brother, Jack.

Ruth's maternal great-great-grandparents were all early settlers in the Linn-Buchanan County area. They include William Bruce, who built the grist mills at both Nugent's Grove (Coggon) and Troy Mills; Andrew Todd, who settled at Ehler (near Coggon); and James Richardson and David Phillips, who both took land along the Linn-Buchanan County line east of Troy Mills.

Ruth was born on September 7, 1928 to Roy and Hazel (Phillips) Stimson and was raised on the same farm that her great-great-grandfather Phillips had purchased in 1855. She graduated from Troy Mills High School and Upper Iowa College in Fayette, Iowa. She has one sister, Dorothy Sherman, and three brothers, Lloyd, Harry, and Andrew.

Leon and Ruth were married April 2, 1950 and have lived on three Buchanan County farms during their married life. They started farming west of Walker for two years, then moved southeast of Winthrop for 16 years, moving to their present farm one mile east of Monti in 1968. They have five children: Virginia (Mrs. Chris) Biang, West Chicago, Illinois;

David, married to Dawn Knaphus, Ames, Iowa; Steven, married to Julie Edwards, Ames, Iowa; Dean, who runs the farm; and Carol (Mrs. Eric) Gilson, Mishicot, Wisconsin. Leon and Ruth have 17 grandchildren.

Leon and Ruth have been engaged in general farming all of their lives. Their enterprises have included dairying, hog and cattle production, and raising corn, soybeans, oats, and hay. Ruth has also been a pre-first and first grade teacher in the East Buchanan Schools, completing her 26th year of teaching this year. They are both lay speakers in the Methodist Church and have taken part in many Lay-Witness Week-ends around the state. Leon is a member of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International. He has also been a board member of Farm Bureau and is currently a board member of the Backbone Area Youth for Christ. Another of their interests is model trains, and they have a large layout in the basement of their home. They enjoy traveling and have ridden on many of the antique steam train rides available around the country.

Born in a Barn?

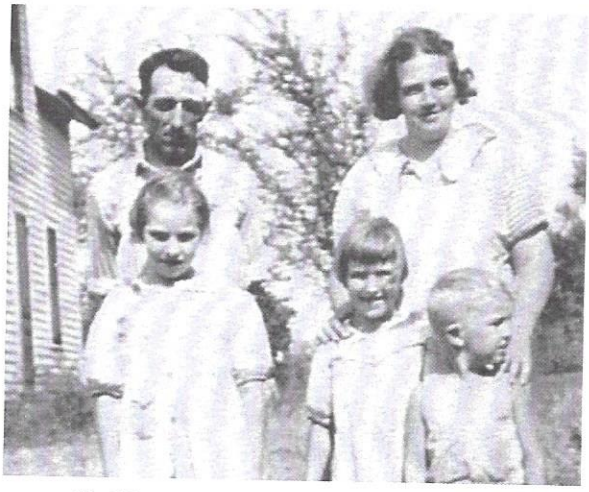
When I was young, I told people that I'd been born in the henhouse. Then the purpose of the building changed and I bragged of being born in the granary. Now Hubby Leon teases me about having been born in a barn.

The truth is that I was born on September 7, 1928 in a new building on our farm. It had been fixed up to be a temporary dwelling after the older house burned down. A new house was in the process of being built, but the first months of my life were spent in a building that later served more common functions of farming. So I could honestly say that I had been born in the henhouse.

Roy, Ruth, Hazel

I am the oldest of five children. We were all born at home with a doctor and a midwife in attendance in the years just before hospital births became common. My family has always had big babies, and I was no exception, weighing nine pounds at birth. I was the first grandchild on my mother's side, and we lived close to my mother's family. Her younger sisters have always told me how sweet they thought I was. When my sister, Dorothy May, came along two years later, they were doubly delighted with their two little doll-babies.

When I was almost five and Dorothy had just turned three, our brother, Lloyd, was born. I remember that we girls stayed overnight at Grandma's and were awakened in the morning by Grandma's call, "You have a baby brother." The other thing I remember about his birth was the uncertainty about his name. The folks had planned to name him, Harry Edward, after both grandfathers, but Daddy's brother and wife had had a baby boy first and named him Harry Dean. So the folks named our baby Lloyd Orval, a name that disappointed me for some unknown



Daddy, Mamma, Ruth, Dorothy, & Lloyd

childish reason.

By the time our next brother was born five years later, cousin Harry Dean was known only as Dean, and our baby was named Harry Edward. My most vivid memory of his June birth centered around our prolific strawberry bed. The huge crop had ripened during the two weeks that Mamma was house-bound. (Women were supposed to remain in bed for 10 days after childbirth in those days.) I seem to remember that Mamma cheated on that some but, of course, she was busy with the new one so it was left for the hired girl and us children to spend the days in the strawberry patch. I remember how jealous I was of Mamma because she got to stay in the house with that new baby, while I had to labor out in the hot sun!

Our family was completed two years later when Andrew Willard was born. He was named so that his initials would spell A.W.S., honoring our longtime landlord, A.W. Savage. He was born in June, too, but I don't remember strawberries. The hired girl who came to help us out became a close friend later when both of us were married and had children of our own.

We were all born on our farm on the Buchanan-Linn county line west of Coggon. The farm was one of the two original places purchased in the middle 1800s by our great-great-grandfather. Mamma's folks lived one mile west on the other original place.

By the time I was born in 1928, the farm was no longer in the family. Our parents had tried to purchase it but were unable to retain possession in the depressed economy of the time. My parents rented the farm on 50-50 shares from our local lumberyard owner and his wife for 25 years. They raised corn, soybeans, oats, hay, cattle, dairy cows, pigs, and chickens. This enterprise set the directions for our learning, working, and playing as I grew up. I give my happy secure childhood the credit for my lifelong love of country life.

Back: Dorothy, Lloyd, Ruth
Front: Hazel, Andy, Harry, Roy

My Earliest Memory

My mother argued that my earliest memory could not have been "real" as I was too young, but the scene in my head is so detailed that I always argued back and say, "I do remember it."

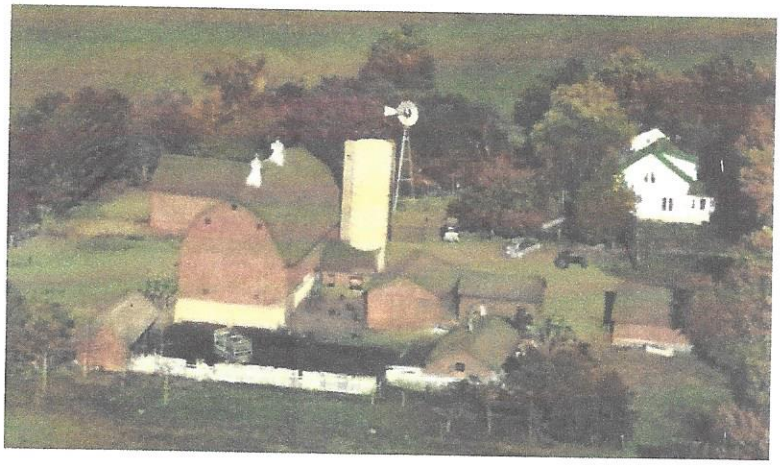
I remember my great-grandfather, John Morris Phillips, coming into my grandfather's kitchen from the door to the woodshed. Behind him are the piles of wood for the kitchen stove which stood at the right of the door. To the left of the door was an old "zinc," my grandmother's term, in front of which sat the cream separator.

John M. Phillips was tall and old with a long flowing white beard, and I was terrified of him. In my memory I see him looking like the pictures of Jehovah in the old Bibles. I have in my possession a photograph of me with my great-grandfather. He is sitting in the yard on a chair, and I am sitting in the grass at least five feet away, the closest that my mother could get me to stay. A close study of the picture looks to me as though I was bribed with something to eat.

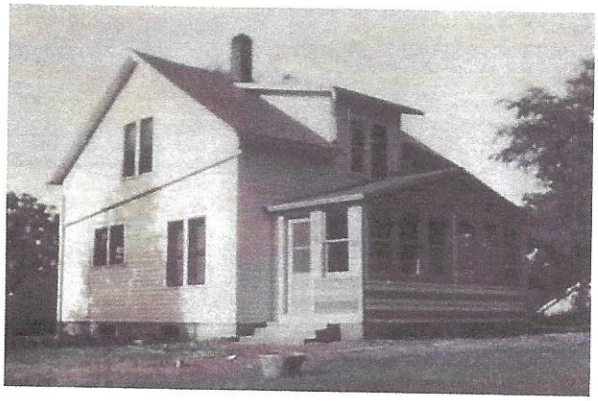
What a disappointment I must have been to him; his first great-grandchild afraid of him. He died before I was two. I think that the fear was what etched the scene so indelibly on my memory.

My Childhood Home

From a certain spot on a hill south of Troy Mills, a person can look east across the Wapsipinicon River Valley and see the farm where I grew up northeast of the town. Ever since I was small I have always watched for that spot. Even now, more than 70 years later, I still watch the horizon for a glimpse of "home." Not all of the farm children from the depression years were as lucky as I was. I lived on the same farm from my birth until my marriage at age 21, except for some months in college, a year as a hired girl, and one year as a teacher.



When I remember my childhood home, it is not just a house but a whole 160-acre farm in southern Buchanan County, Iowa. The farm was settled by my great-great-grandfather, David Phillips, in 1855 and had been in family hands until shortly before my birth. My parents contracted to buy it, but the crop failure of 1927 doomed those plans. For the next 26 years, they rented it on a 50-50 share lease from a businessman in a neighboring town, Coggon. Both my folks and the landlord, A.W. Savage, were anxious to have a neat-appearing farmstead and profitable farm. With the landlord's capital and my parents' labor and management, the farm was developed into a productive, good-looking place where we were proud to live.



The house was new, built to replace the one that burned after my folks moved in. It was simply built. It was bungalow style with four rooms downstairs, three rooms upstairs with sloping ceilings. Under the sloped sides of the bedrooms were closets, so we had more closet space than many larger homes. There was a full, cemented basement but no true attic. In later years, a porch was added on

the front, but it wasn't heated. There was no running water or bathroom while we lived there.

We did have a cistern that caught rain water. In dry spells, the men pumped water into it from the little stock tank in the well house. A pump in the kitchen brought water up from the cistern, an unusual convenience envied by neighbor women. Only the water for cooking and drinking had to be carried from the well.

The house was heated with wood and coal. Mamma cooked on a Home Comfort range. It had a water reservoir on the side and a warming oven above. We had to pick up cobs for the cookstove because they made a quick fire. Wood was used for longer-lasting fires, for baking and heating wash water. On wash days, the water was heated in a big boiler which sat on the range.

A big Warm Morning stove stood in the living room. My folks burned some wood, but I remember them using more coal. Coal would burn slowly all night and make a more even heat. This Warm Morning stove was an improvement on the earlier heaters because it was much safer. Over the stove itself was fashioned a metal jacket which kept us from falling against the actual iron firebox. Some homes had registers in the ceilings to allow a little of the downstairs heat to rise into the upstairs bedrooms, but ours did not have this amenity. I remember some very cold nights being dressed in warm flannel pajamas, covered with several of Grandma Phillips' handmade quilts, and snuggled down into the bed with only a "nose hole" open to the frigid air.

The Warm Morning also served as heat for our bath times. We heated water and put it in a galvanized wash tub. The tub served a double purpose: a bath tub and a rinse tub on wash days. Our hands and faces were washed in the kitchen sink before every meal and the rest of our bodies when they needed it. In those days, it wasn't customary to bathe often. Since we were all involved in livestock chores, I wonder now how we must have smelled some days at school. The other students were also farm children, we probably all smelled alike.

When We Were Young in Church

When I was young, I went to Sunday School and church at Troy Mills Methodist Church with Grandma and Paul Phillips. I was told that Grandpa John Ed Phillips had turned away from the Spring Grove Church in some dispute and refused to attend anywhere, saying, "If that is how Christians are, I don't want to be around them." However, his personal feud didn't keep him from making sure that Grandma and Paul attended at Troy Mills every Sunday. And when we got old enough, we went, too.

An early memory of church must have been at a summer Bible School. I only remember a wire stretched across the sanctuary with figures on it (maybe cars) in a contest to move the figures across the line and win. In my memory, a man was exhorting us to do better, but I don't remember what we had to do to succeed.

Another early memory was one of my life's most embarrassing moments. As soon as Dorothy and I got far enough along in our piano lessons to be able to hit two or three notes at the same time, we were asked to play for Sunday School. Oh, the patience of a congregation to allow beginners to stumble through the hymns; to sing the same few hymns over and over until the pianist learns new ones, and even to praise them later for their "good" job.

On the Sunday that I remember, I was about 10 years old. We had a guest, and he wanted to sing a solo. He asked if there was anyone who could play for him. There was no other pianist there but me, and if I could have evaporated at that moment, I would have. "You can do it," several encouraged me.

Poor soloist! He handed me sheet music, the first I'd ever had in my hand, and we began. I did know enough to find and play the melody line but little more. I've often wondered about the soloist and what he thought of the 10-year-old amateur who dared to accompany him when she couldn't even read the music. The experience did have a good effect on me. I went home determined to practice more and learn some new hymns. I've accompanied many people since then but never with such fear as that first time.

Christmas at Church

Christmas was always a very busy season for our family. In addition to all of the shopping, making presents, making candy, and decorating, we spent quite a bit of time preparing for the church's Christmas program. We attended the Methodist church in Troy Mills, and the Christmas program was the highlight of the year for me. Several times Santa brought us our new clothes the Sunday before Christmas so that we wouldn't have to appear on stage in our outgrown ones.

Coming into the church that night was wonderful. The church's decorations made it look almost like a fairyland to me. There would be a big tree, cut from someone's timber, all decorated with tinsel and balls and popcorn strings. A wire would be strung across the front of the "stage" and curtains hung from it. The church would be full of parishioners, friends, relatives, especially grandparents eager to see their grandchildren perform. Members who never attended at any other time of the year would be there for this happy occasion.

And scurrying around getting everything ready would be the children and their teachers. Each of us above the age of three or so had a piece which we had to memorize. As we grew older the recitations grew longer until we finally reached the age when we could be in the skits and plays and no longer had to do a "piece." I now realize how much work was put into those programs, but in those days my only concern was whether I would be able to remember my piece in front of all of those people. Many leaders in the Methodist church today got their start in witnessing by appearing in the Christmas programs. In spite of overwhelming stage fright and knocking knees, we always managed to complete the selections and receive the applause of our relatives and friends.

Then came the best part. While the grown-ups sang Christmas carols, we children would strain to hear the magical sound of sleigh bells. Yes, Santa Claus always came to our Christmas programs. He would arrive shouting "Ho, Ho, Ho" so loudly that it would drown out the singing. He had a sack on his back. Every child in the church would receive a paper sack containing hard Christmas candy, peanuts still in the shell, and an apple or an orange. I remember some children having a present under the tree, but Santa always left our presents at our home for Christmas Day.

After that was the time for visiting and cleaning up. I expect there was Scripture read and prayers said and other more solemn moments to the evening, but I remember none of that. My memories are a blur of a beautiful tree, stage fright, Santa, and the sack of candy which I tried to make last until Santa made it to our house Christmas morning.

Santa Claus is Coming to Town

In our home at the north end of the present Dix Road, Christmases were always the highlight of the year. Neither lack of money nor illness ever kept my parents (and Santa Claus) from making the season a happy one for us. There was not one person in my family with a "Bah, humbug" nature, and several on the Phillips side were by definition "Christmas people." Our traditions were a mix of traditional habits and some that I find unique to us.

I don't remember that we ever purchased a Christmas tree. There were red cedar trees in Grandpa's timber, but we were older before I remember those jaunts. My earliest recollection is of Mamma fashioning a tree with branches trimmed from the windbreak that protected our farmstead from the north and west winds. She would search out some branches that looked bushy and full. A five-gallon pail filled with sand served as a tree holder. When she finished arranging the branches so that they looked tree-like, there were no lights, but we used Christmas balls, strings of popcorn and cranberries and lots of tinsel. Santa Claus never saw a more beautiful tree.

I realize now that Mamma spent a lot of pre-Christmas time sewing clothes for Santa to bring. Christmas and school's starting were the events used to replenish our worn out and outgrown wardrobe. Santa brought new clothes to everyone, including mittens, hoods, stocking caps, dresses for the girls, shirts and pants for the boys. The men got socks, flannel shirts, caps with ear flaps, and handkerchiefs. If there was Kleenex for sale then, we never bought it. As Mamma was a morning person, she got up with Daddy and sewed while he and the hired man milked. It must have been a challenge to keep the Santa sewing hidden from us. As we got older, and Santa wasn't such a big thing, she sometimes got our new clothes out ahead of time so that we could wear something new for the church Christmas program.

Homemade Christmas candy was another tradition, especially in Mamma's family. Grandma Phillips, Aunt Edna, and Mamma were great candy makers. Chocolate fudge, penuche, and divinity were favorites. In those days we didn't use evaporated milk, marshmallows, and chocolate chips to make a smooth fudge. Ours was the old-fashioned kind that required boiling to a soft ball stage and usually ended up rather sugary. To this day, my sis-

ter Dorothy makes a batch of the old-fashioned kind to remind the members of our family how "real" homemade candy tastes.

Penuche made with walnuts and brown sugar was another favorite. And Mamma made excellent divinity, cooking the syrup until you could dip the spoon in and the syrup would spin off little wisps like spider webs as you let it run back into the boiling mixture. The fluffy egg whites came from our own hen's eggs so they were always fresh. For the best results, she tried to make divinity on a clear day, a time-honored household hint for candy makers. All of the candy would include nuts from our many black walnut trees, laboriously cracked out by whoever she could enlist to help out.

On Christmas Eve we made our final preparations before going to bed. Each child had his own chair with a full-length cotton stocking draped over it. This was where Santa would leave the gifts. Only our presents to each other and our parents were wrapped and put under the tree. Santa's gifts were spread out for everyone to see when we came downstairs on Christmas morning. What a visual feast!

My respect for my parents has never been deeper than in the later years when I came to realize how much effort they had made to ensure that our Christmases would be special. I grew up in the '30s, so I realize how much they must have scrimped and saved to please us. Although some of the presents were practical, like clothes and mittens, we always had toys to fit the age of the child and at least one of the things we'd asked Santa to bring us.

Each stocking contained a penny in the toe, some hard Christmas candy, some mixed nuts, a huge orange, a huge apple, and a small toy that would fit in the stocking. Games and books were favorite Santa gifts. Santa brought us good sleds when the old ones got too worn out, and he also made sure that we had a red wagon, not only for play but also for gardening and wheeling clothes out to the clothesline. Dolls, Tinker Toys, and Erector sets were among the lasting gifts. Someone always gave Daddy a huge box of chocolates, his passion. He often gave Mamma jewelry, beautiful necklaces and pins.

Finding that Santa had been there and opening our presents were just the beginning of the great day. We always spent the rest of the day at Grandma's house. The custom was to spend Thanksgiving in one grandparent's home and Christmas in the other grandparent's.

Then the next year we would switch. We still went to both grandparents' houses each year, going the Sunday after Christmas to the off-year side.

These were occasions for playing with the cousins and getting more gifts. Grandma Phillips always gave each person a gift, as did Aunt Edna. And we had something for them, too. Names were drawn at Thanksgiving, and we made, baked, or purchased a gift for the one whose name we'd drawn. The homemade candy, pies, roast chicken, and homemade bread left us all stuffed and content as we traveled home for the night milking.

Even illness couldn't stop Christmas from coming. One year when I was a teenager, we all had the flu during December, with Daddy having it longest and hardest. Since my mother didn't drive, they couldn't make their usual trips to Cedar Rapids to go shopping. At the last moment, Grandpa took Mamma to Troy Mills and Coggon to shop.

I was very apprehensive as we waited for Santa with the younger boys. What could Mamma find in the local stores that would be appropriate for a teenage girl? Imagine my delight as I saw on my chair, not only the usual practical gifts but also a beautiful umbrella! I treasured it for years until it finally broke its ribs. It was an indication of Mamma's resourcefulness that all of us were happy with Santa's visit via the local stores. Of course, they were well-stocked general stores in those days, not the mini-mart of today.

Is it any wonder that I still love Christmas? I was taught by my family how to keep Christmas properly. Christmas programs at church, decorations, making Christmas candy, making or buying presents, eating at Grandma's house, playing with cousins all combine in my memories in a delightful haze of Christmases past and present. "O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree, how lovely are your branches."

Winter Memories

Winter has always been a favorite time for me even though it has many hardships connected to it. I am an outdoor or winter person, perhaps made so by my early training in rising early to help with chores. Since we milked between 25 and 30 cows all the time that I was growing up, early rising was a necessity.

Our farm home was protected by a large evergreen grove to the north and west so it was possible to be outside for more than a few minutes even in the coldest weather. Since our home didn't have indoor plumbing, we were forced to go outside at least a few times a day. I'm not sure why my mother didn't make more use of chamber pots, but I don't remember getting to use those until after my Grandma Stimson came to live with us when I was in my teens.

One winter when I was older, my folks bought a two-quart ice cream freezer. Since I liked ice cream so much, I chopped the ice after the chores were done, brought in the cream, and we had homemade ice cream at least every other night all winter.

A chore-related job that we all hated, especially in winter, was to pick up cobs in the hog lot for a quick fire in the cook stove. I can still see those ice- and snow-covered cobs lying in the north barn lot waiting for me to pick them up and put them in the five-gallon pail reserved for the purpose.

Another job was to refill the little kerosene heaters under the chicken and hog waterers. They were little round metal tubs filled with kerosene. They had a top that had a wick through it. The purpose was to keep the water melted where the chickens or pigs drank. How I hated them! They were always going out at the wrong time, and they needed to be filled twice a day no matter how cold it was or how hard the wind was blowing. I'm sure they were a modern blessing to my parents who had to do much worse things in their days.

You may wonder, if there was so much more work in the winter, why did I like it so much? Besides the work, there were blessings that only winter brings. I realize now that I just feel better in cold weather than I do in hot weather. I seem to be rather hot-blooded, and it is easier for me to get warmed up than it is to cool off. Then winter has so much beauty. Even today, I dress up in my snow pants, put on every available layer of clothing

and go out and stand in the shelter of the windbreak and let a blizzard swirl around me. Until my back got so that I couldn't risk it, I loved to go sledding, skating on the ice on nothing but boots, tobogganing, making snowmen (there is a snowman in our yard now that the grandchildren helped me build), and any other winter activities available close by. I never had the opportunity to ski, but I know that I would have liked that too.

Harry, Andy, & Dorothy

Although being snowed in caused great hardships for my folks, we kids loved it. One of our favorite winter desserts was mousse, the result of Mother's desperation one snowbound season. We whipped heavy cream and mixed it with the homemade jellies that were in the basement and set it out in the snow to freeze. It made a delicious kind of ice cream. Of course, we had oodles of cream to use because our cream hauler couldn't make it to the farm to pick it up. Conversely, we couldn't make it out to get groceries and had to improvise. My love for hominy also comes from that period of my life, because we finally became desperate enough to take corn out of the crib and make homemade hominy with it one year. We all liked it so much that making hominy became a yearly winter tradition.

To this day, snowstorms, ice storms, and winter weather excite me and bring back memories of happy hardworking times with my family.

Winter, 1936

Fire

The fear that has permeated my life has been a fear of fire. When I was younger, my worst nightmares included fire, and my waking thoughts turned to it often. We feel fortunate that the fires that seemed to plague our family caused no personal injury, only loss of possessions and memorabilia.

Before I was born, my parents returned from town one day to find our house burned to the ground. In those days no one determined the exact cause of the fire, but no doubt one of the wood stoves was at fault. As I reported in an earlier chapter, this resulted in my being born in an outbuilding.

The new house was built quickly and cheaply, and it had an unknown and serious fault. Some wood was laid directly against the chimney brick. Some years later that wood caught fire. It was quickly extinguished with little damage, but the incident left an indelible impression on my mind. Lying in bed on nights when the stoves had to be fired heavily, I would picture little fires burning in secret along the chimney.

Another fire happened when I was in 1st or 2nd grade in Troy Mills. The big hotel burned to the ground. In spite of heroic measures by a townsman, a tiny baby died in its crib. That afternoon the big kids on the bus persuaded the driver to alter his route so that we could see the remains of the large building before we went home for the day. What an impression the smoking ruin made on my mind. I can see it yet!

One day when I was older, I was in the basement washing clothes with our Maytag when a great cloud of smoke darkened the window. When I ran out to look, the haymow of our large barn was ablaze. Mamma had already run through the lower level and released the calves, etc. so we long only a few head of stock. The fire fighters were able to save all of the other buildings. The fire was caused by spontaneous combustion in the hay. The "explosion" blew off the roof. In the discussions afterward, the men remembered the small cutting of hay that had been mowed just before a rain. A.W. was there when they were deciding whether it was dry enough to put in the barn and told them, "Put it up. If it burns it will burn." So Daddy didn't feel as though the whole decision had been his.

That afternoon we witnessed an example of superhuman effort under pressure. Four neighbors entered the nearby machine shed, picked up the corn binder, one on each corner, and carried it to safety. It took many more men and the horses to get it back in the shed when the fire was out.

Leon and I have had two fires. In the second year of our marriage, our home on the Bare farm west of Walker burned from a chimney fire. We saved all of our first floor belongings but lost everything upstairs, including the diaries I'd kept since I was 13. The Walker fire department came without a full load of water. As with most farms, there was no available source of water, and the house slowly burned to the ground.

We've always been thankful to have been in no physical danger from the fire. The morning of the fire, I decided to mop the kitchen floor before doing dishes. While the floor dried, I took Baby Virginia with me to the barn to keep Leon company as he milked. As he carried a milker by the door, he saw fire and smoke on the house roof. Neighbors soon came and helped carry out furniture and appliances from the first story, but the upstairs and the attic were lost. The owners, the Bares, were the ones who lost the most valuable possessions. Besides being of great family value, their extensive memorabilia in the attic and in the upstairs bedrooms would be of intense interest in today's antique market.

The last time I saw my freshly-mopped floor, it was black with mud. But in our neighbor's home the next morning I discovered Virginia eating leftover oatmeal out of an unwashed dish! So much for my priorities for the day. We lived in the garage until the next spring when we moved to the Winthrop farm.

Our most recent fire was at Christmas time in 1989. The heater in the hog nursery malfunctioned and exploded. The nursery didn't burn, but it blackened the interior and sucked the air from the lungs of 63 weaned pigs.

One consequence of our house fires is that both my parents and us lost much of our early memorabilia. My high school diaries, many of our wedding gifts, my school class ring, and some photos were lost. In my mother's effects, only those treasures that were still in her parents' home were saved. As we went through her things, imagine my pleasure in finding, along with our report cards, a little card announcing my birth September 7, 1928 as the oldest memento in my mother's personal collection of keepsakes.

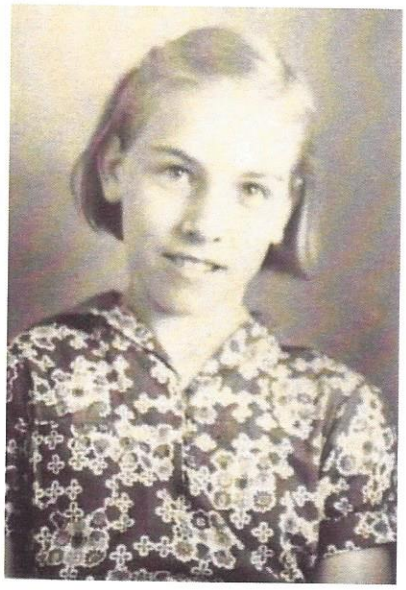
Late Summer Evening

It is dusk. We are lying on an old quilt in the front yard, Dorothy, Evelyn, and I. We've moved the quilt several times trying to find a smoother spot on the hard ground. The best one is underneath the big cottonwood, but from under there we won't be able to watch the stars come out. We are going to have a contest to see who can see the first star and call out "Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight. Wish I may, wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight."

It's getting darker and the neighbor men who helped fill the silo have eaten Mother's lavish supper and gone home to do chores. We hear Mother and Evelyn's mother in the kitchen washing up the dishes in the lamp light. We can tell that Daddy and the hired men are still choring from the soft put-put-put sound of the vacuum pump on the milking machine.

We squirm around trying to get comfortable on the hard ground. We strain our eyes to see stars but we've started too soon, so we talk about nothing in particular, just talk. We jump at the sudden squeal of a pig at the trough and giggle until we can't stop. The dog notices us and comes to lick our faces in turn and lie down on our legs.

It's quieter now; the only sound is the humming of the locusts. We begin to feel the dampness through the quilt. We notice a new smell, so different from the usual barnyard tang. We decide it's the odor of fresh silage, rather sweet and corn-smelling. Is it ever going to get dark? We no longer hear the noises in the kitchen. Evelyn's mother will soon come to take her home.



Then the moment we've been waiting for! The other girls shout out together: "Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight. Wish I may, wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight."

As usual, they've won. It never seems right, for them to always see the stars first. After all, I am nine years old, older than they are by two years. I follow their pointing arms until I too see the evening star in the western sky.

Now we lie back relaxed and watching as the other stars come

out. We wonder. Is there a world way up there just like our earth where three girls are lying on a quilt in a farmyard in their Iowa looking down at us?

Evelyn and her mother go home, and we drag our quilt inside to our softer bed. I try to get Dorothy to tell me what her wish was, but she knows that she can't tell or the wish won't come true. I drift off to sleep still wondering about the other girl in the other world. Is she lying in her bed up there wondering about me?

Rocks

It was warm. The sun beat down on the field. The thumping sound of rocks as they were thrown into the wagon broke the stillness of the spring day. It was May, time to plant corn. We could put it off no longer, the task that was hated by old and young alike. We had to pick up the rocks that were scattered over the field before we could plant corn. Rocks are machinery breakers and Buchanan County, Iowa is known not only for its good soil but also for its many rocks. Nearby machinery dealers have always done a prosperous business in repairing farm equipment damaged by running into rocks.

It seemed that there were more rocks than ever that spring. Besides the natural rocks that were always being plowed up, there were thousands of shards left from a huge rock that had been dynamited by the tiling contractor. We were glad to have the slough tiled out so it could be put into crops, but it meant days of real back-breaking labor getting it cleaned up for cultivation. Daddy, the hired man, and we kids were spending the afternoon picking up rocks, putting them into the wagon. The older ones of us took turns driving the horses and wagon in the field.

The afternoon wore on. We had quit picking up smaller rocks and concentrated on getting those large enough to damage the machinery. This meant that daddy and the hired man were doing most of the picking up. The grumbles from us children about the heat and work went from occasional complaints to continual whines.

As we worked, we mulled over the question of where the rocks came from year after year. Perhaps, one of us suggested, under the soil mother rocks were having baby rocks. Or maybe the whole Earth's crust would finally rise to the surface in the form of rocks for us to pick up!

At last, Daddy agreed that we had all of the stones we could get by hand. The rest would have to be levered onto the stoneboat with a pry-bar. (The stoneboat was a flat platform made of two by twelve planks that was drug away. Daddy had already worn out one stoneboat that spring.) At the news that we were released, we raced for the house. The hated job was finished for the year. We tried to put out of our mind the thought that next year there would be new rocks to pick up.

In retrospect, I can see that I was luckier than some farm youth. After a few days of "rock-picking" when I was young, I was excused from the job to help in other areas. Leon was still at it when we were courting in the summer of 1949. He and Dad Bovenmyer spent months cleaning a recently-tiled slough on their farm. I'm sure the effort contributed to my impression of him as tanned, brown, lean, and fit. And the job is with us yet today. Young people are still making school money by picking up rocks for neighbors.

As I drive through the country in the spring and see a family out picking up rocks, I don't have much trouble imagining the conversation.

"How much longer, Daddy? Can't we be through now? Daddy, he is just playing. He's not working," and, always, "Where do all of these rocks come from?"

Getting the Cows

One of the summer jobs that I liked best was getting the cows in from the pasture on nice days. Our dog, Fritz, and I began by wandering through the north gate and reconnoitering before we started out. The cows would either be in the little close pasture or in the far pasture. I always liked the far pasture better because then I got to daydream my way past the old slough and on up to the Old Grove, a quarter mile back from the road.

The Old Grove was the historic spot on our farm. It contained the remains of the buildings and orchards of the original building site. My great-great-grandparents, David and Julia Phillips, and their son John Morris came from New Jersey and bought virgin land from a land agent. This 160 acres was the second parcel of land that they bought along the Linn-Buchanan County line east of Troy Mills, Iowa. John Morris built a home and outbuildings and planted a large grove of trees, including fruit trees. Although the buildings were gone and the homesite moved to another location on the farm, the grove was still there and many of the fruit trees were still producing in my youth.

The grove was always interesting to me. On one of my special days, a cloud of yellow butterflies descended around me, thousands and thousands in what was probably a migration. It was one of the "Aha!" moments in my life when I felt very special in the world. I was always glad to find a good apple or pear and even a sour plum tasted good. The shade of the tall trees was welcome, and I waited until the cows got going before I left the shaded areas.

The actual task of getting the 30 or so cows headed home was one of running behind first one straggler then another until they all plodded down their cow paths toward home. Since the dog was usually out on a rabbit chase, he wasn't of much use.

Thank goodness there was no real creek to cross, as cows were notorious for getting on the wrong side of the creek from the herder. One of our neighbors made a great impression on the community when he got so upset over a cow switching back and forth from bank to bank that he went home, got his gun, and shot her dead, a deed his family never forgave him for.

As I went, I would leap from hummock to hummock in an attempt to keep from falling into the wet slough. The cows didn't seem to mind walking in the bog, and their feet made a slurping, sucking sound that I would recognize instantly, even after these 60 years.

I wonder now at the schedule on our farm, when the person that they sent to get the cows was a daydreamy girl who took time to explore old foundations, munch apples and pears, and play with butterflies.

The Tractor

"All right, Ruth," my father says as he swings the gate wide, "Lift your left foot up very slowly to let out the clutch and drive through the gate."

Sitting high up on the tractor seat, I try to obey in spite of my almost paralyzing fear, only to lurch ahead amid shouts to stop, and the front of the tractor comes to rest against the left gatepost.

In the patient calm that only a parent of a scared 13-year-old girl can muster, my father climbs up onto the seat and backs up the Farmall F-12 tractor. Again I climb over the drawbar and axle and onto the seat. He gives the directions carefully. "Lift your foot slowly, steer through the gate and into the yard."

This time, in my attempt to miss the left gatepost, I over steer and end up with the front end nudged against the post on the right side of the opening. With only the sound of an almost inaudible muttering, we exchange places again and my father drives the tractor through the gateway and into the farmyard while I follow on foot in complete mortification.

What circumstance has reduced my well-organized farmer dad to make this attempt to turn his oldest daughter into the male helper on the farm? It is a result of the war. In the spring of 1942, all of the young men have been drafted into the army and hired farm help has become non-existent in Buchanan County, Iowa. My Uncle Donald, Daddy's right-hand man, has enlisted in the Marines and is now stationed at Camp Pendleton, California. Old John, the third man hired to replace him, has arrived drunk for the last time. In desperation, my parents have decided that their high school freshman girl is big enough, strong enough, and smart enough to help with the field work and the milking chores.

On the one hand, it is a happy choice for me. I will be excused from the household and chicken chores and will get to work outdoors where I love to be and with our fine Holstein dairy cows. On the other hand, my fear of doing things wrong seems to close down my brain and to leave me apprehensive about the simplest instructions, not to speak of the more complicated ones. "Go up to the 40 behind the grove. Start at the south side and harrow 40 rows in." (Now just what did he say? Is it the north side or south side? Was it 40 rows in or 20?")

The tractor is the first one that our family has ever owned, a McCormick-Deering Farmall F-12 with steel wheels and shiny red paint. Since the tractor isn't balky and temperamental like the horses my father will use on the corn planter, it was decided that I was mature enough to learn to drive it. After much practice maneuvering the Farmall around the yard, we drive to the field and I'm set at my first task, dragging (harrowing) the field being prepared for corn planting. Daddy has plowed it and disked the large lumps of soil into smaller clods. My job is to pull the large many-toothed drag over the field ahead of the planter and further pulverize the soil.

I am repeatedly warned against turning the tractor too short with the drag on behind, as the steel wheels can catch the rod pulling the drag and bring the whole piece of equipment up over my back with dire consequences. This warning does nothing to alleviate my fear. Nor does it help to know that I must turn at just the right place at the end of the field or the end of the drag may catch the fence and rip out a rod or two of hard-placed fence posts and wire.

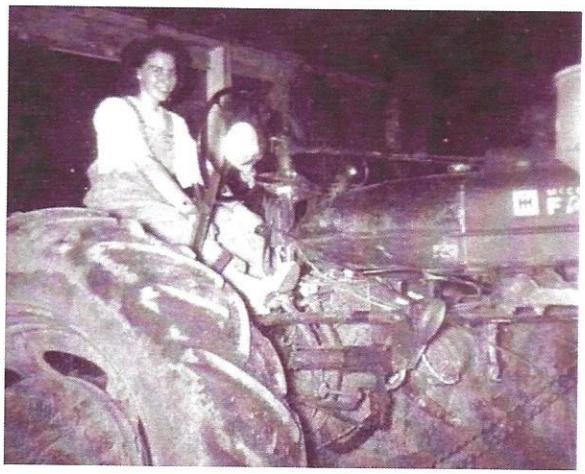
We finally get me started. Back and forth across the field I go with nothing to do but steer the tractor as straight as possible and take care at each turn. I go only a few rounds when I make the most startling discovery. I am in my element. This is delightful work!

All around me is sky and earth, clouds and sun, birds and animals. The blackness of the soil that I have just stirred up contrasts with the grayness of the dried out soil that I haven't harrowed yet. Horned larks, blackbirds, and crows follow me, finding food in the newly disturbed soil. Robins feast on the newly turned up worms. I discover field birds that I've never noticed and determine to look them up in the Little Golden Bird books that my mother is always trying to interest us in.

I feel sorrow for the little animals, rabbits and mice, who've lost their homes to my father's plowing and disking. I hope that they survive in their newly cultivated environment. I try to make out shapes in the cumulus clouds overhead as I used to do lying on my back in the house yard. Like my father, I look with apprehension at any gray storm clouds that threaten to delay the planting and force us to rework the soil.

I watch my father as he drives the team and planter back and forth across the field, putting into the ground the corn seeds upon which our livelihood depends.

Back and forth, back and forth, hour after hour, with only the drone of the tractor for company. I have time to daydream, remember the book that I'm currently reading, rehash conversations in which I always think of the right thing to say too late. I'm not going to mind it if I have to miss some school during spring planting and fall harvest. I think I'm coming to understand why my parents make the sacrifices necessary to this way of life. I hope that I can live on the farm all of my life.



An older Ruth on a newer tractor, a Farmall M

The Cousins

My sister, Dorothy, and I were born two years apart. We were married one year apart. Dorothy and Bill in 1949 and Leon and I in 1950. Between us we produced nine children in the next nine years, five for her and four for me. (My fifth one came along five years later.)

Dorothy and I have always been close, and our husbands hit it off, too. We lived on farms in adjoining counties and saw one another a couple of times a month, year in and year out. To say that the cousins knew each other well is understating the case.

They don't remember the early years of diapers, baby toys, two and three year old wrestling meets. They can't recall learning to say "Gimme," "Mine," and "Mamma, he hit me first." But as they grew they began to find things in common with the cousins of their own age. Usually the two girls chose to play with each other, and the boys paired off in various combinations as they grew older.

David, Dean, Ruth, Steven, & Virginia in 1961

In 1960, the year that Kenny turned 10, Virginia and Gene were 9, David was 8, Steven and Helen were 7, Richard was 5, Dean was 4, and Keith was a 2-year old. If a child couldn't get along with one cousin, there was always another to pal with. In general, the older ones picked on the next younger ones and vice-versa.

Summertime was the busiest time. As they got old enough to stay away from home, each individual got to stay for a week at the other farm. One summer the entire vacation was gone by the time each child had taken a turn.

Occasionally, they would get to visit during winter vacations. David was going home with Bill's one Christmas when their car slid off the icy T-intersection south of us and turned upside down. No one was hurt. Dorothy remembers how odd it was to have her skirt falling down over her head. Kenny remembers the

sand falling in his eyes and his disappointment that David changed his mind and wouldn't go home with them after all.

The farmsteads held all sorts of possibilities for play. Everyone took part in the corn cob fights. They ranged all over the farmsteads, guerilla style, usually older vs. younger. On one memorable occasion they found some rotten eggs to use as ammunition.

The big haymows were another attraction. The cousins made forts in the hay using the bales of hay rather like huge Legos. They added boards to make elaborate twists and turns. One of the children had a tense time when he slid down behind a bale and was afraid he would not be able to get out. They never told us of the close call because they were afraid we would make them quit playing in the haymow.

Our barn had a dirt approach to the second story haymow. It made a perfect little hill for sledding with small children. All of our own children learned to ride their bikes on the lower part of the incline.

Both homes had gentle ditches between the house, yard and the road. Bill and Dorothy's even had a little bridge across it to keep your feet dry when you went to the mailbox on the other side of the road. What fun these ditches were! A favorite game was Alligator. One person was the alligator in the ditch and the others tried to run down one side and up the other without getting caught. These ditches were also good places to catch fireflies in the summer and to skim down the snowy sides with the snow saucers popular at the time.

Leon and the boys built a tree house in the huge elm that stood outside the back door of our house. It had a ladder to climb up that was too high for toddlers. The older kids enjoyed the upper level play while the younger ones had to play in the fenced-in yard.

We all remember one sad day. Both families were finishing up the project of building a dog house for our farm dog, Fritz. The dog seemed amiable; so much so that I took a picture of him in the dog house looking out of the top before the roof was put on. But horrors! Just as they were nailing on the last shingles, Fritz ran out onto the road in front of our neighbor's car and was killed. Many of the children had seen the event, and it was a sad evening for us all. I don't remember where we buried Fritz. Now our pets are buried one by one in the garden of our "new" farm.

The younger cousins of the family were more scattered geographically. Their memories are more of the get-togethers at holidays and reunions. These were often held at Grandma's house, both on their farm and at their retirement house in town. Our Carol was the first of the second batch of grandchildren, followed by Tiffany in Iowa City, John and Mike in Independence, Doug and Tom in Illinois, and Teresa, the last born grandchild.

Now the cousins are scattered. They live in places like Wheaton, Maryland; Buffalo, New York; Weiser, Idaho; Newburg, Pennsylvania; the Chicago area; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; the Des Moines area; Ames, Iowa; the Cedar Rapids area; and two at home in Buchanan County.

In recent years, Bill and Dorothy and Leon and I tented all over the United States visiting children and grandchildren. We all have a good time recalling the days when we were younger and the cousins gamboled around on the lawns playing Alligators.

Sundays and Vacations

My parents observed the Sabbath and did not work in the fields unless the weather made it absolutely critical. However, that did not make Sundays a day of loafing for us. The cows and pigs lived Sunday like any other day. Since they didn't sleep late, neither could we. Indeed, sometimes it seemed as though the farm saved up interruptions and breakdowns for Sunday mornings as we hurried around for church.

Sundays have always meant church to me. When we older children were young, we went to Sunday School and church every week at the Troy Mills Methodist Church with Grandma and Uncle Paul Phillips. I've been told that Grandpa John Ed Phillips had turned away from the Spring Grove Church in some dispute and refused to attend anywhere, saying, "If that is how Christians are, then I don't want to be around them." However, his personal feud didn't keep him from making sure that Grandma and Paul attended at Troy Mills every Sunday. And when we got old enough, we went too. When Grandpa got so it was hard for him to drive, Daddy took both families. And when we began to get active with youth group activities, all of us went to church and Sunday School as a family. Grandpa even attended the Christmas programs whenever we were performing.

After church, we were freed from work until time for evening chores. I'm sure we didn't go away every Sunday, but in my memory, Sundays meant that we would go to visit relatives.

We lived only a mile from Grandpa Ed and Effie, so we saw them often during the week. The Sundays we spent with them usually included visiting relatives. People from as far away as Chicago, South Dakota, Council Bluffs, and Washington state would come to see Grandpa and Grandma. Most of these were "old" with grown-up children so we just listened to them talk or read or played.

Most active were the times when Aunt Blanche and Uncle Duane and their children came to visit. In age, their children matched with Lloyd on down, so we girls had to play more juvenile things with them, but we didn't mind. Looking back, our parents probably counted on us to be their eyes and ears so they could visit in peace. They didn't come very often as Chicago was a long way away, but they really enjoyed Iowa and the farm. Uncle

Duane was always trying to find a way to buy some land so they could move to Iowa, but he was too much of a city boy to ever make good on his dream.

The Phillips cousins closest to us were Aunt Nona and Uncle Wilbur's kids. They lived down toward Toddville in the extra house on Wilbur's parents' farm. We had good times there and often stayed with them for a week in the summer. One treat there was Aunt Nona's delicious homemade bread. Grandma and Mamma were good bread bakers, too, but Nona's was the whitest and lightest and smelled so good. One of my early goals in life was to make bread as light as hers. I'm still trying.

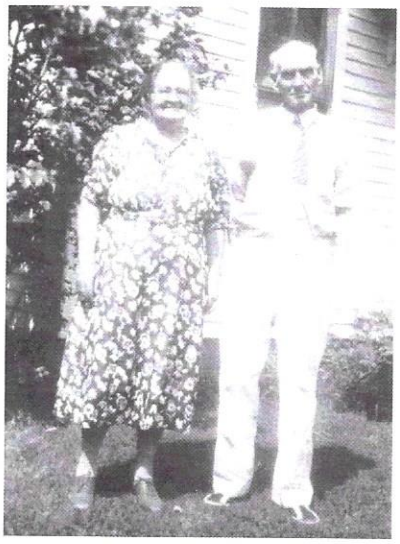
Going to Masonville to see Grandpa and Grandma Stimson was special, too. We got to play with Cousin Emma. Emma was raised by our grandparents after her mother's (Aunt Esther's) death, so we had someone young to play with. Once in a great while, her dad and older sisters would come for a visit, but usually it was just Emma, Dorothy, and me to pal around. Aunt Alta and Uncle Clyde also lived in Masonville, and we often stopped to see them. And living on the farm just south of Masonville were Uncle Oliver and Aunt Margaret. Their five children were exactly our own age and their farmstead made just as good a playground as ours did.

Someone we didn't see often on that side was Aunt Bertha. Uncle Loren was a road construction worker and they moved around the country with the road jobs. When I remember best, they were in Illinois.

Some of my most vivid memories are of Sundays in the wintertime. Since everyone walked to school and did outdoor chores, we were well-fitted to play in the snow for long periods of time. With only our rubber overshoes for skates, we searched out any slippery snow or ice we could find. Falling down held no fear as we were bundled up in snow pants, coats, scarves, stocking caps, and mittens—often two pair at a time.

The best times to use the sled were when our little-travelled dirt road became slippery with packed snow or ice. Then we could slide downhill to the west toward Grandpa's. The challenge was to see who could slide the farthest. Naturally, those who weighed more went the farthest. When we got older, we walked to the higher hill on the north road. It was steeper and more challenging.

The best place to go sledding was at Grandpa's. There was a rather steep rise in the pasture south of the house that had already been used by our aunts and uncles over the years. It was off the road so there was no danger of cars coming. Besides, there we could use Uncle Donald's sled. We had sleds of our own, but Donald had a bigger sled that went faster and held more people. Do you ever wonder where those things went? I suppose that sled wore out and was thrown away and only lives in my mind's eye.



John (Ed) and Effie Phillips

The last time I remember sledding with cousins was when we were grown up. Charles and I and Frances and her boy-friend, Dean, decided to go up on the north road sledding. We would all get on the sled together and see how far we could go. We lay on the sled, pancake-style, with Frances and I on the bottom, and Charles and Dean on top. You can guess what the problem was. We were no longer slim, light children but full-grown adults. I could barely breathe under the weight of the guys, and Frances couldn't catch her breath at all. Down the icy road we went at full clip with us screaming for them to get off, and they thinking we were screaming at the fun of it. Finally, the matter became clear to everyone and we rolled off in both directions while the sled careened on down the road as though trying to set the record by itself. No one was hurt, and we laughed at ourselves for our ignorance.

Summertime activities were more varied. The creek at Grandpa's was a sure-fire attraction. I appreciate my grandmother very much for taking time out of her very busy workdays to take us wading. I don't remember us doing much in the way of catching frogs, etc., but we loved the splashing good times we had in the shallow water.

In the summer the barns were empty as the cattle spent their days in the pasture, so the haymows were free for play. Some of the younger ones remember swinging on the hay rope, but we older ones were too circumspect to disobey our parents like that. It was fun to climb on the hay piles, though scratchy. The straw piles were less prickly and made good hide-outs. Hay and straw made good partitions for pretend rooms.

The farmsteads were ready-made for games of hide and seek. All of our farms had windbreaks around the north and west sides. Our families had orchards, too, especially apple trees. Our own farm had many walnut trees. The most played with tree on our farmstead was an older walnut north of the house that had a branch low enough to ride on like a horse. It's a wonder that the branch out-lived all of us. Grandpa Phillips farm was protected by a windbreak of pines that were tall when I was a child. He had put up a swing for us from a high branch. That was a favorite place for us. One day we tired of plain swinging and began twisting the swing until it was as tight as it would go. The swinger would then untwist and whirl until the rope was straight again. I don't know how long we did it, but I ended up very sick. For many years afterward, the act of swinging would trick my memory into actually smelling the pungent odor of pine needles whenever I got on a swing. The big pine trees are still there and continue to shelter the family who bought the farm from our family.

During school vacation, we got to go stay with relatives. Both grandparents would have us for a week, and Aunt Edna, Aunt Nona, and Uncle Oliver's were the other destinations.

The week spent with Edna and Alpha in Winthrop meant that we would live in town for a week. How strange to be close to so many people. You could walk just a few blocks for groceries. If my memory serves me correctly, Uncle Alpha had an icehouse and sold ice during the summer. We girls were too shy to stray away from the house by ourselves. One time we had to walk to our piano teacher's house for our weekly lesson. (Usually she drove to our house on the farm.) What a time Edna had, repeating the directions several times and finally pushing us out the door. What fearful little country girls we were.

As a teacher I always gravitated toward the child who stood silently in the doorway of the room, big eyes encompassing the whole room, taking in as much information as they could before timidly entering the room.

Edna always had a big garden and she delighted in making jams and jellies. We got to have jam on our bread every meal when we were with her.

When we visited Aunt Nona in the early years we had a special treat. Wilbur's niece (Betty Van Fossen) was just a couple of years older than me so we played with her a lot. She lived in Grandpa and Grandma's house next door.

One of my memories of Grandma's house on the Creek place was of the early morning sounds. We slept upstairs and when we awoke, we could hear the whine of the cream separator winding down and could smell the oatmeal that was waiting for us on the wood cook stove.

The Masonville grandparents also lived in town. We weren't so shy there because we had Emma to go with us everywhere. Grandma ran the telephone switchboard in my earliest memories. They lived in the phone office on main street. Sometime early, they moved to an L-shaped home east of the main street. Grandpa was mayor of the town for many years. A favorite activity for Emma, Dorothy, and me was to walk down the railroad tracks to the cemetery east of town. Emma's mother, Aunt Esther, was buried there along with older Stimson relatives.

Harry and Mary Stimson

Uncle Oliver's farm had two fascinating things that I marveled at. Atop their house roof, they had a Wind Charger. It looked like a little windmill, and the wind turned the blades to charge up the big Delco batteries that were kept in the attic. As a result, the house had a limited amount of electricity, which was only enough to run some lights in the house. It only generated when the wind blew, so in times of doldrums, there was no juice. Even so, the electric light bulb above the kitchen table was my idea of luxury.

Another marvel at Uncle Oliver's was the way their dog would help get up the cows for milking. Aunt Margaret had a way with dogs and as each one came along she trained it to "get the cows." Some dogs were better than others, but the one I remember best could be sent to the pasture and it would herd the cows into the barnyard. They had gotten the dog as a puppy. She let the puppy follow her to the pasture after the cows. By the time they turned around to head home, the puppy was tired, and she carried it as she gathered the herd and prodded them toward the barn. The puppy never forgot the routine and was still impressing me when he was an old dog. We had dogs, too, but none smart enough to save us the daily chore of getting up the cows.

You can see that, even though we were rather poor and lived out in the country away from all conveniences, we had a good childhood. Between our country school friends and

our relatives we lived a full life, for which I thank my parents and grandparents, though they have all gone on ahead now.

Five Generations of Firstborn Daughters
Standing: Hazel Stimson, Effie Phillips
Seated: Mary Todd, Ruth and Virginia Bovenmyer

Drought

"What a beautiful morning," my friends say. And it is. Blue skies, white fluffy clouds, brisk winds to blow away the heat of the intense sun, all contribute to the beauty of the July day.

"Yes," I agree, "it is a lovely day."

"But inside my heart is protesting. "No, no, this is not what we need. We need rain, a solid curtain of steady rain. One that lasts all week. A steady life-giving drip, drip, drip. That's the kind of day we need."

What an ironic twist of fate. It is July 1991. Our county has been declared a disaster area because of the heavy spring storms. By the first of June we had received 270 percent of our average spring rainfall. Since then we've not received more than a sprinkle.

On a drive through the countryside, the land looks lush and green. Tall corn, alfalfa, soybeans, an ocean of green broken only by plots of golden oat stubble. But close observation gives clues to the stress that the land is under. The pastures and house yards have gone prematurely dormant. The alfalfa fields are only four inches high instead of the fourteen inches common for a second crop of hay.

Some of the cornfields are taking on a strange whitish cast, especially in the low spots where the land was wettest this spring. In places, cornstalks are turning golden brown just above the ground, beginning their slow process of dying upward. During the day, stalks curl their leaves inward, trying to shield themselves from the sun and wind, giving the whole field an unusual spiky appearance. In the evening, the leaves relax, drinking in any dew that forms on their leaves.

Farmers worry that the pollination will be incomplete. It takes water to wash the pollen down from the tassels onto the silks that form the kernels of corn on the ear. One year we had a 40-acre field that pollinated during a very dry spell and not one ear set on in the entire field.

Soybeans withstand drought better than corn. They seem to go into a kind of dormancy. But in dormancy, they won't set the pods that make the harvest profitable.

Personally, I did not understand drought until 1988, when we harvested only one-third of the normal yield for our farm. Our parents had always spoken of the terrible droughts of '34 and '36, but hearing is not understanding. Now I know how it feels to watch your crop die too soon.

You drive down the road trying not to look at the distressed crops, but you can't keep from looking anyway. You try not to think of the corn as a living organism, but all around you are signs of life as the plants twist and curl in their attempt to survive without water. You feel guilt at being able to water your garden and flower beds from the well, keeping these relatively unimportant plots alive, when you can't save the acres and acres of crops beyond the reach of your garden hose. You wish for an instant irrigation rig, but there is little irrigation in eastern Iowa because, as the old-timers say, "It always rains just in time in Iowa."

You listen intently to the weather forecast. Maybe there is a storm front approaching from the west. Clouds form and hope revives. They may even linger for days, dropping little sprinkles here and there. Finally they pass off to the east, leaving the land and crops to wilt in the sun again, no better off than before.

The final realization that the 1988 corn crop was doomed came on a late July evening when Leon and I took an evening walk down to the creek. As we passed the large cornfield, we realized that it smelled like silage, the smell of harvest. It was too late. No amount of rain could make it really live again.

Now I know what drought is. I try to be patient with my town friends who seem to want every single summer day to be sunny and clear.

"Isn't this a beautiful morning?" they ask in greeting.

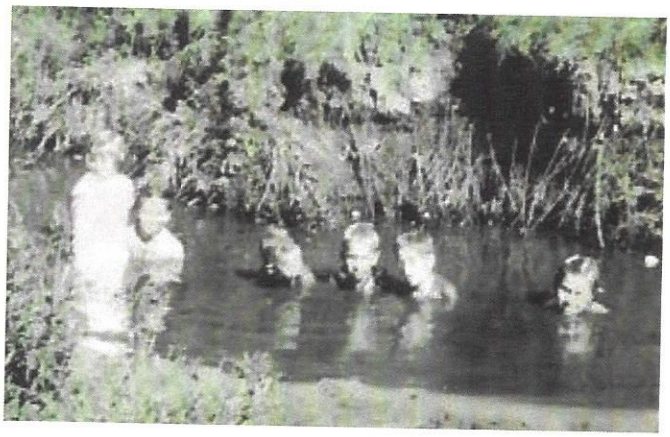
"Yes," I agree, "it is a lovely day."

A Day at the River

I had never realized how beautiful the river is close up. Always before, I had seen it from high bridges and narrow highways. Now, as I sat on the sand beach and watched the children play in the shallow water at my feet, I looked around with pleasure. Beyond the frolicking youngsters, the mighty river rolled slowly along down its path to the Gulf. The bank on the Iowa side was almost a mile away. Over there, the cliffs and timber and town of Guttenberg were barely visible through the hazy air. It was truly a mighty river, the mighty Mississippi.

People had told me about the river and how it felt to swim and play along the shore. They had told of their boating trips and of the big fish that they had almost caught. Some of them had learned to water ski and some had even tried snorkeling gear. I had only seen such gear on the television shows about the sea. And the boats! All kinds and sizes. I could see boats big enough to be called yachts speeding upstream past canoes that slowly paddled up the river, gliding from sandbar to sandbar.

I thought of the circumstances that brought us to this beach. Leon's sister, Barbara, had purchased a boat. It was a motor boat of uncertain vintage with a Mercury motor that delighted in playing tricks on its user, especially the no-start trick. But the family had adjusted to its idiosyncrasies, spending hours on smaller rivers, learning to water ski and enjoying the new-found sport of boating.



Gladys Van Fossen, Dorothy, Charles Fan Fossen, Lloyd, Bruce Kingsley, and Ruth in Grandpa Phillip's creek.

Living in the country miles from any large body of water had meant that water sports were new to me. It wasn't that I had never been in water. When I was growing up, I spent lots of summer afternoons in Grandpa Phillips' creek and never failed to be delighted at finding a hole deep enough to lie down and get all wet in. Some of the depressions had been almost two feet deep! And in college, I took swimming one summer and got to

swim in a regular pool. But I had never had the opportunity to spend time close to a big river.

Now we had decided to try a day on the Mississippi. Much time and thought had gone into the planning. Everything from the picnic we would eat, the gas, oil, tools for mishaps, and the gear we would need to play with was gone over before we left home. Especially stressed were the lessons on water safety. Although I could swim a little, I didn't feel confident in deep water and even less in the river current. The children were also novice swimmers. Barb was the expert swimmer, and Leon had learned in a deep-hole creek when he was a boy. The children were never allowed out in the river without life jackets on and then only to play out of the strong current.

As I kept my eye on the children—Virginia, Dave, Steve, Dean, and any friends or relatives along—I allowed myself to examine the river. The gentle waves from the boat wakes washed against the brown sand. Little river shells were visible among the pebbles. Earlier, the children had found some clam shells with perfectly round holes in them, holes about the size of a medium-sized button. Leon explained that they had been discarded by the button factory that used to dredge the bottom of the river for shells suitable for buttons. Sometimes one would be found with four or five holes in it. With the development of plastics and alternate materials, the factory had closed down and all that was left were the discarded holey shells.

I turned to examine the timber that lined the banks on both sides of the river. I watched for water birds along the shore line but only heard the sounds of blackbirds and sparrows asserting their rights to the abundant timber. We didn't walk back into the woods because it was wild and weedy. Only the sandbar was free of willows and other scrub trees.

We couldn't see the many fish gliding in the brown water, but there were always fishing boats in the backwaters. It was obvious that there were fish there from the fish smell everywhere along the river. I fleetingly wondered whose soil it was that the brown river was carrying along to deposit on somebody else's delta.

The sand got hot as the afternoon wore on, and we had to stay on the blankets. We were kept busy applying suntan lotion, and some of the fairer-complexioned ones had to resort to wearing shirts.

We watched the large barges coming up the river. Pushed by the magnificently well-kept river tugs, there were usually nine barges lashed together. If they were riding high in the water, they were heading upstream to the terminal to get their load of corn or beans. Going downstream fully loaded, they rode low in the water, heading for New Orleans and the ships waiting to take the grain to some faraway country.

The paddle-wheeler tourist boat slowly churned its way past to show its passengers the meandering turn and backwaters of the Mississippi. We exchanged waves of greeting with the people on board.

After everyone tired of the water and the life jackets, the adults rested while the children built sand castles. Packing wet sand into ice cream buckets and plastic margarine tubs, they turned the beach into forts and castles with stick turrets and moats. No matter that the moats continually leaked out the water poured into them.

Late in the evening, we picked up all of our gear, boated back over to the Iowa side of the river, pulled the boat from the water, and drove the 50 miles home with exhausted children sleeping in the back seat.

This was just the first of many "play days" on the Mississippi. Many of us learned to water ski there, and all of us learned to swim better. Our children soon learned to swim better than their mother, and they started to watch out for me rather than me for them. I felt like a mother hen trying to keep a batch of baby ducklings safe in the water.

The only time that I remember being worried for anyone in the water was the time Leon got off the water skis and started to swim upriver toward the boat. The boat was unable to get close enough to pick him up. Although he can swim very strongly, he gradually began to tire. He finally quit trying to buck the current and drifted downstream toward the bank. He climbed out into the rushes, cattails, and mud. I remember rubbing his shoulders and back to relieve the strained muscles, thankful that there had been no panic, only a thoughtful reassessment of a potentially dangerous situation.

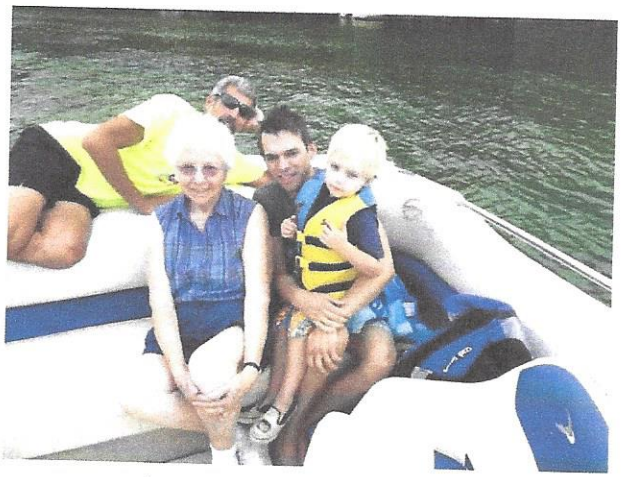
We spent many Sundays playing in the river at Guttenberg. At first we could drive right down to the water and picnic in the park on the bank of the river. But the last years we were there, our view was obscured by the tall dike they erected along the waterfront. We always played on a big sandbar on the Wisconsin side of the river. One time, we were there at the

mayfly season. The whole waterfront was alive with mayflies. With their gauzy wings they flew around every light and landed on every pole, every boat, and were squashed on the decks and roads. I'd never seen a migration like that before. For a while Andy and Karen were managing a restaurant right on the waterfront at Guttenberg.

When Jack's family moved to Dubuque, we changed and boated there. We put the boat in at the island park and boated over to a sandbar on the Illinois side. Carol first went boating there, but she didn't like it and cried as long as she was in the noisy, unsteady boat. She was very young, barely more than a baby and was afraid of the great expanse of water. The second time, we took electric fence poles and twine and made a little enclosure for her. She spent the whole afternoon playing just outside of the fence. After that she had no trouble at the beach and learned to swim quicker than her brothers and sister had in the Winthrop pool.

After Barb bought the lot at Apple Canyon Lake, we quit boating on the river. The lake is beautiful, too, with safer swimming, easier access, and a place to sleep. We spend lots of time there and enjoy it immensely. But I still count those days on the Mississippi among my fondest memories.

The children are all grown now, but in my mind's eye, I still see the brown water gliding by the sandy beach, hear the waves lap on the shore, the children shouting and splashing in the water. I smell the fish, watch the sandpipers daintily running about in search of food, feel the hot sand on my feet, watch the boats go by. I truly relish the memories of those lovely summer days on the Mighty Mississippi.



Apple Canyon Lake, July 2012

My Year as a Hired Girl

My year with the Ray Wassmer family began on a late summer day in 1947. I had been out of high school for two years while waiting to get old enough to go to nursing school. I had been busy enough, as I was my dad's "hired man" all through high school and for two seasons after that. One day Raymond Wassmer drove into our yard and wanted to know if I would be interested in working for him and his wife to help with housework and the care of twin babies, plus three older children. He had been given my name by Art Wachal, whose parents lived neighbors to us. Since my younger brother was old enough to take my place with chores and on the tractor, I took the opportunity to earn some money and said "Yes." Thus began my big adventure.

Today I would be called a nanny or "au pair," but in those days we were called hired girls. I found out later that my dad wasn't happy with my decision. He had been taken out of high school to work as a hired man at a young age and had determined that his children would not have to go that route. It didn't turn out bad for him, though, as he met my mother while working for a farmer and she was the hired girl at the next farm. He later enrolled in the Iowa State College at Ames and finished the winter courses on farming. Being a hired girl didn't turn out bad for me either. I had a comfortable life with a very compatible family and have been friends with them all through the years.

I enjoyed working for Ray and Helen and their children, and they became a second family to me. As I remember, Lora Ann was 13 years old, Norman was 8, and Judy was 7. Rita and Ricky were around three months old. Ray's niece, Lillian, had helped out over the summer but had to go back to school, so they had to search for another helper. I imagine they were getting pretty discouraged by the time they came up with my name. I lived in and

went home every weekend. (One time when I commented on the orderliness of their home life, the older children laughed and said I should be there on the weekend sometime!)

I was used to hard work, both in the house and on the farm, so I didn't find the housework and baby tending much different from chores at home. I give Helen credit for teaching me different ways of housekeeping than I'd known at home. Many of the recipes that I've used through the years came from her kitchen. She was a good cook, and I was a good eater, so the down side of my time in their home was a weight gain of about 15 pounds. In those young days, the weight soon came off, thank goodness.

Besides the daily round of washing clothes, doing dishes, feeding the babies, getting the kids off to school, cleaning house, etc., there were other highlights. Ray was busy with his airport, and one beautiful day he gave me my very first airplane ride. A young man from the area, Bill Sherman was taking flying lessons with Ray. After seeing me around a time or two, Bill asked me out for a movie date. I was interested in another guy right then so I offered to set up a blind date with my sister and we would go as a foursome. Well, that was it! Bill and my sister Dorothy fell in love right away and were married February 20, 1949.

My memories are pretty sketchy of the time with the Wassmers. Here are a few of them. The first night when we did dishes, I dropped a bowl, and it broke. As I picked up the pieces, I was apologizing profusely, but Helen said not to worry because it wasn't anything special. "Now if it had been one of my mixer bowls, I would have been very upset." I thanked the Lord that I hadn't dropped the mixer bowl.

Somewhere along the way, Helen came home with a new soap, Tide detergent. She was excited because the salesman said that the dishes would dry in a drainer without using a towel. Of course, Lora Ann and I were excited, too. We washed the dishes happily for about a week. By then my hands were not only rough and red, they were so sore that I could hardly pick up anything. It turned out that I am allergic to detergents and now use rubber gloves for all my work. Helen said that I could go back to using the old soap but that

School Days

Our rural school—Reilly school in Newton Township, Buchanan Co.—was 1 7/8 miles east and north of our farm home. Both Dorothy and I had been enrolled in the Troy Mills school, me for three years and Dorothy for one, but the tuition was too much for our folks in 1936 and we were enrolled in our home district.

This meant that we wouldn't ride a bus to school, but we'd walk almost two miles to school. In nice weather it was fun to walk along the dirt road, watch for birds and rabbits, and hurry along the neighbor's pasture where a bull would stand and stare at us. When the weather got really bad in winter, we missed school. The teacher and pupils who were close to the school kept it going so we wouldn't have to make up days in the spring.

The Reilly one-room schoolhouse had an entryway where we put our coats, hats, mittens, and boots. Also in the entryway was the water "cooler," a big crock with blue lettering on it, and it had handles on the sides.

There was a coal shed nearby with some old desks in it. The other two buildings on the school acre were outhouses, one for the girls and one for the boys. In the spring and fall we dallied our way over and back, but in winter we cantered back to the warm schoolhouse as fast as we could.

There were three windows on each side of the schoolhouse. Since there was no rural electricity yet, the windows provided our light. The blackboard was in the front with the teacher's desk. The Palmer Writing alphabet was above the blackboard. We were really drilled in handwriting, making push-pulls, and ovals over and over to train our muscles. We said the Pledge of Allegiance every morning, looking at the flag in the corner. There were bookshelves, maps on the wall, and a big stove that ate coals. Each child had his own desk.

There were Beacon reader phonics charts on a stand to supplement the Beacon Reader books. As I remember it, all of the children were bright and learned quickly. One of the best parts of a one-room school education is that if you didn't catch it in first grade, you'll catch up next year by watching next year's class.

We had music supplied by the county office. We had music books and a Victrola record player. The records were sent to every school to learn new songs from the books. Then

at the 8th grade graduation at the Malek theatre in Independence the songs were sung in unison. I loved the big group singing.

Just like now, recesses were our best "class." We played: pom-pom-pullaway; Annie Annie Over, over the coal shed and later over the schoolhouse; tag; softball; and in the winter we made angels in the snow; snowball "fights;" and Fox and Geese.

We were well grounded in reading, handwriting, geography, history (my favorite subject), and arithmetic. I don't remember much science or any organized art or Physical Education.

The county superintendent visited each county school a couple of times a year. Did we ever spruce things up then! And the teacher got very nervous. I remember when Mr. Winter came and noticed a second grader who still had a lisp. A very large man, he sat down beside her little desk and tried to get her to say "choo choo" like a train. She was petrified and the rest of us found it hilarious, but we couldn't show it. Now looking back I think of how frustrating it must have been to see the educational lacks, such as speech training, and be unable to help the teachers out. Mr. Winter was a very respected county superintendent and held the post many years.

Both of my teachers were very nice. Rose Durham and Catherine Reilly took me through the eighth grade. Our school was lucky to have amiable pupils from neighborly farms. If there were discipline problems, I wasn't aware of them. The worst thing I remember was when a new boy came to school and used some cuss words! The teacher and we kids were so shocked that he never did it again in our hearing. We heard stories about the rowdies in other schools, but our school was quite calm as I remember it.

In our day, the rural school children had to pass a county test in order to graduate from eighth grade and go on to the high schools in town. Most of the eighth grade curriculum that year was spent studying the essay tests from earlier years. We were the first classes to take a multiple-choice test. Multiple-choice was easier for me than the essay ones. At graduation day in the Malek Theater in Independence I was called up front as the valedictorian of Buchanan County. What a scare! In later years, we figured out that Leon also graduated that year, and he often reminded me that he thought that the girl who walked up front was

Thoughts on a Saturday Afternoon

"Make new friends and keep the old, the first are silver and the other gold."

This little couplet testifies to the relationship that has developed between the people involved in the Saturday Fellowship that meets in our church on the first and third Saturdays afternoons of each month. I'd like to share some thoughts on how the Fellowship got started and how it has changed my thinking about retarded persons and their place in our lives.

To begin with, God never seems to leave any empty holes in our lives. In 1977, I was going to make the final plunge to finish up my college degree, so I gave up the young people's Sunday School class and got set for the night classes and summer school facing me. One night the very next week, coming home from school, I had this really complete idea of how to organize an area fellowship for retarded persons. I've never been one to think in terms of messages and vision from God, but I give credit to the Lord for the insights that he gave me that night.

Although I've done much studying since on how to teach the retarded about God and know more of the theories and methods now, the fellowship as we are running it is exactly the same as the one I envisioned that evening on the way home. I truly believe that if God gives you an idea of service, you should go with it. He will provide the means for it.

Something like this cannot be done alone. And that's where we've been fortunate. Our North Linn Admin board has been behind us all the way and has underwritten the expenses entirely. We've had many committed persons in our church who've helped out, both with moral support and with their time on Saturdays to be helpers with the crafts, singing, ect. So far, there have been ten regular helpers, mostly high school and junior high youth. My sister, Dorothy, has been in on this from the first. She and the other mothers who bring their "kids" to the fellowship, provide the treats, help out downstairs if necessary, but mostly spend their time sharing and working on projects while they wait. Right now, the "upstairs projects" include two latch hook hangings and an embroidered baby quilt!

As far as the students themselves, what a revelation it has been to me to get to know them and their families! As naïve as I was, I pictured us dealing with people who were being

left out of life and probably would enjoy a little time out of the house once in awhile. Maybe there are people like that around, but we haven't attracted many to our fellowship yet. It is a real tribute to the loving relationships that we've established, that anyone comes at all, in light of their busy days. Of the ten students who've attended so far, four are full time students and five work full time in one of the handicapped industries in the various communities. All are members of their own churches, and most attend services regularly. They spend a week or two at camp each year.

Our youngest was seven years old, and our oldest is 59 years old this year. As a group, they are friendly, very loving, responsive, and enjoy the same things we enjoy. Since most have a hard time communicating, I am becoming intrigued with the possibility of learning some simple sign language. Many groups such as ours have been successful with this method of communication. Our lessons are simple in structure and basic in nature. We teach the love of Jesus for everyone, no matter who they are, and the joy that comes from responsible interaction with others. Our lessons are based on the Bible, and everything we do is done to the glory of God, as He expressed Himself in Jesus.

As for me, what started out to be an interesting challenge from God has turned out to be one of the most rewarding endeavors of my life. He has shown me that what we are doing is not charity but is a give and take relationship with other Christians who have an equal right to normal relationships, no matter what handicapping conditions exist in their lives. It has proved to me again that all persons, regardless of their station in life, have their own personalities, gifts, and are capable of giving and receiving love. All of us, students, helpers, and parents, have gained much more than we have given.

St. Paul expresses it very well in Colossians 2:2, "I do this in order that they may be filled with courage and may be drawn together in love, and so have the full wealth of assurance which true understanding brings. In this way they will know God's secret, which is Christ himself. He is the key that opens all the hidden treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge."

Early Memories of the Silver Creek Church

By May Emerson

(May Carrothers was born in Silver Creek in the year 1889. She married Roy Emerson and they became the parents of six children. May now lives in the Good Neighbor Home in Manchester. I asked her to write some of her Silver Creek memories. She said, "I could write a book of events that are interesting to me. I hope it appeals to others. I love the Silver Creek people and their church.")

The Silver Creek community was situated approximately four miles south and about four miles north of the church. The families who didn't live on the road lived within sight of it. The families were large and believed in God and that made for a strong church. I can

just remember when the church was just a long straight room with two rows of seats, the men on one side and the women and children on the other side. The cemetery was knee high with weeds and grass. The long horse shed was south of the cemetery. The shed had stalls for each family's team and buggy. The buggies were generally two seated open buggies. We froze in the winter and scorched in the summer. A real windy day and we were wind-blown when we reached church. We had to hold onto our hats for no woman or girl would think of not wearing a hat.

In the spring the roads were about hub deep with mud in lots of places, and in the summer several inches of sand. But no one paid any attention to the roads. We got used to them, and we went to church regardless. When we arrived at church the driver would drive close to the wooden steps that were the right height so we could step from the buggy onto the steps, and the same when we left.

Our minister served Sand Creek and Silver Creek many years. We had services half a year in the forenoon and half a year in the afternoon. The afternoon service, in very warm

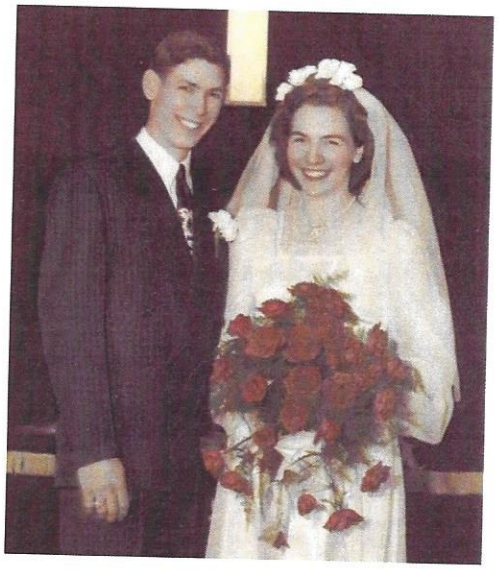
weather, was sort of trying as some people got sleepy. I remember three people, Aunt Ann Carrothers and Grandpa and Grandma Carradus. Aunt Ann always got down on her knees between the seats for prayer. Grandma Carradus, a peppery old lady, also knelt and several times during the prayer she would holler, "Amen." They always sat in the front seat. Grandpa Carradus had a very stiff leg, and he would sit in the end of the seat and stretch his leg out in the aisle. During her last years Aunt Ann had an ailment which necessitated the amputation of both her legs. She never complained but felt, "Thy will be done."

The minister lived in Manchester, so if Sand Creek had morning worship the minister ate dinner and fed his horse with a family of his congregation, and if morning service was at Silver Creek, he would do the same. One of our ministers, a short heavy man and a hearty eater, took sick in our home one afternoon. I remember seeing him lying on the couch and my mother doctoring him with Wards Liniment mixed with hot water and sugar. He recovered!

One interest the community had was the orphanage at Council Bluffs. For many years they shipped eggs in the spring and fruit in the fall. The eggs were packed in thirty-dozen egg cases and the fruit in a big salt barrel. Mrs. Godfrey Wenger always sent a thirty-dozen case. Tomatoes were the only vegetable as people didn't know how to can other vegetables. Then occasionally a cash donation would be sent to the home. The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society was organized about 1888. It was always a strong society, and every penny they made was sent to missionaries or for missionary use.

Our Livelihood

When we married in April of 1950, Leon and I were beginners at farming for ourselves. I had two months of teacher's salary coming, enough money to buy a refrigerator and equipment to supplement our wedding gifts so we could keep house. Leon had a lifetime of farming experience with his dad and enough money to buy an engagement ring and a beautiful cedar hope chest. He also brought with him several Brown Swiss heifers that he'd acquired while he helped at home. We also had traded in the robin's-egg-blue Model A that I was driving to school and bought a newer used car as the family car.



One Sunday, before our wedding, we had gone down to Marshalltown with Dale Dennie and his pickup to buy a Westinghouse electric stove turned in by a school. Uncle Don Mathern was in management at the Iowa Electric Power Co. there and had arranged for us to buy the one-year old stove at a discount. Our trip was enlivened by eating at "Stone's, Under the Viaduct," a classy restaurant. My enjoyment of the meal was tempered by the fact that we were in "grubbies" while the other patrons were in their Sunday best. I was not too embarrassed to enjoy the HUGE piece of their lemon pie.

Leon and his dad had heard that John Bare's family had the family farm west of Walker for rent with a 50-50 share rent. The drawback was that Mrs. George Bare, the owner, and her daughter, Lida, would still be living in the house. Since we were newlyweds and didn't need such a large house, arrangements were made for us to live in the west side of the house, while Mrs. Bare and Lida used the east half. It was a beautiful large square house with a full basement, first and second floors, and a large attic where family keepsakes from many, many years were stored.

This worked out fine for us except for the day that Leon went out to prune up a broken apple tree. Lida stormed out with fire in her eyes and forbade him to ever touch the

grove again. As a result, the Bare farm was the only farm we've ever lived on that we weren't permitted to clean up.

With his father's signature on the mortgage, Leon borrowed $2,000 from the Security State Bank in Independence to buy half of a herd of Milking Shorthorn cows and enough machinery to farm the 120 acres, using his dad's equipment for planting and harvesting. Before we got done we had to borrow another $500, and I never forgot the stern lecture we got from the banker about overshooting our budget.

The Milking Shorthorn herd had been the pride and joy of the Bare family and had been show cattle in the past. The farmstead, too, had been up-to-date in George Bare's earlier years. Now, the only buildings still in good shape were the house and the garage.

The former renters, Harold Bare, moved to Illinois, and Leon moved to our new house on March 1, 1950. He batched it until we got married on April 2. I took two weeks off from school to honeymoon on the farm. The second week Leon planted oats, then I went back to school to finish up the year and quit teaching forever!

On the Bare farm we raised chickens, sold eggs, had a good batch of pigs, and milked cows morning and night. The farm was excellent land but poorly drained so wet weather was a problem. After school was over, I had pictured myself as Leon's "right-hand man" but we hadn't counted on my getting pregnant with Virginia so soon.

My first job as a helper was riding the corn planter while Leon drove the tractor. My job was to ride along and disengage the trip wire at the ends of the fields. A trip wire had buttons on it to release the seeds into hills that could be cultivated both lengthwise and crosswise. A farmer was known for how well he kept the wire taut enough for the corn to be straight when viewed crosswise. The trip wire was put into a slot on the side of the planter, and my job was to let it loose on the end of the field. When the planter was turned around the wire would be placed into its slot on the other side of the planter. It took just one day of disengaging the wire by lifting a lever with my foot to give me a severe pain in my side and sent me to the hospital in case I was threatening miscarriage.

From then on, my tasks centered around the house, children, and chickens. Leon took care of the other chores and he, his dad, and Dad's hired man did the field work on both

farms. Leon also traded haying with my uncle, Donald Phillips, who was farming several miles southeast of us at the time.

The two years that we rented Bare's farm were happy ones for us. We had good neighbors, shopped in Independence, and went to church at Walker Methodist Church. I belonged to the Spencer's Grove women's group, thanks to Catherine (Mrs. Raymond) Miller's asking me. Virginia and David were born while we lived there and were baptized in the Walker church by Rev. Clyde Scott who had married us.

The incident that mars our memories the most is the house fire that consumed the lovely home. The fire started in the attic near the chimney where much of the Bare family paraphernalia was stored. As we look back, we wonder at the value of any antique articles that went up in smoke. All of the first floor furniture, etc., on both sides of the house was saved but almost nothing on the second floor. This meant that all of Lida's keepsakes from her life and marriage were destroyed, a loss that brought her much grief.

After the fire we moved our remaining furniture into the garage, sleeping on the sofa-bed. We had already rented the farm near Winthrop, so the piano and anything else we could do without were moved into spare rooms at our new place. While we were living in the garage, Virginia had a light case of red measles. We wondered for years if we had diagnosed the rash correctly, but when the boys had the measles later, she did not get them.

After David was born on January 23, 1952, a VERY icy night, the children and I stayed with my folks until we could move to our new farm on March 1. Leon batched it again, in the cold garage, although I remember he spent quite a few nights with us, admiring his babies and encouraging me through a breast infection.

When we first married and started farming at Bare's I was secretly relieved to be able to live 16 miles from Leon's folks. With them working together all of the time, I worried that Dad would still be boss and Leon would still be the "boy." Was that ever an unnecessary worry! Dad was a great model for Leon. When they worked at Dad's, he made all of the decisions. When they worked at our farm, Leon made the decisions. Even when Leon begged for advice, his dad would say, "It's your place. You decide." He continued to co-sign Leon's bank notes until the happy day, years later, when Leon came home elated because the banker hadn't asked for Dad's signature on a new loan.

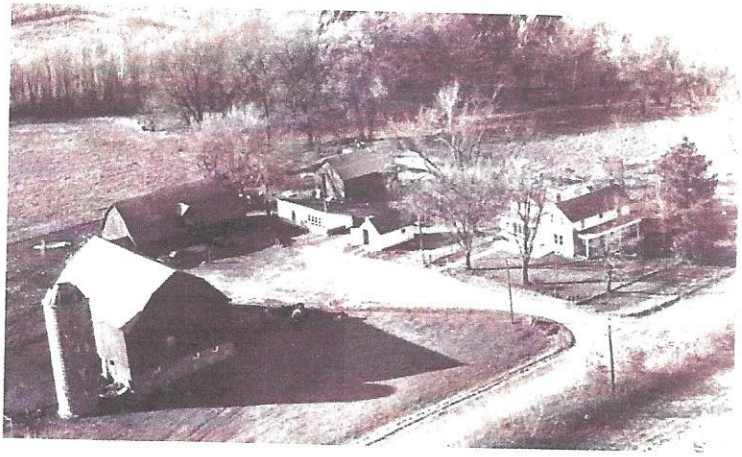
Leon's mom turned out to be a lovely friend and confidante to me. She still had elementary children at home and was a very busy farm wife with outside activities in church, Farm Bureau, and King's Daughters. She was never critical of me or the children and helped out many times with sick children and keeping the kids when we had business to do.

Thus, after two years of transporting machinery back and forth over the 16 miles between us, with great relief and pleasure we moved to the Foster place just a mile from Leon's folks. It was seven miles southeast of Winthrop in Middlefield Township.

The Foster Place

The Foster farm was 160 acres which we were able to rent crop-share. That means that we paid cash rent for the pastures, hay, and buildings and divided the row crops half and half with the owner of the land. The farm was owned by Mrs. Edith McMillan of Vinton. It was managed by Leonard Walters of Walters Farm Management of Waterloo. We felt very fortunate to rent a farm so close to "home" and were glad to get onto a crop-share lease. On that kind of lease the livestock was entirely ours and our labor toward the animals counted directly to us.

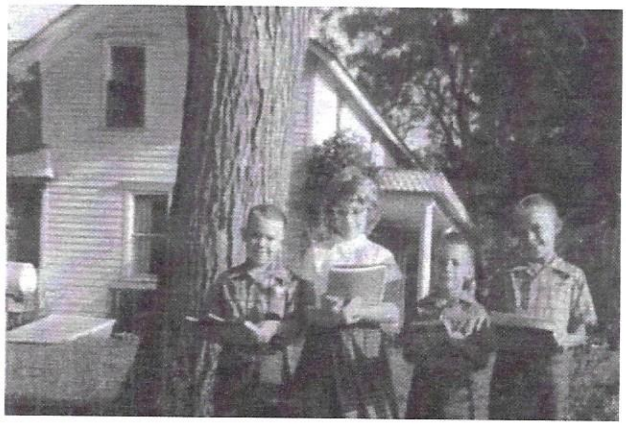
The first time Mrs. McMillan came to the farm to see us was a hot day. I was barefooted and wearing shorts, with a four-month old David perched on my hip and 16-month old Virginia clinging to my shorts. Finally, Mrs. McMillan asked, "How old is your husband then? I didn't laugh then but have often chuckled about it since. I'm sure she thought the manager had gone off the deep end with such a young couple. Leon was 25 years old, and I was 23. We ended up renting the farm 16 years until Mrs. McMillan died, and it was sold to Mr. Lowell Walters. Mrs. McMillan was a lovely landlady and was always interested in the children. She remembered them occasionally with a gift. On one visit she brought us a dictionary which we used until it fell apart many years later.



The Foster farm had some wet land, too, but with dairy cows we could use that for pasture. We continued to keep a laying flock, enlarged the pig operation, and milked the cows which were becoming increasingly Brown Swiss.

The first year we lived there we were very tight on money. I remember being hungry for greens that spring and trying to do dandelion greens. It was my one and only attempt. Aunt Ruth Mathern had given us some acorn squash after the fire, and we got so tired of squash that winter that it has only been in recent years that we occasionally enjoy squash again. In spite of being short of money, we enjoyed our years there. Our other three children were born while we lived there: Steven in 1953, Dean in 1956, and Carol in 1964. The older ones remember it as the home of their childhood and when they reminisce with cousins, that farm is the setting. After we moved away, it was deserted and eventually absorbed by a neighboring farm. Now the buildings are gone and all you can see is cropland.

The Foster farm was a good place to live, with good neighbors and a good school at Winthrop for the children. We attended the Kiene Congregational Church, Leon's home church. All of us were healthy and maturing and working hard. I grew a big garden and continued to raise chickens and sell eggs. Leon's mom raised frying chickens and together with the men and children we had a big processing day each summer as we got the fryers ready for the freezer. Some days we processed as many as 50 chickens. We had to begin making adjustments to our income when the weekly egg check no longer bought our groceries and we had to use part of the milk check for living expenses. When the hen house roof began to leak on the roosting hens, we decided to bypass the chickens and use the milk check for our living expenses.



Steven, Virginia, Dean & Dave at the Foster Place

One experience from this time shows how nice our neighbors were. Frank Cannon appeared at our door one morning carry a bushel basket of squealing newborn piglets. The mother sow had died and Frank was left with 10 orphan pigs. He gave them to our children in hopes we could hand feed them and save some of them. We didn't try to bottle-feed the

poor things but followed someone's advice to just hold their snouts in warm milk and let them learn that way. It worked, and we saved six of the pigs. Leon had turned the time-consuming job of feeding and caring for them over to the kids and me. We decided to use the money we'd get when they were sold to buy a better piano than the old player piano we'd bought when we were first married. Leon agreed to supplement the income from the pigs, if necessary.

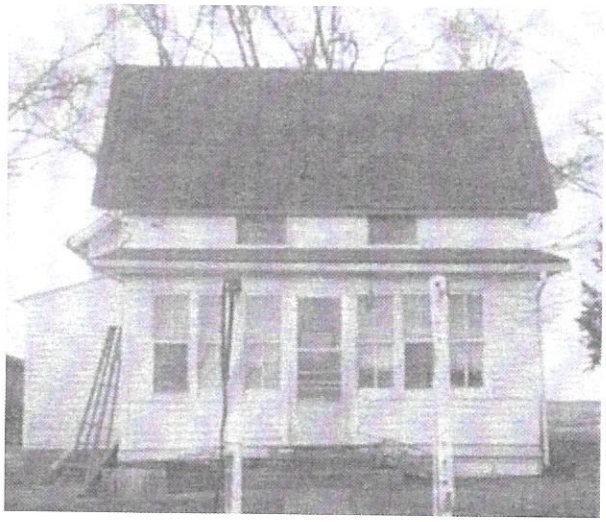
One morning when we went out to feed them one of the pigs was dead. The vet posted him and pronounced him dead from over eating, of all things! In the meantime, a runt pig of John Benton's was wandering our cornfields and refusing to stay home in his own lot. Johnny finally said we might as well keep the scrawny thing. We ended up selling six hogs, after all. By then the hog market was down, but Leon made good his promise, and we bought the studio upright piano that I have yet. I gave piano lessons for years, until I began teaching school full time and had to give it up.

When Dean was around four years old our fortunes began to turn in a different way. I was visiting with a teacher after one of the children's conferences. She told me that a person could get a substitute certificate if they had ever held a valid teaching certificate. Leon and I decided that substitute teaching was a way to supplement the farm income without a huge commitment of time. Leon's mother offered to baby sit for free, but I made an agreement with her that whenever I got paid for teaching she would get a portion for caring for Dean and whoever else might be home from school that day. I got my substitute certificate and started filling in at East Buchanan immediately.

For many years, Leon supplemented our farm income by doing custom work, mainly silo-filling and harvesting. When my father started to work at the high school, in the '50s, Leon rented his farm for awhile. In the '60s he bought a truck and hauled corn away from Lowell Kress's corn sheller. He continued that until after we moved to the Monti place. He fell asleep on the way home one day and ran the truck into the ditch. That was the end of that enterprise. By this time, our Milking Shorthorn herd had been changed to Brown Swiss cows. That meant milking chores morning and night. As the kids grew older, they all had chores after school. It is no exaggeration to say that we couldn't have been successful farming without our children's support and help.

I continued subbing, which is a hard job. In the fall of 1963, Jeff Myers, the elementary principal, asked if I would be interested in tutoring two boys each morning who were having extreme difficulty getting started at school. They were Robert Gates of Aurora and Brad Neal from Quasky. I enjoyed the tutoring and as fate would have it, we got pregnant about the same time. I tutored until Friday, May 1, and Carol was born Saturday morning May 2, 1964. With her arrival I quit teaching and went back to being a full-time mother and farm homemaker.

Two years later in February of 1966, Jeff came to the farm and asked if I would be willing to teach remedial reading half-days under the government's new Title I program. I would need to take some specific training by going to night school at Cedar Falls and taking training in remedial reading. Leon and I decided it would be a good chance for a part-time job. Mary Sullivan, Gladys Richardson, and I began teaching in new trailers set beside the schoolhouse doors. Mary was at Quasky, Gladys at Aurora and I had Winthrop children from 3rd to 6th grade I've always enjoyed teaching children to read so the part-time job was a good match for me. Leon's folks had just retired and moved to a house in Winthrop one block from the school house. Mother and Dad kept Carol while I taught in the morning. Now Mother and I both had extra income.

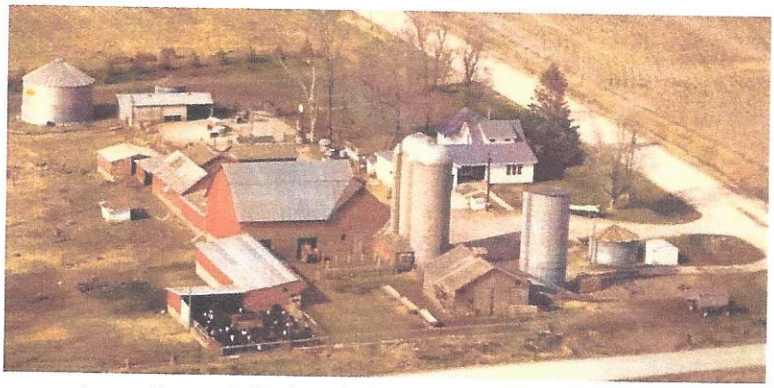


After our landlady's death, the farm was sold to Lowell Walters who owned many farms in the area. We were not interested in going back to a 50-50 lease so we began watching for farms that might be available to rent in the area. A friend tipped Leon off that Roy McDowell's farm one mile east of Monti could be available. I had memories of the place because it was on the road to Grandpa Stimson's home in Masonville. Since I remembered it as having quite a small house and we had five children, we drove down to look at it. The house was small, but it had four rooms upstairs, four downstairs, a bathroom, and a full basement. We decided we could fit if we were selective about what we moved into it so we contacted Roy McDowell and rented it on the crop-share basis.

Leon's dad expressed some apprehension about the choice. The farm had the Buffalo Creek running through it and the soil was lighter than what we were used to. In fact, Dad glumly predicted to Leon that we would "starve to death down there." For me, it was a little like moving back home, as I had grown up in the Monti area and was teaching at the Monti school the year we were married.

East Monti

We moved to the East Monti farm the summer of 1968. That year we farmed both farms so our move was gradual. My most vivid memory of that summer was of cleaning and rejuvenating the house. Virginia and I painted the porch both inside and out. The windows were the barn sash type with 96 window panes. We were thankful that the children didn't have to change schools. They were all able to attend and graduate from the East Buchanan Community Schools. By this time, I was teaching part time, and my job was unaffected except for the extra distance I had to drive along the Buffalo Road to Winthrop.



We continued to milk cows until the summer between Dean's junior and senior years. The final blow came when the heifers and dry cows got into the gas tank water wagon and ingested some herbicide that had been forgotten there. Several died and others recovered after the men and vet drenched them with charcoal. Since the milk regulations were changed so that we'd have to remodel our barn to sell milk, we got out of the milking business and fed cattle instead. Our yard had been built for feeding cattle and there were two concrete silos and one metal one. Leon designed a bunk auger and with the silo unloaders and the feed grinder, we fed a lot of cattle over the years until Leon retired in 1988.

To continue teaching on my temporary certificate, the school required me to get at least six hours of credit every year, so I began taking night courses and correspondence courses. After a counselor at the University of Northern Iowa looked at my meager credits and told me I'd probably be better off to forget college and enjoy raising my children, I

transferred to Upper Iowa at Fayette as they would accept the odd hours that I was gathering. For less than $100 I took six CLEP tests which gave me 30 hours of credit and made me a junior in one afternoon. When the kids got older, I went to summer school at Fayette for several years. I graduated Magna cum laude from Upper Iowa University in 1978 and got an immediate pay raise of $4,095!

In 1969, one year after we moved to the Monti farm, I was offered a new position to teach a transition room between kindergarten and first grade for children who were not ready to read yet. I would have to attend night classes at UNI to learn more about learning disabled children. And it would mean full time working. Leon and I discussed it at length and I finally decided to go for it. As it turned out, the two learning disabilities classes that year were among the most valuable of my educational career.

Ruth, Mary Sullivan, & Gladys Richardson, each celebrating 25 years of teaching

We rented the farm from Roy McDowell until 1972. That year the farm came up for sale. At first, we didn't consider buying it and got mentally prepared to move. But as time went on, we began estimating how we could raise the down payment by selling down our dairy herd and pigs. One afternoon, Rev. Al Schneck of Winthrop stopped by on an errand. As we talked we ended up sharing the circumstances with him. His advice: "If the Lord wants you to have it, things will work out. If he doesn't, they won't." The Lord must have looked on it favorably, as things worked out.

We couldn't swing the whole 280 acres. Leonard Monaghan bought the 80 acres east of York Ave. for $500 an acre. We bought everything west of the road for $360 an acre. The first mortgage was held by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., arranged by Clifford Aldermatt. The second mortgage was held by the FHA to be called in when we got on our feet more. We were able to pay on both mortgages faithfully. In the late '80s the FHA

wanted out, so we refinanced through the Security Bank. When we bought the farm we figured we wouldn't live long enough to pay it off, but 25 years goes by very quickly and the farm became ours, free and clear, in the spring of 1996.

Doing chores with granddaughters Michelle and Nikki

Dean bought a 40-acre plot a mile and a half south of the farm, part work ground and part timber. (That's where the black raspberries come from for his Christmas presents of black raspberry jam.) He and Leon rented Iva Swindle's farm for a few years. Another year they farmed Bernard Ryan's farm.

In general, my salary took care of the living expenses and the farm income was turned back into the farm payments and farm enterprises. Since Dean had a steady job with the tiling crew, we did not expand our enterprises by buying more land and ended up riding out the recession of the '80s. The timing of our purchase of the farm was the deciding factor. The $360 an acre land was soon worth many times its cost. At one time during the later land boom, we figure our worth at nearing a half-million dollars! Several of our friends found themselves in deep financial trouble when they expanded their farms to include a child and were saddled with land debt that their farms couldn't support.

One personal example of the change in attitudes that accompanies the '80s was the change in bankers' attitudes. A lot of our farming was possible with timely loans for cattle and crop expense. Leon went to the banker, they negotiated the loan, documented it, shook hands, visited awhile, and parted friends. Sometime in the eighties, we were both asked to come in. All of the loan materials had been collected, and my signature was added to them all. In their calling in of loans and foreclosing, they had discovered how lax they had been in getting the "other

East Monti Farm with a new barn and machine shed

half's" signature on their loans. The easygoing days were gone. The young, efficient men were in charge now.

Now both Leon and I are retired. Dean is the farmer and now owns a share in the Fangman Neighbor Tiling business. We haven't been motivated to move to town. Farming seems to be in the blood, and we are comfortable living on our East Monti farm.

The Last Load

The truck comes early while it is still dark.
The men are ready, the cattle confined behind the gates.
The huge truck maneuvers the narrow driveway on the first pass.
The trucker puts on his work overalls.
The dog, shut in the garage, barks, longing to be part of the melee.
The loading proceeds as she sits on the bench watching, feeling nostalgic.
He has retired, turned the farming over to their son.
This is the last load, the last produce of a lifetime of farming.
How many mornings has she helped or watched this ritual?
Her dad's cattle stumbling up the chute, his dad's cattle being loaded in the early morning darkness, their own cattle going off to market after months in the lot.
How many cattle in a lifetime on the farm?
He seems well-satisfied to put the uncertainty of farming behind him.
Enjoying the change to retirement activities and a new enterprise.
She sits watching, hearing the hooves on the steel floor of the truck.
At last, the truck is loaded. Brightly lit, it heads for the highway.
It's the last load, and she finds that she is crying.

Music in My Life

Beginnings

I have always loved music. I have loved to sing, play piano, strum a guitar, be a song leader and do music with my class of first graders. As I go about with my daily activities there is always some stray tune humming around in my mind. Being born into a family that prized musical talent was a great gift. My parents sacrificed to give Dorothy and me the instruments and training that allowed us to become proficient enough to share music with others and enjoy it for ourselves.

Our mother was our first model in the music world. She had taken some piano lessons in her youth and could play enough to amuse herself and her children. Her favorite piece was named *Falling Waters*, and we loved to hear her play it. As we took lessons she allowed us to practice at will and never berated us for playing too loud or too long, although sometimes she had to pry us away from the piano to go do chores.

Our first formal piano teacher was Mrs. Harry Powell, Oma. She lived down the county line west of us and came to our home to give us a lesson every week in the summer. My first few lessons were on an old organ. Where the organ came from or where it went, I don't remember and there is no one living to refresh my memory. Soon the folks bought a real piano in Cedar Rapids for $40, a real sacrifice in the '30s. It was an upright and was one of the best pianos I've been privileged to play on. Dorothy began lessons a year behind me, and we were soon close enough in ability to play duets, something we still enjoy. The lessons cost each of us $0.50 every week. When lessons were over for the summer, we spent the winter playing any easy music we could get our hands on. I've always given Oma Powell credit or getting us started on our lifelong love of the piano.

After several years, Oma stopped giving lessons and introduced us to a young woman starting out, Margaret Miller (later Mrs. Kenneth Jones). Margaret was our teacher for the rest of our formal study on the piano. She immediately started putting hymns into my repertoire, and I soon began playing for Sunday School. For several months they only sang the songs I could play, so the choice was very limited. I'm grateful to our church for giving me the chance to play with my meager skills. In my opinion, accompanying hymns in church is

a good way to discipline and train budding students. The new pianist may falter, stumble, lose her place or anything else, but the congregation goes on singing and the novice just has to catch up. Both Dorothy and I kept at it, and we still play the piano or organ in our churches.

Both Oma and Margaret came to our home for the lessons, a practice which has been discontinued. That was what made it possible for us to have lessons since our mother didn't drive. At the end of the summer, there was a recital. Proud parents and grandparents could see how we were progressing by the increasing difficulty of our recital pieces. We did more practicing in the weeks before the event than anytime else to be sure we wouldn't make some obvious mistake. In all, I took lessons for seven summers. One of the highlights was when I could play Mother's *Falling Waters* piece, and it is one of the few songs I can play from memory.

School Music

In our country school, we had no piano and our lovely teacher wasn't musical. However, there were provisions for some music in our learning. For small schools, the state education department prepared a curriculum based on a music book and record players. Each year they selected pieces from the book and recorded them. The records were given to the school and we learned to sing the songs with the record. Naturally, I liked the music time. We always sang several songs at our program for the public each year.

In high school, I joined the girls' glee club, mixed chorus, and played a clarinet in the band. Since my high school years were from 1941 to 1945, the war made a big impact on our extracurricular activities. Gas and tire rationing prohibited any sort of field trips, and music competitions were not common in our area. We presented concerts at the school and both the vocal and the band performed at graduation. Music awards were given. I especially admired Miss Nicolla, the music teacher in my freshman year. She spent time teaching us to sing harmony, breathe correctly, and enunciate our words as we sang.

At the same time, Dorothy and I were progressing with the piano, playing for church, accompanying singers, and playing piano duets. We were asked to perform on a number of public occasions. One of our most memorable performances was at a reunion at the Spring Grove school house, which had been closed for several years. We put our book on the rack

and sat down to play. As we started playing, we sat up straighter and looked at one another in shock. About half of the keys on the unused piano were stuck and made no noise. We just went on and played anyway. With five fingers and four hands playing at the same time, it still made a lot of noise. We were hard pressed not to laugh as people congratulated us on our playing.

Our teachers were very patient with us. We spent a lot of time playing the piano but not always in our lesson books. We especially liked pounding out duets on our home piano and some of the selections were difficult enough to set things reverberating. Now that I'm older, I realize that our mother had the patience of a saint to have put up with our noisy choice of recreation.

Music Through the Years

Playing for church has been pretty constant all through our married years. Dorothy went on to take lessons on the organ and became proficient on the church organ. She enjoys playing organ-piano duets, wherever there are both instruments at hand. I took a few organ lessons, but our own church didn't have an organ so the incentive was minimal. Both of us have accompanied high school singers and band members at contests and musicals. Dorothy accompanied the Linn County Farm Bureau Chorus until they disbanded. I sang with the Buchanan County Chorus the last year before it disbanded.

One of the satisfying musical activities I pursued before I got to teaching full-time was giving piano lessons myself. It was a way to pass on piano skills to others as well as giving us a little more income. I taught my own five children also. The girls became quite accomplished and both became church musicians. The boys learned enough to read music in chorus and band, and Steve continues to have musical interests, right now with a recorder. I modeled my teaching after my own teachers and had fun with many students over the years. I've been pleased that several of them have gone on to become accomplished musicians.

Later, as I taught full-time, I began to see that a guitar would be great for leading youngsters for singing at church, school, and on the Lay-Witness missions that Leon and I went on. We gave Dave and Steve guitars at their graduation time, and they both took them off to college. I decided to give myself a guitar, bought a guitar instruction book, and learned enough chords to accompany myself and others in singing. It was rather like when I

started playing for Sunday School all those years ago. We sing songs in the "keys" that I can play. As a result of an injury long ago to my left hand ring finger, it has molded itself into a position that won't reach the fret of the guitar. Consequently, I've had to find another way to accompany us.

I bought a portable keyboard to use when we have sing-alongs at nursing homes. I purchased a karaoke machine with two microphones to amplify our voices as we sing. We can't deny that our voices betray our older ages, but church members and nursing home residents are very forgiving people.

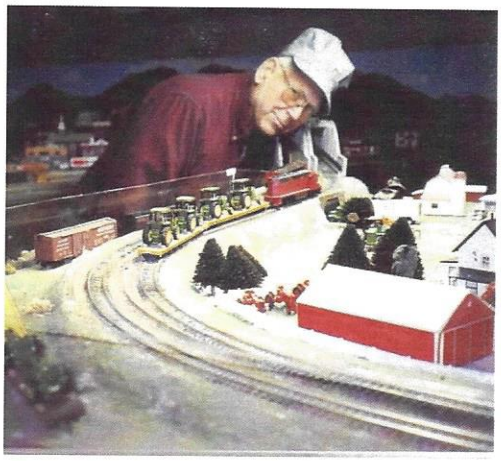
Much to my delight, our 17 grandchildren are continuing to develop their musical talents. Some sing and play in their contemporary church bands. Some are in the school orchestra. The instruments are more varied than in our day. Instruments involved are four pianos, a keyboard, both Spanish and electric guitars, two bass viols, a violin, a viola, a bass clarinet, a saxophone, and drums. Carol's children sang and danced in their school's award-winning show choirs.

It's evident that music has played a great role in my life. I'm thankful for the ability God gave me and the support I've had that has allowed me to enjoy music in all of its forms and beauty. And I hope that I've been able to pass that joy to those I've taught and performed for.

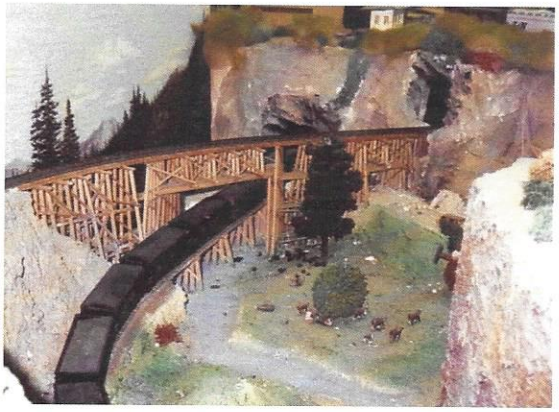
Leon Bovenmyer, HO Modeler

Leon Bovenmyer has had many interests in life. He's been a lifelong farmer, a family man, interested in church and neighbors, always interested in what he can do to make life better for others. He's also had a lifelong hobby and that is anything that has to do with trains.

Leon received his first model electric train when he was three years old. It was powered by an automobile battery. That was the beginning. Every Christmas he received a new model train until he got old enough to fashion his own layouts and buy his own equipment. Besides his interest in models, he found anything that had to do with real trains fascinating. He remembers going with his father and watching the steam locomotives pulling through Winthrop on the Illinois Central Railroad. He remembers riding home from Chicago on the *Land of Corn* after they had taken a load of cattle into the stockyards in the Elmer Jensen truck.



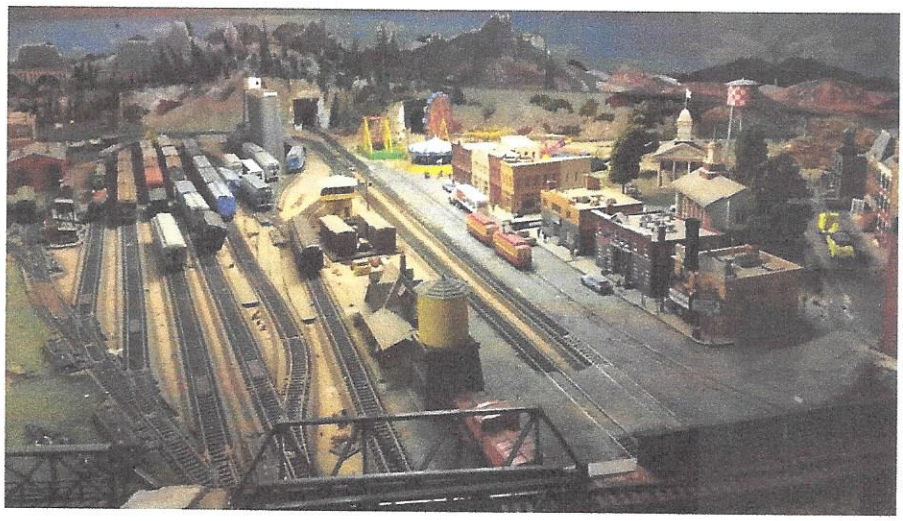
As Leon grew up, he began to make more extensive layouts of model trains, which include scenery, towns, mountains, rivers, etc. By the time he graduated from Winthrop High School, he and his brother, Jack, had a layout that filled half of a large bedroom in their home. When he married Ruth Stimson and they started farming on their own, the train models took a back seat to the other necessities.



As his children began to show an interest, Leon built a layout that filled a room in the upstairs of their home southeast of Winthrop. In 1968, when the family moved to their present home east of Monti, they moved the project to the basement. Now Leon has a two-room extensive layout where he enjoys showing off his hobby.

Leon has never lost his interest in real trains either. He and Ruth have been fortunate to be able to travel around the country, and they have ridden on many of the antique trains that have been restored to running order by other train enthusiasts. Leon can tell you the names of most of the trains currently running and also those that have passed into history. In the spring of 2000, they took a tour of Europe that featured traveling by train. It included six major rides and seven shorter rides as they toured England, France, Switzerland, and Italy.

A related interest is Leon's knowledge of the building of the Chicago, Anamosa, and Northern Railroad from 1906 to 1912. The CAN Rail Road extended from Anamosa to Quasqueton and passed through a corner of the Bovenmyers' present farm east of Monti. With the help of other local train historians, he learned how the railroad was built with the most modern equipment available at the time and why it and others like it were discontinued. He used old postcards to make a slide presentation on the building of the railroad and has given the presentation many times around the area.



The Letter

The letter lay in the box of old family documents. Buried in the box containing memorabilia from 135 years in Iowa, the letter stood out from the other yellowed news clippings, bills, receipts, Civil War letters, and deeds to farms gone from the family long ago. Handwritten in beautiful script of the time, dated July, 1891, it carried the postmark of an almost forgotten post office, Newtonville, Iowa. The greeting read: Dear Uncle and Aunt. It had been mailed to New Jersey and was signed by my great-grandfather, John Morris Phillips. The letter was edged in black.

I read and reread the astonishing letter, trying to picture the times, the scene, the activities that lead to its writing. I could see the farm as it was in later years; I had grown up there. But I began to picture it as it would have been when my Grandpa Ed was young. I wondered what it might have been like on that fateful day, long ago day in July. I laid down the letter and let my imaginations wander.

"Get up, Eddie. It's your turn to milk the cows." Eddie felt a sharp nudge as his brother, David, rolled out of the bed. David always seemed to wake up first and never failed to remind him of his morning chore. As Eddie rose and dressed, he could smell the breakfast that Mama had ready and could hear his sisters chattering in the kitchen. He took a quick look out of the window. It was a sunny day, just right to put up the hay that had been mowed two days ago. He would have to hurry with the milking while David fed the hogs and Papa got the horses ready for a day's work.

As he ate breakfast, Eddie looked around at his family. His father sat at one end of the table. He was a rather tall, spare man with a beard and mustache. Eddie knew that his father was looked up to in the neighborhood because he was more educated than most rural men. Books, newspapers, and magazines were stacked in piles on every available surface.

"Are you ever going to clean the papers off the parlor table?" Mama would scold. And Papa would wink at the children and go on reading his literature from

the state college on how to raise new varieties of apples and pears in the orchard he was so proud of. Mama said that it was the bane of her life that Papa couldn't dispose of a single written word. He had every receipt that he'd ever received since he started farming on his own after his father died in '67.

Mama bustled around putting the hot cereal, milk, and homemade bread and butter on the table. She had been born in Scotland and had come to the United States with her parents when she was two years old. She was starting to get plump now. Eddie thought that she was pretty and knew that Papa did, too.

Across the table sat his sisters. May was 10, and Lydia was 8. As usual, they were arguing. "It's my turn to help Mama make the ginger cookies," Lydia pointed out.

"But you got to help her make the pound cake last week," pouted May.

Eddie noticed that the argument was being conducted in whispers, because if Mama got upset with them, she might bake the cookies herself and make the girls wash the dishes and the milking utensils.

Sitting beside him, David was wolfing down his breakfast. David was 17 this year, one year older than Eddie. But Eddie was taller. Already six feet tall, he was hoping to be as graceful as his brother when he finished growing. Although they had only been to the country school two miles away for three winter terms, their father had taught them at home and they were taking after him in their love for education.

Papa and David were making detailed plans for the day. He liked to listen to them plan but sometimes wished that he would be included in the conversations. Breakfast over, they headed for chores and the hayfield.

From his seat on the buck rake, Eddie looked out over the hayfield. It was perfect drying weather, and it was hot. He was sweating under his straw hat and was itchy from the dust that seemed to settle on every inch of his body. The horses switched their tails over their backs, sending dozens of flies to buzz around Eddie's head. He watched over the horses' backs to be sure that he was dumping the rake full of hay in an even windrow so it would be easier for Papa and David to pick up.

"Giddy-up, there," he spoke half-heartedly to the team and gave them a light tap with the reins to hurry their pace a little. Maybe if everyone hurried, they'd get done in time for a splash in the creek before supper. After a short spurt, the team settled back into their slow, steady pace. Back and forth across the field he drove the team, each pass bringing him closer to finishing the raking.

As he worked, he thought of how this land must have looked when his Grandpa and Grandma and Papa and Aunt Caroline settled on it 36 years ago. Grandma and Aunt Caroline were always talking of how tough it was then. "I'm glad I don't have to work as hard as they did," he mused. "Papa tells us of how he had to carry wheat to be ground in Dubuque. That's seventy miles away. Farming is so much easier now. We even have a tripod to help stack the hay near the buildings and new harpoon-type hayfork to make the stack taller."

As Eddie finished with the raking, he saw that David and Mr. McKee had the hayrack loaded and were driving it toward the barn lot, ready to pile it on the growing haystack. Papa drove his team over from where he had been mowing the field.

As he got closer, Eddie saw his younger sisters nearby. He was glad to see the basket of big ginger cookies that May carried and wondered which sister had helped to bake them. Lydia was headed toward them with a big pitcher of cool well water in her hands.

"This tastes good," Papa drank heartily from the dipper. "I don't know when I've been so hot and dusty. It's good hay-making weather, though. Let's get this job done and go swimming before supper. We'd better oil the pulley above the hayfork now that we can reach it better."

"Let me do it, Papa," David offered. "It will be easier for me to shinny up the pole than for you." Eddie was about to make the same offer, but Papa had already handed the oil can to David. As his father turned the team to pull the load of hay next to the stack, Eddie watched David climb up with the oil can. He shinnied up one of the poles and squirted oil on the pulley.

And here the letter edged in black became so descriptive that it hurt to read it. I reread it in its entirety:

Troy Mills, Ia.

Aug. 14, 1891

Dear Uncle and Aunt,

It is with a sad heart I write this letter. Our oldest son David was killed with a hayfork about half past four o'clock p.m. July 18th. He was 17 years old 15th of last (Dec). We were stacking hay with a double harpoon fork. The boys and Mr. Henry McKee were stacking with two teams, and I was mowing. David and I talked it over and decided we would go up and oil the pulley as soon as we got the stack up to where it would be convenient to get at the pulley, so while they were driving out the empty and bringing up the other load, he had went up to attend to it.

No one knows exactly how it happened. No one saw it, but a moment before it happened, Lydia Jane and Edward saw him falling just before he reached the stack, the fork dropping right after him. He alighted on his feet. Edward called to him to lookout for the fork, but there was no time. The fork struck him in the left breast just under the first rib. Penetrated eight and a half inches. He pulled the fork out, put it on the stack, and called Edward. "Eddie, help me," took two or three steps toward the house and feel. As soon as Eddie saw him falling and the fork following him, he called to him to lookout for the fork and jumped from the wagon and ran to him, but he had fallen before he could reach him. He carried him off the stack.

Lydia called to Eliza as soon as David was hurt. She ran to him, took his head in her arms, and asked if he knew it was her. He moved his lips but could not speak and nestled his head close to her breast. She saw he was dying. She told him to commit his soul to God. He turned his eyes toward heaven, then gave her one last loving look and nestled his head still closer to her breast and the death gurgle came in his throat, and his sweet life was gone. He did not live but a minute or two after he was hurt.

From your affectionate Nephew,

John M. Phillips

I turned the letter over. Was that all? Just the bare bones news? No mention of a funeral or how the family grieved for the nearly-grown oldest son? Did Eddie or his father struggle with guilt that David was the one killed in the freak accident? Did they relive the day again and again, imagining ways they could have averted the disaster?

I pictured my Grandpa Ed as we knew him 50 years later. Kind, gentle, soft-spoken, he never scolded or punished us no matter how much we disturbed the regularity of their farm.

I laid the letter back in the box among the deeds and receipts and other memories of a century ago. I would never know how much the death of his older brother had shaped my grandpa's personality. I only know the stark, tragic news detailed in the letter, the letter edged in black.

My Uncle Paul

My uncle Wendell Paul Phillips was born in 1905, eighteen months younger than my mother. The older aunts in our family claimed that he was a normal baby until he had a severe case of whooping cough when he was around 18 months old. Whatever the reason, Paul was what we would now call intellectually challenged or educable retarded. Paul was very high functioning and today would be carefully schooled to be an independent person with a life of his own. But being born in 1904, his opportunity for education was to remain in the country school where his sisters went until the subjects got too hard for him and he was allowed to quit. He learned to read, write, to add and subtract but was unable to comprehend long division.

Under the supervision of his parents, Paul had several enterprises on their farm. Besides helping Grandma in her large garden, he raised popcorn to sell locally and to relatives. They also raised watermelons, but I don't remember them marketing the melons. Paul also spent the winter cracking out hickory nuts and sold them locally. In those days nuts in cakes and cookies were highly prized, and he had a steady, though small, market for nutmeats.

Though not capable of business decisions, Paul was tall and strong and able to help both Grandpa and Daddy with chores, haying, and other jobs which needed strength. The biggest drawback for Paul came when we children started to grow up. He would much rather play with us than to spend the day doing the dull tasks his dad set him at. Nevertheless, he was good help in both of the families' gardens. I realize now that he also served the purpose of a babysitter when the men and women were especially busy. During the war, when Donald was in the Marines and overseas, Paul worked for Daddy, and filled in until I got strong enough to clean the cow barn and carry pails of feed and silage to the dairy cows.

Paul made a great playmate for us as we grew up. His had an elementary school level mind, and as each of us reached that level, he was a companion that we loved and cherished. That love remained with me for all of my life, even when Paul's childish ways became embarrassing in an older man. After the family moved away from the Troy Mills area, there were fewer neighbors that could make allowances for his lack of social graces. In his older

years, his greeting became, "Do you like me?" and no matter how often he received an affirmative answer, it was his standard question. The last time I saw Paul alive was at the nursing home in Lansing. He was glad to see us, still smiling and asking if I loved him. And I can say, "Yes, Paul, I have always loved you."

Paul and Grandma lived with Mother and Dad on the farm near Independence after Grandpa died. Both Mother and Daddy worked in town and Grandma and Paul kept things going at home. As Grandma aged, the question became, where would Paul be the happiest after she was gone? A few months before her death, Paul moved to the Buchanan County Home and seemed to be content there. He took part in all of the family things as usual. His health deteriorated as he developed emphysema, though I doubt he ever smoked a single cigarette in his life. He was also diagnosed with chronic leukemia. When he got too sick to manage at the County Home, he was accepted into the Lansing Nursing Home at Lansing, Iowa. He died there on September 3, 1979 at 73 years of age.

He was buried beside his parents in the Troy Mills cemetery. Those buried in that plot are Aunt May Gardner, John Edward and Effie Phillips, Paul Phillips, and Roy and Hazel Stimson. In another plot are David and Julia Phillips, John Morris and Eliza Phillips, and Aunt Caroline Phillips. The cemetery is very well kept up, with a big flag display over Memorial Day weekend. Some of us are close enough to put flowers on the graves each year.

Eulogy Given at the Ruth Alice Todd Funeral by Ruth Bovenmyer

Ruth Alice Todd, 95, of Coggon, died Wednesday, May 14, 2003, at Mercy Medical Center in Cedar Rapids, following a short illness. The services were held at the United Parish Church in Coggon on Saturday, May 17, 2003. The burial was in the Pleasant Hill Cemetery in rural Coggon where her parents and grandparents are buried.

Survivors include three nieces and their families: Isabel and Delbert Paulsen, Bernita and Dr. Earl Stine, and Wilda and Russell Scholz. She was preceded in death by her parents; two sisters, Ella Emerson and Lottie Hawkins; and two nieces, June Emerson and Marjorie Cooksley.

Ruth Alice was born April 3, 1908, the daughter of Albert and Ada Manchester Todd in Delaware County. Her childhood home was called Pleasant View and was one-half miles west of the Silver Creek Church. She graduated from Coggon High School and from the State Teachers College in Cedar Falls. Ruth Alice taught in rural schools in Buchanan County. Later, she attended John Fletcher College at University Park, Iowa. She then worked for the Printograph Company in Kansas City, traveling to every state selling advertising for cookbooks. Ruth Alice retired in 1979 to her home in Coggon.

She was a member of Silver Creek United Methodist Church, Coggon Historical Society, United Methodist Women, and was a staunch supporter of the Republican Party. She was also active with the Coggon senior citizens.

Ruth Alice and I share some of the same genes, the Todd genes. Her father, Albert Todd and my great-grandfather Saleh Todd were brothers, which made Ruth Alice and my grandma, Effie Todd Phillips, cousins. She explained to me early on that she and I were first cousins, twice removed. If you ever wondered about any of your relatives, you could go to her. Wherever she worked or traveled, she visited any relatives in the area. She took along little black notebooks and entered dates of births, marriages, deaths, and anything of interest

about her many relatives. She had a notebook for each of her father's siblings, ten in all. Genealogy was a lifelong interest. About twenty years ago, I spent a winter transcribing some of her notes and putting them on the computer.

Ruth Alice was 20 years old when I was born. I have no memory of her as a schoolteacher, but she must have been a good one by the way her former pupils remember her. Six or seven of her former pupils, now older and growing gray, were present at the visitation or the funeral. She had corresponded with them all these years. My first awareness of her was as an exotic lady who wrote letters from anywhere in the world. One letter would come from California, the next from Kentucky, the next from somewhere in France.

Since her sister, Ella, and family lived only ten miles from our home, we saw them quite often. An early memory was of Grandma announcing that Ruth Todd was coming to visit. We'd go down to Grandma's for a hefty meal and play with Ella's girls who were close to our own ages.

The Todds have been a very devout Christian family. They are known for their preachers and missionaries. That continues today as several descendants are to make connections to come to the funeral. They were in the Ukraine on a mission trip, taking medicine with them and running a clinic in a rural area.

Ruth Alice kept up correspondence with all of the current preachers and missionaries and contributed generously to their causes. She remained a member of the Silver Creek church and sent a check every month. She also gave to the United Church where she attended regularly after her retirement. She sponsored children through the Christian Children's Fund for as long as I can remember. She never missed a meeting of the Silver Creek United Methodist Women until she began having health problems just a few years ago. She gave the lesson at our meeting at Donna's last month with her usual interest and skill.

Ruth Alice maintained a vast correspondence with former pupils, church friends, neighbors, her many cousins, and persons she had met on her travels. Her Christmas list must have been endless. She was good about remembering birthdays and anniversaries. She attended all kinds of reunions and a matter of principle for her was to never miss a meeting of any organization she belonged to.

Ruth Alice never owned a car or learned to drive. She relied on public transportation in her work and travels. After retiring she rode to activities with friends or relatives. If the trip was out of town, she always paid you for the gas, no matter how much you protested. If you didn't take it from her hand, you'd find it in your coat pocket or on the car seat or somewhere. It was one aspect of her determination to be independent. Those who have been loving and caring for her as she became more infirm know her constant phrases: "I'm O.K. I can do it myself." and "I'll be all right once I get home."

I heard a quotation recently that said: "The death of an old person is like the burning of a library." That fits anyone who dies, but I think it is especially appropriate for Ruth Alice Todd.

She once told me that she had agreed with her doctor to do everything he told her for her health, and he was to help her reach her hundredth birthday. She didn't quite reach that goal, but we know her spirit is with God now. And those of us who are left here will always remember her generous, loving, independent spirit.

Edna Muriel Phillips Hawkins

Edna Muriel Phillips was born July 22, 1908 at the "Creek Place" on the Linn-Buchanan County Line east of Troy Mills, Iowa. Her parents were John Edward, "Ed," and Effie Todd Phillips. She was the third of six children, all born on the home place: Hazel, Paul, Edna, Blanche, Nona, and Donald. She graduated from Center Point High School in 1927.

Edna married Alpha Hawkins on May 14, 1929 at the Methodist parsonage in Independence. Alpha was a widower. His first wife, Lottie Todd, a cousin of Effie Phillips, was killed in a windstorm on Pretty View Farm one and one-half miles east of Monti. Alpha and Edna farmed there until 1931 when they moved to a farm northwest of Winthrop and farmed until 1934, when they quit farming and moved into the town of Winthrop.

Alpha ran a trucking service until his health failed. He was an ice-man in the summer, driving to Oelwein to get the ice. He also ran a fix-it shop, repairing furniture and odds and ends. Alpha died on April 23, 1954.

After Alpha's death Edna remained in the little house across from the schoolhouse. Always a good cook, she worked as a cook at the Winthrop school. She lived with Carrie McKay for several years, until Carrie's death. She lived and cooked at the Buchanan County Home until she retired and moved to Tucson, Arizona for her health. Every year she returned "home" to spend the summer with friends and relatives.

In Tucson, Edna was active and lived in an apartment until her health made that impossible. For a number of years, she lived in a Christian adult care center. She never lost her sense of humor and was loved and cared for by her friends at the center.

Edna died of pneumonia Wednesday, February 7, 1996, at a hospital in Tucson. She was 87 years of age. She was preceded in death by her parents; her husband; two sisters: Hazel Stimson and Blanche Kingsley; and one brother, Paul.

Survivors are a sister, Nona Van Fossen, Brooklyn, WI; a brother, Donald Phillips, Urbana, IA; and many nieces and nephews. Her body was cremated, and she was buried in Silver Creek Cemetery south of Masonville.

Edna was a loving, generous person who enriched the lives of those around her, relatives, friends, and neighbors. She enjoyed gardening, especially flowers. She traveled all over this country and Europe and was a prolific letter writer. She had a pen-pal in Greece whom she visited three times, and she was Godmother to her Greek friend's two children. She will be missed by her friends and family.

Things You No Longer Do

It is hard to realize how times have changed since I was a girl. As I thought about my early years, I realized that there are many things that we no longer do. Here is a list of activities that are not commonly done today.

We no longer stop at the gas station and get the tank filled up, the oil checked, and the windshield cleaned by an attendant. I especially remember stopping at Harlan Walton's station in Troy Mills. He would come out when we pulled up to the gas pumps and ask, "How much today, Roy?" Daddy would tell him how much he could spend.

Then came the fun part. Harlan would twirl the handle on the side of the gas pump until the numbers registered zero. Then he would pump the lever on the side back and forth to pump the gas up into the glass container to the level that Daddy had requested. A hose carried the gas into the car's gas tank while the numbers on the pump registered higher and higher and the gas drained out of the glass into the tank.

That done, Harlan would ask if the oil needed looked at. Depending on the age and condition of the car, it would be checked and oil added if necessary. Finally, he would clean the windshield with a rag, accept the payment and we were ready to go.

We no longer take eggs to Troy Mills on Saturday night in either the 12 dozen case or the bigger 30 dozen case. I remember taking them to Willard Carson's egg-buying business just to the south of the big Cook & Wilson grocery. How we liked to watch Christine candle the eggs. Candling eggs meant holding up the egg to a light to make sure they were fresh and had no blood spots. She would take the eggs out of our cases four at a time, pass them over the light, and put them into the cases that would store them until sold. I thought she had the softest hands because I never saw her break an egg. These cases of eggs were our grocery money.

We no longer go to town on Saturday night to sell eggs, buy groceries, listen to the band concert, and visit with our neighbor friends who had come to do the same things. I remember being jealous of those who got to town early because they parked on the main street, sat in their cars, and watched people go by. In summer, they listened to the band concerts and to show their appreciation, they honked their horns after every number. If my

memory is correct, the band set up in the middle of the intersection in Coggon to play. Later on, they played on the school lawn.

We no longer go to the movies at what is now the restored Coggon Opera House. When I was a teenager, we went to movies often. Daddy was a fan of westerns and comedies so that was what we viewed. We saw every Gene Autry, Roy Roger, and Hopalong Cassidy film. We went to every Shirley Temple movie that was made. We saw Jane Withers movies, Bob Hope's, and Bing Crosby's. And the Disney cartoon movies, such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, and the Abbot and Costello features.

The schedule was always the same unless they had a double movie feature. I don't remember that we always had popcorn, but it was available. Preceding the movie itself there was always the RKO news film, and the word *Pathe* was in there somewhere. Much of the news that I remember featured the war with its air attacks and submarines. Sandwiched in were spots on buying war bonds and stamps and other encouragement toward the war effort. After the news came the cartoon, the coming attractions, and then the movie itself. We didn't go in for heavy dramas. I was old enough to be disappointed that the folks went to see *Gone with the Wind* but wouldn't let us go because we were too young. As I remember, it was the only time that our parents went to the movies without us.

We no longer go to the drug store on the corner to sit at the fountain and get a treat after the movie in Coggon. Even though there was a Coca-Cola machine at the fountain, my parents had no interest in soda pop and our treats were always ice cream in some form. When we were small, we had ice cream cones. As we got older, Daddy would treat us to Sundaes sometimes, the kind in the tulip glasses with whipped cream and a cherry on top. Aside from the fountain, I had no interest in the rest of the store, but there must have been drugs and other necessities. The most interesting store in Coggon opened when Leo French's came to Coggon. French's Hardware had everything you could ever want and my mother enjoyed visiting with Dorothy French.

We no longer climb the stairs to the telephone switchboard office above what is now the Troy Mills Post Office. The Carl Walton family lived there and ran the switchboard. We had no phone at our farm, so the folks made the absolutely necessary calls from there. If Wilma wasn't too busy with the telephone business, she and Mother would visit. I was in

the same grade as their daughter, Carol Lee, but I don't remember really playing with her up there. I suppose my extreme shyness played a part.

We no longer have to deal with mud roads. Every spring would find the roads of Newton Township nearly impassable for a few weeks. I say, nearly impassable, because certain vehicles had to continue traveling even in such conditions. The cream hauler, the mail man, and the school bus tried to drive their respective routes as near on schedule as humanly possible. I shudder to think of how we treated the school bus driver when we got stuck in the mud. To us, it was a gleeful occasion as it meant that we would get home later and maybe miss out on a few chores.

I've heard stories of how students would all slide over to the "low" side of a bus to make it more likely to get stuck! However, the occasion that I remember most did not cause me to be happy. On the contrary, it was the evening of our Junior-Senior Banquet and we got solidly stuck in the muck two and one-half miles northwest of home. I walked the rest of the way home, only to find that there would be no way for Daddy to drive out, either. My wonderful mother walked up to the neighbor's phone and called Miss Norris, our English teacher. She met me on the good road one mile south of home. Of course, I had to walk down to meet her. Mamma also arranged for me to stay in town with Bernice Powell overnight so we wouldn't have the hassle of getting me home again in the dark. What lovely people populated my life.

We no longer have to deal with kerosene lamps. Not only did we have to be sure of the kerosene supply, but we had to deal with the smoky residue that each burning caused. And it wasn't just one lamp, but at least two: the kitchen light and the living room light. The most danger was in carrying them around the house. The barn lights were lanterns, again fueled by kerosene. They were more stable to carry but extreme caution had to be used to be sure they were away from the combustible hay and straw. It was a great day in 1947 when electricity came to the farm. All evening we ran around the house turning the lights on and off. The electrician must have wired the house while we were at school as I have no memory of that part of the great transformation of our lives.

Valerie's Questions

My sister, Dorothy's, granddaughter, Valerie sent me these questions in April, 1995 and I sent her these answers.

Did your father bring candy from town?

Yes. He brought two kinds, "common candy" like gumdrops, jelly beans, and licorice for us kids to devour. Then he brought special candy that got put in the hanging pockets on their closet door. A favorite was chocolate drops. He also liked coconut candy, the kind you can still get in the Cracker Barrel stores, with different colored coatings, chocolate, lemon, pink, or white. Daddy always gave boxed chocolates for special occasions. Valentine's Day always brought a heart-shaped box of chocolates for Mamma. And the whole family was treated to a big box of chocolates at Christmas time.

How long did you use outhouses?

Until I was married at 21. Our farm got electricity in 1947, but there was no indoor plumbing yet when I was married. We never had to use outhouses after we were married. Leon placed the old outhouse on the Foster farm near the gas barrels to store oil in. My folks got indoor plumbing when they moved to the Liberty Township home in 1953.

Was snow a problem?

Both snow and mud were huge problems as we lived on a dirt road that had little gravel on it. For a first-hand look at what a bad winter was like, see Chapters 11 and 12 in *More Good Old Days* by Grandma Hazel Stimson.

What was used for lighting?

Handheld lanterns were used outside for lighting. You carried them wherever you were choring and hung them on hooks on the barn rafters when milking. In the house, we had two kinds of lamps. Both used kerosene as their fuel. The kitchen lamp was a simple glass base that held kerosene. Screwed onto it was a mechanism that held a wick that you lighted and it was covered with a glass globe. All of our lamps were this type until we bought an

Aladdin lamp. This lamp had a mantle placed over the burning wick that enhanced the light and made the light whiter.

In a rather crude way, the kitchen lamp would compare to the light of an incandescent bulb and the Aladdin would compare to a fluorescent bulb. Of course, both were indescribably lower in lighting power than electric bulbs. Of all the changes on the farm in the past century, the coming of electric lighting and power to the rural areas is probably the most life-changing.

When was soda invented?

If you mean baking soda, it has always been here and soda ash, calcium carbonate, has been used for baking, soaps, etc. for I don't know how long.

If you mean soda pop, Leon and I visited the Coca-Cola museum in Elizabethtown, Kentucky in January of 1992. Coca-Cola was originally marketed as a tonic in the late 1880s. It later was made tastier and marketed at soda fountains. The museum in a treasure house of Coca-Cola advertisements and memorabilia. It's connected to a working Coca-Cola bottling plant. We found it extremely interesting that the Coke people put their advertising on every imaginable piece of household equipment and any other bric-a-brac available.

What kinds of injuries were common?

Many injuries were connected with the handling of horses, but I don't remember any serious horse injuries in our family. Another common injury at our farm was being kicked by a cow before, during, or after milking her. Haymow injuries were common, with some people badly hurt by falling through the hay chutes. A common injury with me was stepping on nails. I seemed to like to walk on boards without looking to see if there were any nails sticking up from them. We went bare-footed in the summer so it was more common then, although the deepest nail puncture I ever got went through the sole of my shoe. In later years, a nail puncture meant a trip to the doctor for a tetanus shot, but I don't remember when the shots became available.

With the coming of tractors and mechanized equipment, other injuries became common. The corn picker was especially dangerous as the early models didn't have the shields

and safety equipment. A number of farmers lost fingers or arms to the whirling wheels of the corn picker.

Were suicides less in those days?

I don't know. There may have been fewer suicides among young people but more among older ones as there wasn't the knowledge of pain control and how to keep older people productive as there is now. My grandfather Phillips tried to kill himself a couple of times when he knew that his mind was being affected by "hardening of the arteries." He was too weak to do it by the time he tried and ended up dying quickly with his heart. Our cousin Earl Pogue finished high school, went into the army, and was soon discharged. Not too long after he shot himself in his bedroom. It shows the great discretion of our family that I don't know why he was discharged or the reason for his depression.

Could you shave your legs?

We were very naïve rural girls who went to country school and then to high school in Troy Mills (there were 12 in my graduating class) and shaving my legs had never been thought of. In my circles, women who shaved their legs and under their arms were considered "fast." My high school days coincided with World War II, from 1941-1945. We all started wearing lipstick and some time in there I started shaving my hairy legs and under my arms and started using deodorant. Like all other teenagers we were influenced by the movies. Thank goodness, we admired stars like Betty Grable, Dorothy Lamour, and other well-shaped idols and weren't influenced by the anorexic types held up as today's beauties.

What were telephones like?

We had no telephone on our farm, but in emergencies ran to the nearby neighbor to the south. The phones were wall phones, and each line served several farms, often as many as eight families. Anyone on the line could overhear your conversations so the talk was usually of business or generalities. Each home had its own ring. For instance, if the phone rang three longs, it would be for one party. If it rang two longs and a short, it would be for another. A long steady ring alerted the neighbors to any emergency and would result in quick help.

Most lines had at least one busybody who listened to everyone's conversations so knew everyone's business. Children were taught not to touch the telephone, and if the receiver was left off the hook in one home, the line was not available to anyone else until someone drove around and found the guilty phone. Leon and I got our first private phone when Winthrop put in the East Buchanan Cooperative while our kids were in high school.

How did you clip fingernails?

It depended on whether you kept them bit off or not! Neither Dorothy nor I had much problem cutting our nails. We bit them off first. People ordinarily used scissors for both finger and toe nails.

Did you have many friends? Did you have friends over?

I think you could say that our best friends were our sisters and brothers in the sense that they were the ones we played with most. Next were our cousins who we saw about once a month. These were cousins on both sides of the family. Then our schoolmates were friends. Both Dorothy and I had only one other person in our country school class, and they were the Reilly sisters. We were active, and recess was our best class as it still is for students today. We also had high school friends in our church, and I remain close to my high school chum. Lately, it has just been through Christmas letters.

Our neighbor girl would walk up to visit and play with us. Her mother had died, and she was a lone girl amid several brothers. Another neighbor girl came when her mother helped Mamma cook for silo-fillers. Occasionally, we would stay overnight with our classmates.

Were surgeries done?

Yes. The most common ones were tonsillectomies and appendectomies. Cancer was not as treatable then as it is now, and replacement joints and organs had not been developed yet. The most serious surgery in our home was the removal of Mamma's abdominal tumor soon after Andy's birth. At the time, we were told that it was non-cancerous, and Mother herself was told that. Before Grandma Phillips died, she told me that it had been cancerous and the doctors expected Mother to die from it. A neighbor also told me many years later that Mother had been given up to die but that may have been the rumor around

the neighborhood. Mother told me many years later that she guessed that it must have been cancerous and she wasn't told. It all worked out well, and she had no recurrence. In the end, she died at 83 of endometrial cancer.

When did makeup come out?

Since even the Egyptian ladies used powder and lip-tints while the slaves built the pyramids, I expect there has never been a time before makeup. But I think the present emphasis on makeup and hairdos could be traced to the '20s and the coming of the movies and modern advertising. And it used to take a generation before the fads of the coasts reached the Midwest.

What was farm life like?

I think the big difference that made farm life different from other kinds of life is that the whole family was together in all of our activities. Everyone was involved to the extent of their abilities in making the farm productive. Everyone did chores as soon as possible. Everyone worked in the garden together, canned produce, cooked the meals, helped harvest, helped plant, take care of the animals, etc.

Since Mamma didn't drive, we all went to town together and any other social activities were done as a group. I don't remember my parents ever hiring a babysitter. We did sometimes stay with Grandma while the folks went Christmas shopping, etc.

And on the rare occasions when they had to do business we stayed with Grandma. In 1933, when Lloyd was a baby, they left Dorothy and me at Grandpa's and took him with them to the Chicago World's Fair. Mother said that everyone said that they would help carry him, but in the end, she was the only one who could stand to carry him for long. When I was older we occasionally watched our little brothers for an afternoon but not often. In our family, it made for a very close-knit family, but in some families, the children couldn't wait to get away from home. To me, it shows how much our parents respected us and tried to make our lives happy in spite of the hard work and limited income.

Did you write poetry on the farm?

No, I was too busy reading what others had written. However, my mother Hazel wrote lots of poetry and had some published. There were educated people on the farms as well as

elsewhere. Many of the older ones were self-educated. My Grandpa Phillips spent some time learning Spanish and I have the Spanish Bible that he purchased. He had a limited amount of time in schools, but his parents were educated and subscribed to newspapers and magazines regularly.

Did you ever go anywhere for vacation?

Our family never took a vacation as such when I was at home. This was because we milked a good-sized herd of Holstein cows and had to be home every morning and every night for milking. We children did get to go on summer vacations by visiting our cousins for a week. In return they came and visited us.

How were children's birthdays celebrated?

Birthday parties with friends and presents were not common in our rural area. Our birthdays were remembered by having a birthday cake and being sung to. We didn't expect presents. Our time to receive gifts was Christmas and then our folks were most generous.

What grade did you end school?

I graduated from eighth grade in the country school, Reilly School, Newton Twp. Buchanan Co. in 1941; Troy Mills Consolidated High School in 1945; and received a B.A. degree in education from Upper Iowa College at Fayette, IA in 1978.

Were there groups like 4-H or FFA?

I think there might have been a few 4-H groups started by the time I was in high school but none in our vicinity. Our high school did not have an FFA group and since the war was on some of the previous activities had to be curtailed. This was partly because many of the teachers and leaders went into the armed forces.

We did have in our community a farm mother, Mary Price (Mrs. Cecil Price) who had been in a Camp Fire Girls group when she grew up in Oelwein. There were a number of girls in the farm families in our community so she organized a Camp Fire Girls unit that met on Saturdays at her home. These girls became good friends, and we had lots of fun earning beads and awards doing outdoor things. Dorothy and I walked the two miles to her home many times. This unit was active during our high school years.

Did your mom cut your hair?

Yes. We wore our hair Dutch-bobbed while we were young. About the time I was in high school permanent waves came into fashion. I had one put in at the beauty parlor. Then Tony Home perms came out, and Mother put those in our hair for years.

What was worn during that time of the month?

I can't tell you whether Kotex was available before I matured or not. We had an elastic belt to which we pinned soft absorbent "rags." These were put through the wash water after everything but the barn clothes were washed. We changed to Kotex just as soon as they became available or as soon as we could afford them, I don't know which.

Did they have comic books?

Yes, and if you have any of them in your attic today, look them over. Some are worth a lot of money now. I don't remember that the older three of us had comic books, but Harry and Andy did. We read extensively out of our limited country school library. Mama had books from her childhood and passed on sources that we read over and over. They bought us Big/Little books, about 5"x5" in. square and very thick for their size. I can't name a single title!

What metals were commonly used?

The defining factor in describing things of my childhood is that plastic was not common. Tires were made of real rubber; toys were made out of tin, pressed cardboard, and an early synthetic called celluloid. Cars were made of tin and steel. Glasses were glass; dishes were china. Shoes were made of leather; furniture was made of wood and cloth.

Celluloid was the first type of plastic, according to my references. Now it is only used for gambler's dice. There are 40 kinds of basic resins used to make over 10,000 kinds of plastic. It's hard to imagine life without plastic when something made of it is within arm's reach anywhere in our homes, cars, or schools.

What were eyeglasses like?

In my memory glasses were similar to those of today. They were made of real glass and had metal frames. In my family, only older members wore glasses. Neither of our parents

had to get glasses until they became far-sighted in their middle age. Many of our children are near-sighted and needed glasses early. Some doctors say that the same process that caused most of our children to grow taller than their parents made their eyes also grow bigger, causing near-sightedness. The only pair of glasses I remember as a child was my Grandma Phillip's. They had metal frames and small lenses. She would be right in style now.

Was money used or a service for a service, or both?

As I remember, money was the tender used for services, but as a child we were not familiar with the status of our finances and some things may have been bartered between neighbors that we were unaware of. I do remember my dad and granddad working in the quarry at Troy Mills for a day to pay their poll tax sometime during the worst of the Depression. In order to vote, you must have enough money to pay the $1 poll tax. In Iowa you could work off your poll tax by giving the county a day's work.

Were there psychiatrists then?

There had to have been as all of the ones I studied in college lived long before I did! The people with mental illness in our area were treated at the Independence Mental Health Hospital in Independence. I'm sure that the local country doctors treated many mental conditions as part of their practice.

My uncle Clarence Popp, my dad's brother-in-law who was a widower, was "shell-shocked" in World War I. He was a farmer and functioned pretty well until about the time I was in high school He was treated at the Mental Health Hospital in Independence several times and later in the Veteran's Hospital at Knoxville, IA. He spent his later years working for various farmers and carpenters so the psychiatrists must have helped him out. My dad was appointed his "guardian" and manager of his farm, so whenever he ran out of cash he would come to visit. He and Daddy were life-long friends.

What fabrics were common?

We wore cotton, woolen, linen, and silk, which are now referred to as "natural fibers." As children our clothes were overwhelmingly made of cotton. It was the cheapest and most durable. The girls wore dresses and skirts and the boys wore shirts and bib overalls to school. It wasn't until Virginia was in school that little girls began to wear slacks. Even

though Katherine Hepburn wore pants in some of her movies, it didn't catch on until in the '50s. Mother sewed our dresses until we were in high school. Then we learned to sew and made some of our own clothes.

Commercial use of rayon was begun in the U.S. around 1910. Some of our Sunday clothes were made of rayon, especially women's dresses. Also, women wore rayon hose for dress occasions. Nylon was developed just before World War II. The first product that I ever had made out of nylon was hose. During the war you couldn't get nylon hose. Their greatest attribute was that they did not run and get holes in them easily. For me, the fabric that made the most change was polyester, which did away with a whole day's ironing.

What hair cuts did boys wear?

Can you believe that the style in men's hair has come back to that of my childhood? Most of the neatly trimmed cuts of today are similar to those of that time. World War II saw the crew cut become popular. If you look around in a crowd today, you'll see men of Leon's age or older still wearing the "flat-tops: of '40s. The longer hair for men came in with the late sixties.

How did you feed and water animals?

Our animals were fed in mangers in the barns, and feed bunks and troughs outdoors. Everything was carried to the feeders by hand. My dad carried bushel baskets of silage and ground corn on his shoulder and I learned to do it, too. A bushel of ground corn was almost too much for me, though. The feed to the hogs and chickens was carried in 5-gallon pails. In the summer the dairy cows were let out into the pasture and just fed ground corn and minerals in the barn.

Our water came from a deep well by way of a tall windmill. The mill pumped the water into a small tank in the well house where we kept the cream cool until the cream hauler collected it and took it to the Coggon Creamery. From the small tank the water ran underground through a pipe to a large covered stock tank next to the barn and silo. In the winter the cows were let out into the yard to drink twice a day. In the summer they were on pasture and could come up to drink whenever they wished. I don't remember the pig chores so

well. I know we carried water to the chicken waterers from the well. We also carried our drinking and cooking water to the house.

Do you remember any remedies like oatmeal paste for chicken pox, honey to soothe a baby?

No, I really don't. My mother was not one to doctor us up with "old fashioned remedies." She put us to bed when we were sick. When we had a sore throat or cough, we were given F & F cough drops, the poorest tasting drops on the market so that we wouldn't eat them like candy. We had salve for scrapes and burns and always had mercurochrome put on cuts. Leon's family was bothered by croup in the children. His family's remedy was to spread lard on a piece of brown paper and dust that with sulphur and pin it to the child's flannel pajamas so that it laid against the chest. Unique, but it seemed to work, and I used it a few times for my own kids.

Sulfa came into use when I was in high school, and it was given to me for tonsillitis until we figured out that I was allergic to it. Penicillin came in soon after and the home remedies began to fade away.

Were there many board games to play?

Checkers was one of our favorite games. Chinese Checkers was another. I don't remember any others from my childhood. A number of board games became popular when my children were young. We played several card games Old Maid and Author's were those I remember. Daddy also taught us to play Pitch with playing cards but I don't remember now. A favorite game we played with the younger boys was "I am thinking of something that is…" and you'd give a color. The person who guessed right would be the next one to be "it." As the boys got older we would give glues using the beginning letter.

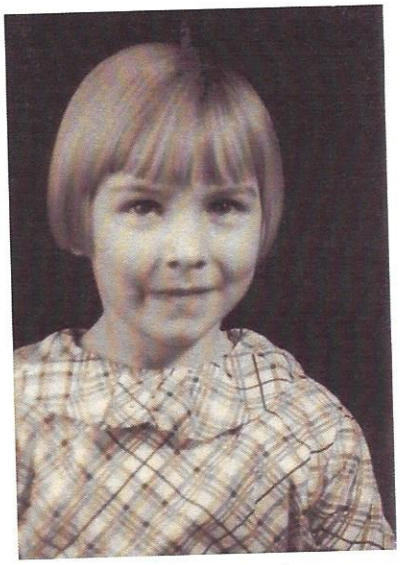
Did you get an allowance?

We weren't given a set allowance. We always had money for the Sunday School collection and whatever we needed for school, especially in high school. Allowances weren't common among farm people as cash change was hard to come by for grown-ups as well as children.

Our other money time was on Saturday nights when we took eggs to town to buy the next week's groceries. We were given enough to buy candy bars for a nickel or an ice cream cone for a dime. At the end of the evening we would meet at the drug store on the corner and Daddy would treat us to sundaes from the soda fountain. Harry was the thrifty one of the family. He would carry his money around, enjoy the sundae that Daddy paid for and came home with money in his pocket.

Photo Gallery

Ruth, Dorothy, & Lloyd



Primary School

Elementary School

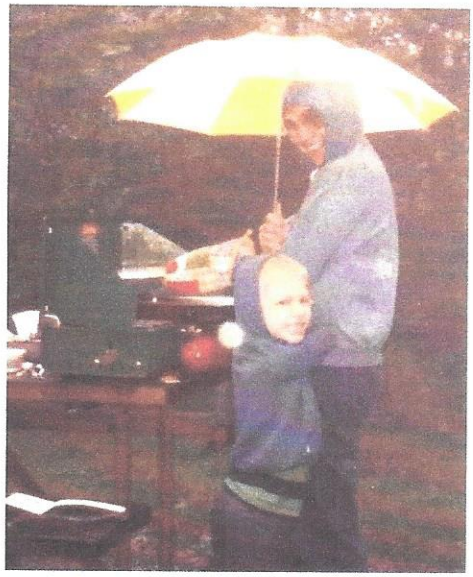
High School Graduation

At Iowa State Teacher's College

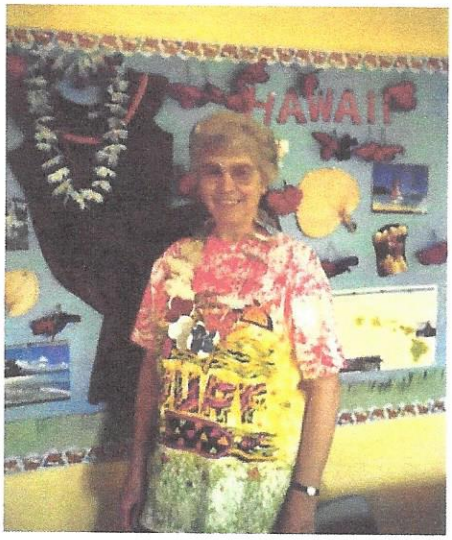
Ruth, David, and pup

Sewing with Dave, Steve, & Virginia

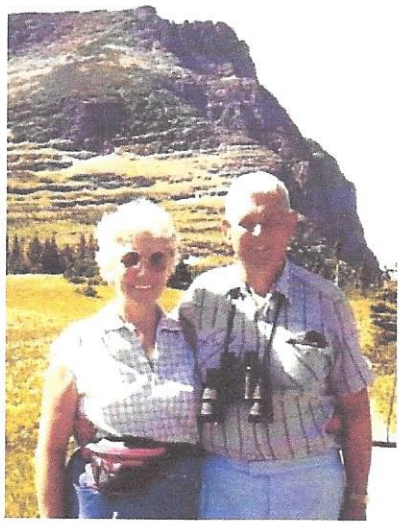
Winthrop Centennial with Virginia



Camping in the rain with grandson Jonathan

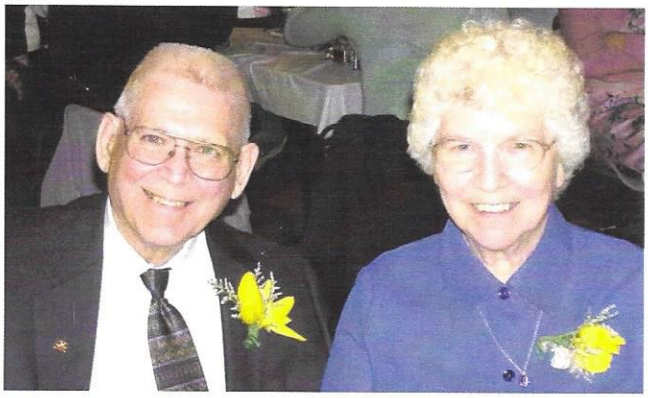


Hawaiian Day at East Buchanan



Logan Pass

Great Grandmother 2007



Leon and Ruth, April, 2006

Dave, Dean, Steve, Carol, Virginia, Ruth, November 2007

Ruth's Family at Leon's Funeral, November 2007 (Last name is Bovenmyer unless indicated)
Back Row Standing: Riley Jacobson, Adam Laug, Karen, Joe, Mark, Dean, Peter, Jonathan, Dan, Chris Biang, Mike Biang, Joy Biang, Tim Biang.
Front Row Standing: Eric Gilson, Beth, Steve, Rebekah, Rachel, Christine Biang, Wendy, Jakob,
Back Row seated: Harrison Laug, Nicki Laug, Michelle Gilson, Carol Gilson, Julie, Virginia, Ruth, Dawn, Jacky Biang, Dave
Front Row Seated: Bob Biang, Travis Gilson, Matthew, Andrew, Tom Biang