

# **TWENTY YEARS ON THE PRAIRIE**

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**The writer tells  
experiences of his life  
on the North Dakota prairies  
from 1921 to 1941.**

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## Chapter 1

### THE BEGINNING

Having been invited and encouraged many a time, by my wife and by my children, I have finally come to the time where I, within myself, am feeling drawn into writing some of my history. Here-to-fore, I have always felt that there was so much going for the present and for the future that reveling in the past was not a wise stewardship of time nor energy. I have now been completely retired for about ten months. Retirement has come step by step, six steps in all. I have appreciated this gradual slowing down. Hence, now, with no binding commitments for the future, I can bind myself as little or as much to the past as I like. So I turn around and look to the past, to the beginning.

It was on March 15 of the year 1921 that a fourteen-pound boy, some records say a twelve-pound boy, was delivered into the family of Henry and Minnie Ten Clay. They called him Ralph Gerald. It was the eleventh time that these parents had to make such a decision. They didn't have books with baby names at that time, and they had about exhausted the list of past-generation

relatives, so they were free to choose without obligations. His name shall be Ralph Gerald. The second name was a bit after an uncle Gerrit, but that was coincidental. The slip of paper handed to the pastor just before the baptism that Sunday afternoon bore the name Ralph Gerald Ten Clay.

Fourteen pounds was a lot of baby! But, think of having fourteen pounds of contentment! Then again, there were also the times of having fourteen pounds of discontentment! But, as over against a five-pound baby, there still was only one more mouth to feed, two more eyes to entertain, two more ears to instruct and the normal 208 bones to give this flesh shape. Having been born to a farmer couple, he gave the promise of becoming a valuable farm hand, as farm workers were called at that time.

There were to be four children born into this family after me. The fourteenth was born dead as he was even larger than I was. The fifteenth child was another boy, bringing to completion a family of eleven sons and four daughters. Thirteen grew to adulthood. One daughter died at the age of eleven years. The greatest number of feet regularly under that huge farm table was twenty four, plus four which belonged to

parents and two which belonged to Grandma Renskers. ( The oldest of the children married before the youngest was born.)

I well remember when the youngest was born. It was on a hot August afternoon that my brother John and I both had "summer flu". We were lying on the floor in the "sitting room", to be away from the family. Through closed doors we heard our father making a telephone call. That was almost unheard of, so we listened. It turned out that he was calling the doctor. We could not understand such action as we didn't think that we were that sick. We listened. A car drove up. After a while we heard a baby cry. That was a surprise, but we soon had that figured out, at least so we thought. The oldest sister, the one who was married, lived in the same town where the doctor lived, about twenty miles from us, so we decided that somehow the sister must have heard about the doctor's going to make a visit to her parental home and had asked the doctor whether she and her baby might ride along to have a brief visit with her parents while he did whatever he would have to do. Well, eventually we learned that the sister had not come along, that the baby which we heard

was not our nephew, but that we had a new little brother. That was August 17, 1929.

I happen to remember too when the slip of paper had to be made and finalized to give to the pastor when this fifteenth child was to be baptized. The first name had been chosen, Eugene, But the second needed a bit more discussion. It was eventually agreed that Luverne satisfied. The paper was given its message and before long we were all in church, on time, to witness the baptism. We younger children sat in the regular family pew, under the watchfulness of our grandma and of the older sisters; our parents were on the front pew with other parents who were having children baptized.

The beginning of my life was experienced in North Dakota because that is where my parents had decided to live when they married on April 20, 1904. This was partially determined by my grandparents. In 1886 my maternal grandparents, Gerrit William Renskers and Hattie Wesselink Renskers, decided to move from Greenleaf, Minnesota, to an area not too far from Strasburg, North Dakota. While enroute, my mother was born in the covered wagon, the first girl to be born in that part of the Dakota Territory. They were yet about

fifty miles from their destination, so my grandmother and baby stayed with a family several days before completing the trip. The date was April 11, 1886.

My father was living in the Strasburg area because his parents, Derk Ten Kley and Marrigjen Gortworst Ten Kley, had moved there from northwest Iowa, Sioux Center, in 1886. However, my father was not born in the Dakota Territory. He was quite a bit older than my mother, about fifteen years. He had the experience of being born on a canal boat in the Netherlands on August 2, 1870. I often say that both of my parents were born "on the go" so no wonder that travel seems to be in our blood. However, I suppose that the boat docked during the birthing experience, even as the covered wagon stopped.

The Strasburg area was populated primarily by German-Russians but there were some of Dutch extraction, from the Netherlands. Eventually more of the Dutch settled farther south and founded two small villages, Westfield and Hull. My maternal grandparents lived near the Westfield settlement but my paternal grandparents remained in the Strasburg area until they again moved out of the state in 1892. My

father returned to the Westfield area after he had gone with his parents, in 1892, to live in Missouri, and then in Sioux Center, Iowa, where they had lived before going to the Dakota Territory in 1886.

Living was quite different in those days. My paternal grandparents lived in a dug-out for some time and then built a wooden shanty. (I have a stone which likely was one of the foundation stones of that shanty.) My maternal grandparents lived in a sod house.

I remember hearing my mother tell how for a time the sod house was the only building owned. One hot afternoon they could see that a severe hail-storm was likely. Such storms could give much suffering. They wanted to protect the cattle, but how? The best they could do was to take the best cow in and to lead the second one half way into the sod house and cover her rump, the hinder part, with a blanket. It was pelted with hail stones but not too badly.

Eventually a larger house was built. That building still occupies the same spot. I remember being in it after my grandparents had left it. My grandfather died in 1925, when I was about four years of age, and then my grandmother came to live with us.



My mother was part of a family having seven boys and two girls. However, one of her brothers died when he was less than four years of age and her one sister was drowned in a tank used for watering the cattle and horses. She was less than two years of age at her death.

My mother, Minnie Renskers, was always a large person. When she was about fourteen years of age she was the size of an adult, and from that time onward she was an over-sized person. She was always very heavy, weighing perhaps 220 pounds. Her name could be shrunk from Willemina to Minnie, but her weight knew no such solution.

My father was part of a family having seven girls and four boys. One of his sisters died in infancy. All of them were born in the Netherlands with the exception of the youngest girl and the youngest boy. My father was the fourth oldest child. He, together with the others of his family, came from the Netherlands when he was fourteen years of age.

When my father's family lived in the Netherlands, Holland, the family name was spelled Ten Kleij. Just eliminating the two dots made the last two letters appear as a "y".

So, the name was spelled Ten Kley. That spelling was used by my father at least until the turn of the century. However, at about that time he began to spell it as we have it today, Ten Clay. Why he began spelling it differently from the traditional, I do not know. As the brothers and sisters of my father continued to live at a great distance, we hardly ever saw the name spelled Ten Kley. As far as I can remember, my brothers and sisters never discussed the spelling. That was just our family name. The uncles and aunts used a different spelling, but, as they were mostly living in Iowa, it did not much concern us. To this day I do not know why my father changed the spelling. My answer has always been "apparently my dad wanted it to look more American". I guess that's what I really believed, so why seek another reason? Never until five years ago did I hear anyone suggest that there might have been another reason. Well, it's too late to ask my father now! Presently I live within twenty miles of cousins who use the Ten Kley spelling, but that difference is no more significant than the color of our hair or the shape of our noses.

Hendrik Ten Clay and Willemina Renskers were married on April 20, 1904,

just nine days after her eighteenth birthday. From then on Hank and Minnie lived on a farm until they left it in 1946. The location was six miles south of Strasburg, one and one-half miles west of Hull and two and one-half miles east of Westfield. It was five miles east from where Minnie had grown up. It was here that I made history and that history was made for me.

The matter of history's being made was clarified to an extent when we enlarged a well on my parents' farm. It is so easy to think that things are as they have been. We talk about erosion by wind, by glacier, by rain, but it seems so unreal. I remember that in enlarging the well, when we dug to about fourteen feet we found a layer with many, many sea shells. This really caught our attention. One of my older brothers explained that years ago this had been a lake and that the sea shells were left from that time, whenever that was. This was convincing to me. The top fourteen feet of ground had not always been there! History was below us!

On this farm of three-quarters of a section I had my beginning. It was the beginning of life as a human being. It was the beginning of survival by nursing at my

mother's breast. It was the beginning of being noticed , in-order or out-of-order. Crying did cause people to take notice. It was here that I began to learn cooperation. I also began to learn self preservation. It was here that I began to learn sharing of responsibility. Here I began to learn communication: by speech, by writing, by signing, by singing, by facial expression, by silence, by chatter. It was here that I began to learn, that I began to teach. Whatever there is as a part of me today, most of it had its beginning on the prairies of North Dakota. Interestingly, of all the properties used to bring about these beginnings for me, only a few remain, a lilac bush and some trees. All of the rest has gone, with the exception of the ground itself. Even the water pond has been drained.

## Chapter 2

### HOME LIFE

My home life was lived in a busy home. With fourteen people coming and going under one roof , one could hardly doubt that there was a lot of activity. My oldest sister, Margaret Theodora, had married and my oldest brother, Gerrit William, was usually working on his own, thus living away from home. Margaret was usually spoken of as Marje or Margie. The second oldest of the family, Gerrit William, was called Will by all in the family, but eventually was called Bill. By some of his friends, it was G.W. He had been named after his maternal grandfather, both names, who, too, was often spoken of as G. W. The third child was Hattie Lucilla, always called Hattie or Hat, and was named after my maternal grandmother, Hattie Renskers. My oldest sister, Margaret, had been named after my paternal grandmother Marrigjen Ten Kleij. Fourth in line was Elsje Willemina. She was called Elsie and had been named after my mother Willemina. Elsie died when eleven years of age, due to complications of appendicitis. The fifth was named Dick Ellard, in honor of my paternal grandfather,

Derk. Joanne Edna was the next in line, but she was called by her second name, Edna. She was named after an uncle. Then came Henry James, named in honor of his father, Hendrik, who was often addressed as Hank, even as was my brother. When my father was addressed as Hank I often felt that this was disrespectful, especially if done by a younger person. It was something like swearing!! John Raymond, next in line, was addressed as John. He, too, was named for uncles, as was my brother Albert Harold, as well as Charles Marion. I was next in line. Then came Ellsworth Milton and Thelmar Stanly. The fourteenth was a large baby who died in the process of being born. He never was named. Eugene Luverne was the last child, being born on August 17, 1929. He was addressed as Eugene for the most part, but Gene was much used also. Hence, our home was well populated and, as a consequence, was filled with action. In addition, my maternal grandmother, Hattie Renskers, lived with us for the most part of my life in the parental home. When I was four years of age, in fact, six days after my 4th birthday, my grandfather died. He had been hospitalized in Aberdeen, South Dakota, because of prostate trouble, cancer

and pneumonia. My grandmother was a frail being, always shaking, but very energetic. In fact, at grandfather's funeral, at the grave site, the pastor prayed for "the widow, tottering at the edge of the grave". She was in no condition to remain alone on the farm. It did not work well for her to be moved to the home of any of her children. However, there had to be a place, so, in view of the fact that she was not likely to live much longer, my parents agreed for her to live with us.

I don't remember much from this moving experience, but I recall that my grandmother was moved to our home in the surrey. This was drawn by a team of horses, Gyp and Dick, which my parents inherited or bought from Grandpa and Grandma. Gyp was an Arabian horse, a light-colored, speckled animal, good runner, a good saddle horse and good on the buggy. She was not a draft horse. Dick was a sorrel gelding, a sort of wicked creature, no draft horse but useful for riding and for buggy service. From 1925 until about 1937 these horses were numbered among our ten horses.

The year 1925 was important not only because my grandmother came to live with us, but also because during that year our house was enlarged. The project was not too

advanced to add another room on the ground floor. This was added specifically to be grandma's room. It was entered from the "sitting room", so was not near the most noise of the family. She brought her own carpet and furniture. Her special chair was a rocker which the Ladies' Aid Society of the Westfield Church had given her in about 1912 in appreciation for her having served as president of the Aid for quite some time. That chair was very soft and attractive. Incidentally, it has a place in my living room today and is still an attractive piece of furniture.

Taking a grandparent to live in such a busy family was not a minor decision, for the grandparent nor for the family. Hence, certain matters were discussed and agreed upon. One was that Grandma would do most or all of the mending, using our sewing machine. In spite of her constant shaking, she was an excellent seamstress and mended scores of overalls and other items. She darned socks a plenty. I remember how I often marveled at how she managed to push that shaking needle just at the right time to get it in the right place. But , she did it! Washing dishes was also part of her work, in cooperation with the children. Mother was



the cook, but was not to wash dishes. Grandma wanted to work, so this was the agreement.

Having to work with the children was the source of some discomfort. We children resented having two mothers. Her disciplining was not always appreciated by us. Generally speaking, she did not push herself ahead, but there were times when we children thought that she was taking too much authority. I remember one time I was complaining about doing the dishes. She said, "Be thankful that you have dishes to wash". Such little sermons were not appreciated. However, the over-all experience of having her live with us was one of blessing. Instead of living just a few years, she lived from 1925 to 1955! She died at 95 years!

Grandma's favorite "swear word" was "Oh, Pshaw". It really was not a swear word at all, just an expression. Some folk say, "Oh dear", some say, "My, My", some say, "Oh, Oh", some say, "Oh, fiddle sticks" and that was one which she used at times also. Her expletives were very mild. I do not recall ever seeing her angry. She was a very dedicated Christian, a woman of prayer

and Bible reading. She attended worship services at the church to within a few months of leaving this world. From her cupboard I treasure two cups and two saucers which were given to her in about 1910. There is no doubt that Grandma Renskers made a real difference, usually for good, in my home life.



1924 family  
My parental family in 1924.  
I am three years, six months,  
seated at Mother's right.  
Eugene not yet born.



My farm home in 1929

Home life had much variety. Some times I marvel at how we all lived through these experiences. Once I was chopping around with the garden hoe and chopped into Albert's head, but he lived through it with no ill effects. One time Ellsworth and I were riding in the luggage box of the Ford roadster when Mother, or someone else, was driving us to church for catechism class on Saturday afternoon. He became angry with me and took the iron jack-handle and hit me on the knee. The pain was something to scream about, but there was no ill effect! One time I thought that it would be neat to

hold a fire cracker in a thread spool, like holding a candle. The fire cracker fit perfectly. I held it out ahead of me, I lit it, I could see exactly what was happening, and it was great. But, when the fire reached the powder, the spool was not strong enough to hold the explosion and half of the wooden spool hit me in the chest, drawing blood. It was bad enough, but it could have taken out an eye!

We were fortunate in having our own swimming pool. It was a good sized body of dammed water, had, primarily, to supply drinking water for the cattle and horses. It was not usually muddy, so it was a good substitute for a bath tub. It was a good swimming hole, and many of the neighbors came over during evenings to enjoy it. Fortunately, part of the water was behind the corn crib, so we needed no dressing house and needed no dressing. We could enjoy nude swimming! And, we did all learn to swim. We were fortunate because the eight youngest children in our family were male. We did not have to share with any females. No one was excluded as there was no one to be excluded. The neighbors all knew that it was a male-only accommodation!

This wonderful summer blessing functioned in winter as a good ice-skating center. All of us learned to skate, and the girls were welcomed also! It was there that many heads nearly split from falls on the ice. But, we all lived through it with no ill results. Also, we sawed out large blocks of ice during the winter and stored them in our ice cave. From that we had ice for ice cream all through the summer. It was Ellsworth and I who had the vision of digging an ice cave. We worked long and hard at the sand-shovels to dig it out. But by the time we had to give up, as we were too small, it was deep enough that the older boys agreed that we should have an ice cave. They joined in and dug it to the suitable depth and then put the roof on. The dreams of childhood did produce desired reality! And, in cutting the ice, no one ever fell into the ice-cold water.

In North Dakota we usually had snow-covered fields during most of the winter. Hence, down-hill sledding was a favorite recreation. I recall one Christmas time when Will was still living at home. Our parents had him make three sleds. (Will was good at wood-work then already. Eventually he became a carpenter and did also erect several church buildings.) One of these sleds was

large enough to seat four or five people. The other two were regular singles. We also enjoyed using these sleds, and others, to ride behind the horse-drawn bob sled. We would attach a ring of some type to the large bob sled, tie a twenty foot rope to the front of the small sled, run this rope through the ring and then hold the rope-end in hand while lying belly-down on the small sled. The result was such as many enjoy when water-skiing behind boats on the lake. In this way we could even run our small sleds out beside the large bob sled. And, we could keep our small sleds out of the track made by the large sleigh. This was good sport, usually experienced on Saturday morning when the older brothers had to go to the straw stack in the field to get straw for bedding the cattle stalls.

Making snow men was not a frequent sport as, usually, when winter came it stayed until spring. Hence, there were not many days when the snow was good for making snow men nor for having snow-ball fights. There was some of this, but not a lot.

Being part of a large family, each person was automatically challenged with being inventive and imaginative. There was usually a coaster wagon, but four children

having to share it was not always satisfying. Hence, we learned to make two-wheel or four-wheel carts, as well as one-wheel, depending on what was available. I recall that at one time I made a four-wheel cart which had colters from a discarded plow functioning as rear wheels. It had a steering wheel and could be steered as I walked behind it. One trouble was that those colters sank into the ground pretty much if the ground was wet.

We played with less-than-a-wheel vehicles too. There were little rims which came from old farm wagon wheels. These were about a foot in diameter, just a rim. We had sticks about three or four feet long, put a twelve-inch cross-piece at the one end of each stick, held the other end and then got the rim started rolling and kept it rolling by pressure behind it, coming from the cross-piece on the three-foot stick. We would run races pushing these rims, or just follow them around the farm yard. Keeping them rolling was not always easy. We also learned how to hang a rim on the cross-piece and then start it rolling just by using the stick. Competition always spurred more practice. It seemed that lack of store-purchased toys resulted in increased inventiveness.

Ellsworth and I at one time wanted a musical instrument other than the organ or piano. So, we invented a gongaphone! It had one or two colters from farm plows, had one disc-blade from a farm disc which had perhaps 18 disc-blades for disking the fields, and then had another metal thing of some sort. All four of these would ring quite nicely when they were bolted onto a frame but did not touch each other. When it was finished we fit it into a cardboard box so that a part of each gong was available for striking. When all was completed we asked our sister Edna to play something on the piano so that we could beat the time. It worked, even though it had only four different tones. (That's more than some drums have!)

Getting spending money was usually a challenge. However, the regular source which we had was catching gophers during the summer time. I remember that I had about four or five traps. These, with a club for the killing, constituted all that was needed, except going out into the pasture. Having sighted a gopher we followed and watched where the hole was. We would set a trap, push the eight-inch pin into the ground to keep the gopher from running off with it,



once he was caught, and then go searching for another gopher and repeat the operation. When all the traps were set we returned to the first. Usually the animals would be caught by a leg. We pulled the pin from the ground and introduced the animal to death by use of the club. Some times we carried as many clubs, or sticks, as we had traps so that we could stick one into the ground near each trap so that we could find it more easily when returning to check it. Some times the gopher was smart enough not to come out and we gave up, seeking better prospects. I always enjoyed gopher-hunting and did quite well at it. Our father usually offered us three cents per gopher and the county offered one cent per animal. One year I earned \$11.00! The greatest challenge was seeing the animal and then using good judgment in knowing just how to fit the trap into the hole.

Thinking about earning money brings me to an experience which my older brother, Charlie, and I had. There was a little pig who did not grow as he should have. Our father told Charlie and me that if we wanted to take care of this pig we could have whatever money he sold for eventually. We separated him and had a special place where he lived. He was always sort of stiff. For a

while he was in a small yard. Then I discovered that a large yard with several stacks of hay in it had both of the gates closed. I was certain that our pig would enjoy that larger yard and I was certain that my father would approve of the move. So, to get the little pig into his new world as soon as possible, I decided that I could as well make the transfer before getting my father's consent. I made the transfer. Then I asked my father for his agreement. There was no agreement! In no uncertain terms he informed me that under no condition was that pig to experience this promotion. Lest he discover what had already taken place, I headed for the hay yard with the greatest speed at my command and moved the pig back to the smaller quarters. Well, he did grow, but not the best. Eventually my father paid each of us an acceptable price, slaughtered the pig and hung his body to be eaten by the chickens.

Another source of earning money was working at harvest time. My parents wanted us children and teenagers to rejoice over the harvest and to celebrate with them. During the harvest time some did do more work. We children carried the afternoon and the morning snacks or " coffee-times" to the

field. We had to milk more cows too. But, there was no pay ordinarily. At harvest the financial payoff was about to be had, only threshing was left, so it was in order to begin celebrating. Hence, the children received some financial remuneration during the harvest season, as well as during the threshing season. This was good psychology on the part of my parents. It gave us added interest. At that time they needed all the help available, so added interest did make a difference. Our sisters, too, were paid for the added work which they did during those seasons. What a great experience it was when the wheat, the chief cash-crop in that area, was sold! Debts were paid, wages were paid, and even the children received recognition! This contributed toward our feeling like parts of the farming enterprise.

I stated that wheat was the chief cash crop. So it was. This was used to pay the larger bills, like for new machinery, a new horse, a cow or an automobile. It went also for new clothing, new furniture, or anything which cost a considerable amount. It was the business of milking which provided the finances to pay for the every-day living expenses. Regular clothing would come under this as well as school expenses and

other common bills. The groceries were usually paid from selling eggs. Milking was an important part of my home life, and I enjoyed it. In fact, when I was about to become a teenager I had decided that I wanted eventually to become a dairyman. The cows were our friends. They helped us to live. They gave us new little calves each year, they gave us milk every day, they gave milk for the hogs, they gave us meat. The milk we separated and sold the cream. That was a steady income. Sitting perched on a one-legged stool was challenging. That was how we sat when we milked. Each of us had his or her own stool. I started milking perhaps when I was six years of age. Seeing the foam rising in the three-gallon pail was rewarding. Holding the pail between one's legs was not always the easiest thing to do. But it was the best. Setting the pail on the floor was a bit dangerous as one little move from a cow's leg could turn it over. The greatest enemy in milking was the summer flies. When they bit man or beast, at times there was quite a reaction. The cow's tail could do quite a sweep and could put one's hat in the gutter. Or it could be rather unkind to the face, and to the eyes especially. One solution was having a little brother hold the

tail as the older one milked. That wasn't being quite fair to the cow as those long tails were given the cows partly for brushing away flies.

Earlier I mentioned carrying the 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. snacks to the field for those working there. Those little excursions were usually enjoyed as we children who brought the "lunch" got to have coffee too, as well as a sandwich or cookie, or both. I remember one of these excursions as being very sad. My father was working on the west side of what was corn field the year before. I had to come from east of the field. Corn fields often had pronounced ridges and six-inch stumps from last year's corn. My father told me very clearly not to walk through the field going east to west as I would have to step over all those six-inch stumps. He said for me to go to the end of the corn field and go west until I was even with where he was working and then wait for him. I could see that it was much shorter to cross the field . Then, too, I was a "big boy", so I concluded that I need not take the precautions. I started across the field and soon discovered that my father had good reason for his warning. But, I was still determined that I need not follow his

instructions. It didn't take long until down I went. The first concern was to save the coffee. The cover had come off so I grabbed it as fast as I could and did save about a third of it. What could I do but continue with what I had rescued and face my father. He didn't say much. We sat down and I told him to take what coffee was left. However, graciously he gave me a bit of it and he took a bit more. That really humbled me!

Some times doing the wrong thing had to be faced immediately but some times it was delayed. With the coffee experience the "music" had to be faced immediately. I recall another experience with my mother where the "music" was delayed. I was called to help her pull weeds from around the rhubarb. She showed me how to pull the weeds and pull the roots at the same time. I discovered that it was much easier just to pull the tops off. The appearance was just the same, so I took the easier route and merely pulled off the tops. I did a good job, as it appeared. The next week my mother easily showed me where I had not pulled out the roots. Delayed action only made for more painful learning.

There were times when painful learning came by another person's doing.

My mother often went by herself with the horse and buggy to attend meetings at the church. One time when she returned home she told Ellsworth and me to take the horse from the buggy and to turn her into the pasture. We asked whether we might first ride the horse, and permission was granted. All went well, but Ellsworth decided that he would sit on the horse ahead of me and would thus be the driver. I judged that to be out of order because I was the older of us two. He persisted so I had to crawl on behind him. We rode a distance and then he decided that the horse should go faster. I was feeling very insecure and asked him to slow the horse. Whether his holding the reins made him feel more secure, or whether he was a better rider, I do not know, but he insisted on going faster. We were riding next to a barbed-wire fence. I could see that we were going to land on top of that fence. I did have time to choose. Would I roll off alone or would I take him with me? I decided on the latter. After all, I had warned him and he could have prevented it, so he had to learn his lesson. My arms were around him and down we went together, right on top of the barbed-wire fence. My shirt was torn and I had a huge scratch under

my arm. I had to be doctored up by mother. How Ellsworth fared I do not remember. If only those "little kids" would learn their places in life!!!!

Meal times are anticipated by most children, I think. At least I enjoyed eating and my size proved it. Until about the age of 13 I was always a "fat boy". I recall that at times my bibbed overall could be buttoned at the hips only by adding a short "extender" between the button and the button-hole. I was a slow runner as I had too much baggage. Being a slow runner produced other results, but that was life! Being the last one chosen for a ball game was expected.

I think backward to our meal times and still wonder how it ever happened that everybody had sufficient to eat. I remember that once in a while my mother would have to say to someone, "easy on the eggs" or "easy on the jelly, there are more who need some". It seems that we did learn to share, and that we learned this early in life. It took good judgment to serve one's self and leave enough for twelve more people. But, the food usually made the rounds and everyone had some of every thing. Seeing the layer cake making the circle had each of us hoping that the largest piece would just happen to be



next when it was his turn to take one. Aware of such rivalry, my mother and sisters learned to be good judges in cake-cutting.

Taking music lessons on the organ was another part of home life. My mother had gotten a good organ when she was young and wanted everyone to have opportunity for taking lessons. When Will was about the age of understanding something about music, he ordered, at a cost of \$18.00 per year, a "music-lessons-by-mail" deal. Those lessons were saved and I think that every one of the children took at least a few lessons from that course. Mother bought the course from Will and ordered the second year course. Many dropped taking lessons, but four did complete the course and came to the level of being able to play the organ or the piano at church. I think the first time I played the organ at church was for a funeral when my sister Edna had to sing a duet with another person. I was about 13 years of age.

Taking music lessons was not easy as we were to practice an hour per day. I remember that I quit but mother did not want to force me. Then one day she said to Ellsworth, "Don't you think that you would like to begin taking music lessons?" I was

standing right there, and I was older, but she didn't even look at me. It was true that I had started and had quit, but did that mean that I had had my chance? This just burned me up, that she invited Ellsworth and not me. I would show her that I was not to be out-done. Ellsworth could begin, but I was not to let him get ahead of me. I asked my mother whether I could start again. She told me that I could , so I did. We were both to use those same "music-lessons-by-mail" and Edna was to supervise us. There were times when Ellsworth and I would be playing outside and then one of us would decide that it was time to do the organ practicing and we would start for the house. The other caught on to what was happening so made a dash to out-run the first and get to the organ first. At least our competition kept both of us going. We completed the course and came to the place where we played the piano and the organ for church services.

I remember a little item of interest about those 96 music lessons, a two-year course. When I went to college I wanted to take lessons on the college pipe organ. I was not that good, but I wanted to have at least some experience on that organ. So, I applied for lessons. A lady interviewed me and

asked how many lessons I had had. I told her, "ninety-six". She was amazed that I had such an exact figure and asked how come I could state such an exact figure. I told her of the two-year "Music-lessons-by-mail" course. After the interview she discussed my application with her husband who was also into music. He was just overcome! He said to her, "If that fellow has had such a meager back-ground and has gotten this far he should be given the opportunity regardless of how good or poor he is". So, I took lessons on the big college organ! What a thrill! And I did play in one student recital. I finished that number with the organ at "sforzando", meaning, "full organ". And then there was the audience's clapping and my bow! What a thrill! Practice, practice, practice! Even though some of it was for spite!

Thinking of the chapel in which was the organ which I played, I recall a childhood "crush". My sisters Edna and Hattie, had a mutual girl friend who visited in our home quite frequently. She was about 16 or 17 years of age and I was 4 or 5 years. She was "my girl". She graciously accepted me as her friend. Once she gave me a valentine. I saved it for many years. I can still visualize it with its expansion section whereby the legs

of the child pictured could be put farther behind. Also, she gave me a little handkerchief with purple marking. That, too, has disappeared, but I had it for a long time. Recently in looking through old picture albums I discovered that I have a picture of her in her nursing uniform. Her name was Janet, the daughter of our pastor and his wife, the Rev. and Mrs. Richard Douwstra. She became a nurse, but died within a year or two after becoming such. Later in visiting with her father he gave me the opportunity of taking a few of his books, and I took Janet's medical dictionary. Her father had a way of saving money and it was he who gave the large gift which brought into reality the chapel at Central College. It was named in his honor, the Douwstra Chapel. Now it is an auditorium, the school having been given another chapel.

Even though we were several brothers of much the same age, we still enjoyed having some of the neighbor children visit us and we enjoyed going to their homes to visit. The Dykema family, living about a mile north of us, had four boys, the youngest two being just older and just younger than I was. During the summer months we exchanged visits. Our mother would telephone their

mother and ask whether our "little boys" might go over to visit their "little boys". If agreed, we would walk over shortly after 1:00 p.m. and they would walk out to meet us when they saw us coming. We would play games together. At the appropriate time their mother would serve a cold drink with cookies or cake or a slice of bread. When it was time to think about doing the milking and other chores, we would leave for home and they would "bring us part way". After a few weeks they would telephone us and ask whether their "little boys" might come to our place. If it fit in, the same procedure would follow. They came to our house, we played, had refreshments, walked them part way home and did our chores.

The Van Heukelom family lived about a mile south of us. Two boys lived there, again, one just older and one just younger than I. With them we followed the same visitation pattern. This one boy had lost his mother and was living with his father and sister. They spent a lot of time across the road with the grandparents. The other boy was living with his uncle and aunt, because of the death of his mother. This grandfather, or uncle, was a typical grandfather, as I saw it. He carried peppermints, always, and he

shared them with us, in addition to the drink and pastries.

I recall a Saturday-afternoon experience with the grandfather. Two of my brothers and I were walking down the road, through the mud, to attend the catechism classes at the church. Along came this moneyed grandfather with his expensive, clean sedan. Being a kind gentleman, he stopped to offer us rides. We accepted. I remember how badly I felt, getting into his beautiful, clean car with our boots thick with mud. Some would surely fall off in his car. But, what could we do? What else could he do? Even so, he did have peppermints to share!

Transportation was a problem in our family. We used horses longer than most families, and that was difficult to reckon with at times. My father was one of the leading farmers of the area. He was one of the first to have a tractor, a big John Deere, model D. This was in 1928. He was also one of the few who owned a threshing machine, getting one in 1929. He did threshing for many of the neighbors, even though it was a son who ran the machine. In fact it was sons who ran the tractor too. He ran the tractor only once, as I recall. He also had one of the

outstanding herds of cattle in the area, Holsteins. He took the lead in many enterprises, but he was one of the last to have an automobile. This, of course, was not to the liking of any of the children, and, I presume, not to his either. However, that's the way it was. Looking backward I think that one of the reasons for this was the size of the family. Where could he get a car to carry such a family? I recall the Ford car salesman visiting at our place and talking to my father. He suggested that all he could do was to purchase two cars. However, this was not acceptable either. Finally, a big Chandler was available. It was big, big! It had folding seats between the front and rear seats. These could be folded out and then one could lay a board across them, reaching from one side of the car to the other. This was bought in 1926. There was no car in the area like it. I recall that it had special little oval-shaped windows where other cars didn't even have windows! It had space! I recall sitting on the lap of one of Edna's girl friends who was coming to our house to visit for Sunday evening supper. She was seated in the third, or rear seat. I sat on her and then there was the improvised board-seat ahead of me, and then the front seat, occupied two-

deep. I think that I was about 5 years of age. Going to church was much better when there was an automobile such as that! (Since that time I have visited many museums but have never found a Chandler automobile. In one I did find a picture.)

Some of the cars during my early childhood were equipped with glass for the upper part of the door, even as is general today, but some had side-curtains. These were made of a fabric which could stand heat and rain and they kept the rain out fairly well. However, one could not see through them. They were less desirable from that stand point. But, they could be rolled up in summer to let in cooler air, so they were more desirable in that way. The early glass windows could not be rolled down. They could be removed with a screw driver!

When I was about twelve years of age I had a very frightening experience when one of those large cars came down the road. I was out catching gophers. Usually I did not seek gophers so close to the road because I was afraid. Federal highway 83 ran along the east side of our farm. Being a federal highway there was traffic from far south and far north. Gypsies frequently traveled this road and they frequently had their



representatives leave their cars on the highway and walk to a house seeking food or money. Also, it was in March of 1932 that the Lindbergh baby was kidnapped. The entire nation was disturbed by this news. I was eleven years of age at that time, so this made an impression on me. The thought of being kidnapped was not a pleasant one. Hence, primarily because of the gypsies, and because of the possibility of kidnappers, I did not spend time near the highway if I did not have to be there.

One day I was hunting gophers near the highway when I saw one of those large cars coming down the road. It did not have glass windows, it did not have regular side curtains, it had gunny sacks hanging in the space between the doors and the roof. These could be pushed aside when one wanted to get out. I noticed that the car was slowing and then the gunny sacks were being pushed aside. This indicated trouble, as I viewed it, so I began walking away from the highway as fast as I could. I did not run. After all, I did not want to appear to be a coward. But then, as I looked backward, the car stopped, gunny sacks were pushed aside, and someone was jumping out. Hence, I began to run. The fellow who had jumped out

crawled over the barbed-wire fence and came my direction. That put me into full gear and I ran as fast as I could, which was not awfully fast because I was a heavy fat- boy at the time! But I had the lead, so he gave up and went back to the big car, pushed the gunny sacks aside and got in. Even to this day I wonder why he came after me. Was he planning to kidnap me? Did he have a question? The answer I shall never know, but it was enough to increase my fear of being near the highway.

At another time I had a related experience. It was evening and I had to bring the small calves in for their evening meal, skimmed milk. The pasture for the calves was bounded on the east by this same highway. I walked to the northeast as the calves were not in view. The only place they could be was way in the northeast corner of the pasture, at the watering tank, and that tank was only about ten steps from the highway. Naturally, time after time we would have to be near that road and I tried to take it in stride too, as the other brothers did. It was not as though there were kidnappers stationed there! When I came over the hill this time I discovered that the calves were at the tank. I proceeded in that direction. As I

walked, I saw a car stop near the tank. There was also a culvert in the road at that place. A man got out of the car and, as good as I could see, he went into that culvert. It was not large, but a man could get into it. Then the car drove away. I was certain that someone had gone into the culvert, so I decided to take no chances on being kidnapped. I called to the calves, they heard my voice and they came to where I was. As I stood there waiting for the calves this car returned from the north, where it had gone before. It stopped right at the culvert, so I could not see whether someone came out of the culvert and got into the car. It all appeared that this is what happened. It appeared that when they discovered that I was not coming to the tank, that they gave up their kidnapping intention. As I later pondered the event I concluded that perhaps the man needed a rest room. Highway 83 not being part of the Interstate Highway system, there were no beautiful rest stops, so, what could the man do but stop where at least there was some cover-up. Why did the car return? There must have been someone in the culvert! Why did the car leave in the first place? At least this gave some added privacy.

I recall another incident experienced at this place. The cattle water tank had to be filled often, perhaps daily. There was a wind mill placed there and this did the work adequately. However, someone had to open the windmill, and someone had to close the windmill when the tank was full. A child could easily do this, so that became a task for the children in the family. The logical procedure was to open the windmill, sit in the grass near by and then close the windmill when the tank was full. That was my duty often. So, dangerous as the place was, according to my thinking, I still had to sit there many times. One time my brother Charlie and I went together. We turned on the windmill and then walked a bit up the hill from the highway and sat there to wait. As we were sitting there a car stopped, a man got out , he carried a water bag and approached the windmill. It looks simple now; it was mystery then. I whispered to Charlie, "See, he's got a bag for our heads." Tom Sawyer was not the only kid who was both brave and scared at times!

Others of the family built "fortifications" too! Once I heard my older brother Albert tell us that he liked to take the dog along to the windmill. If anyone

stopped and then cautiously asked, "Does your dog bite?" then I will say, "Yes". Then, remembering his training , he said, "And that won't be a lie . He does bite when he eats."

We did have gypsies come to the house at times. It seemed that the favorite story was, "there's a lady in the car. She just had a new baby. Could we have some milk and eggs and some other good food for the new mother?" Of course, the car stayed out on the highway, an eighth of a mile from the house, so who could investigate? As a couple of these women kept the house-wife busy, several more, or even some men, were seeking out the hen house from whence they hoped to extract several good frying stock and several more eggs. Their approach was usually quite well planned. The huge pockets which the women had concealed behind their aprons were well stocked at times, such as when the group casually visited the country store.

Visiting the country store was not only interesting to gypsies. It was interesting to all who lived near it or who passed through. Children, teenagers and adults all had interest in the stores. Progress in dress, in utensils, in dry goods, in eating, in learning

and in general contact with the world was often related to the country store and to the village stores. That's where we often got our school supplies, our treats, our groceries and all that was needed from day to day. Going to the village, or "to town" was even more important because there one would find a variety of stores. When we children got our turns to ride with an adult "to town" that was a great experience. For me, the country stores were at Westfield and at Hull. The town, or village, was Strasburg, the same Strasburg which was Lawrence Welk's home town. (His family lived about four miles west of Strasburg and my family lived about six miles south.) Westfield was the Reformed-Church-in-America settlement and Hull was the Christian-Reformed-Church settlement. Both areas were populated primarily by folk of Dutch extraction. Strasburg was primarily a German-Russian settlement, centering around a Roman Catholic Church. There were also some Dutch folk, centering around a Reformed-Church-in-America church. Both groups used their national tongues quite much. The Welk family was Roman Catholic, the Ten Clay family was Reformed-Church-in-America.

I remember going "to town" with my father. It was with a team of horses and a wagon. Groceries and other needed items were purchased, and likely a ten-gallon can of cream, or perhaps two, was brought to the train station to be shipped to a creamery in Minnesota. A crate of eggs likely was brought to the grocery store to pay for the groceries. When we had finished the business we went to Aunt Minnie Int Veldt and her daughter Maggie. Aunt Minnie was a widow. We stopped for a little visit with them, and this resulted in their offering to give us the noon meal, if we had not eaten. We had not; they had. She had two pieces of pie left over, and these were part of our meal. I rather think that our visit there was primarily to give opportunity to be served. But that's the way people lived in those days. Aunt Minnie would have felt insulted had we not stopped.

I remember one time when Edna was to make the trip and do the business. I got to go along. The only experience of that trip which I remember is that before we went home we went into the drug-store and each had a cone of ice cream. But, I was not to tell anyone. There is where I saw for the first time those drug store chairs made of

heavy wire, even heavier than telephone wire. Incidentally, this trip was made with our Ford roadster or perhaps it belonged to Dick.

Flush toilets were not a part of my home life. We had a little building not far from the house and this was called the outhouse. It had a bench with two holes, one a bit smaller than the other, and it had a lower bench with one hole. The latter was specifically for children. There was also a catalogue available, preceding the soft rolls of tissue. In order to have dry seats available, the boys and men were expected to use the barn or to stand behind another building, such as the outhouse, when they only had to do "number 1". Before going to bed the boys were expected to step outside, and, if it was dark, they might stand wherever they chose. The older sisters were expected to use the outhouse. Young kidneys were usually strong enough to hold through the night and until we reached the barn for milking. But, just in case, there was a "vessel" or "pot" in each bedroom.

Meal times were always important. With few exceptions, we all had our meals together. Breakfast was after milking the cows. Dinner was at noon and supper was usually at 6:30 or 7:00 p.m. After we were



all seated at the table my father usually offered a prayer. After we had finished eating my father would read from the Bible and Mother would offer a prayer, this to be followed by prayers from some of the younger children. I recall my first participation in this. One morning my father said, "Charlie and Ralph, you are about old enough to take part, so tonight you can pray after John and Albert finish. All prayers were in Dutch at that time. I had absolutely no idea what the words were nor what they meant. That day I figured out what I would say. However, when Charlie prayed, his did not sound as I had planned mine. I deemed best not to give up what I had planned, but I did modify and accept some of what he said. When we finished everyone just sat there, too embarrassed to know what to do. A new language had been born! It was not English, it was not Dutch, it was not American. What was it? Just a hodge-podge of sounds. I am sure that God didn't even know what I intended. How could He when I didn't even know what I intended to express. After sitting there for a bit my father said, "You boys better ask Mama what the English words are and then pray in English." So we learned, "Thou art great and Thou art good,

Lord we thank thee for our food. Amen." I think it was shortly after this that Mother gave Father an English Bible and this was used until the end of reading at the table. Grandma Renskers offered prayer at times. Most meals were traditional. There was little variety. Breakfast was pancakes during winter, with balkenbrie replacing it from time to time. This was a real treat and a favorite for most of us. There was cooked cereal at times, cold cereal at other times, fried eggs, (or scrambled or cooked), bacon and bread. Actually, there was quite a variety. At noon we had potatoes, meat and vegetables, very good food! There was always skimmed milk to drink.

The evening supper was often fried left-over potatoes, cottage cheese, (called Dutch cheese by us.) pickles and perhaps cold sliced meat. Sunday was special with pies, cakes, canned fruits, cocoa and other specialties.

## Chapter 3

### CHURCH LIFE

Church life was a very important segment of living. How the church life is related to the spiritual life is often quite hazy to many folk and I suppose it was to me also. Sometimes the church gets most of the emphasis and we tend to forget that it is intended to be secondary to the spiritual. It tends to become the primary.

The spiritual emphasis and the church emphasis were given early in life. As was the custom, if the weather was acceptable, the entire family went to church at least once each Sunday. That was the pattern into which I was to fit. Feeding babies was no problem because the feeder was just a few inches removed from the infant mouth, should it become hungry. Women felt free to nurse their babies during the church service, regardless of who might be watching. So, it was there that I drank of the physical and drank of the spiritual. As the Bible was read after every meal at home, drinking the physical and the spiritual was experienced together. When I was old enough to attend regular school I was deemed old enough to attend catechism and

Sunday School. The catechism classes were held on Saturday afternoons in the church and the pastor taught all of the classes. We had to memorize our answers regardless of age. During the week mother, grandmother, older sister, or perhaps even father or brother would work at the lessons with us. We were expected to learn every lesson thoroughly and I am grateful that this was expected.

Sunday School was quite different from what we have in most churches today. There were few individual rooms for classes. Hence, many classes met in various parts of the sanctuary. Today it seems that such conditions would make it impossible to have the attention of the children. However, this was not true. Having eight or ten classes, thus having eight or ten teachers talking at the same time, the end result was a rather loud hum with little notice of individual teacher voices. Concentrating on hearing one's own teacher was not so difficult. Interestingly, specialists in the Sunday School work have been of late admitting that several classes can be taught successfully in a large place. For me, learning did take place.

Attending the regular Sunday worship services was meaningful to me. We usually sat toward the front of the sanctuary. I recall that the rows of theater seats were not fastened to the floor, but stood quite securely because they were in long rows. However, my grandmother had a violent case of palsy and there were times when she shook the entire row of seats. We children were irritated and embarrassed to be experiencing that movement.

Denominational loyalty came to the foreground even when I was young. I remember that at a certain time we received a new pastor and the Hull Christian Reformed Church also received a new pastor. I had never heard the Christian Reformed pastor preach and some of my friends at school had never heard my pastor preach, but, lo and behold, at school we had a violent argument as to which was the better preacher. Neither, of course, could prove the point.

## Chapter 4

### SCHOOL LIFE

School life was for me an important part of life. I took the kindergarten schooling in the first part of the first year and then first grade. My teacher was Cornelius Leih. I liked him and he liked me. I had him off and on during my school days and I always ranked him as my favorite teacher.

One time Mama wanted me to wear a little navy-blue short-pants suit. That was, according to me, good for Sunday wear but not for school. I rebelled. Mama said, "You just wear it and see what your teacher says. He'll say, 'Oh, what a nice suit'." So, Mama won out; I wore the suit. I entered the school room, the teacher looked at me and said, "Oh, what a nice suit". That stunned me. Had Mama told one of the older kids to tell the teacher to say this? But, I knew that to be impossible as they had no opportunity to talk to the teacher before he saw me.

The school was located about one and one-half miles from our farm, if going over the highway. However, we usually had to walk and thus found it convenient to walk across the school section. This was grass, better walking than the graveled road and

shorter. But when the dew lay heavy on the grass it thoroughly soaked our shoes. In North Dakota a certain number of sections, one per township, 640 acres, remained the property of the state and the rent from this went to help fund the schools. The section which we had to cross was one of those sections, so it was never plowed and was good for walking. There never were fences or anything else to obstruct our walking nor to obstruct the horses when an older brother or Papa had to bring us to or get us from the school. My father rented part of this section to supply winter hay for the horses.

The school really was in Christian Reformed territory. There was just one other Reformed Church family attending the school. All the others were Christian Reformed. That sort of put us on the outside in both school and church. At church we had no school friends; at school we had no church friends. Why did not my family attend the Christian Reformed Church if it was a mile closer? I remember asking my mother this question. She said that when they married and settled on that farm that they did discuss the matter. They got the impression that the Reformed Church was more interested in foreign mission work than

the Christian Reformed was. As they were much interested in foreign mission work, they chose as they did. At that time, and for many years after, their observation was correct. Looking backward now, how much was decided by that one decision! Both denominations would have noticed the difference. Many people would have been affected!

The Christian Reformed Church has placed much emphasis on Christian education, on educating children of the church, rather than on reaching out to non-Christians. No denomination can do everything. So, in this case, these two issues became the subjects for choice. This choice made a difference in my schooling. As most of the families in the Hull area were Christian Reformed, and though this was not a heavily populated area, the thought of having a "Christian School" as over against the public school was considered but, had to be abandoned. These people could not foot the bill for having their own school. However, if most people in the area were either Christian-Reformed or Reformed-Church-in-America, perhaps the school board would be cooperative and hire only teachers who were capable of teaching the



bible and would themselves live the Christian life. There was good cooperation. Hence, the Christian Reformed leaders formed a Christian School Board. This board sought out acceptable Christian teachers by advertising in the Christian-Reformed-Church denominational paper and in the Reformed-Church-in-America denominational paper. The approved applications were then given to the public-school board and were approved by it also. This was good reasoning and was completely acceptable in that day. The Christian School Board did arrange for material to be used and also paid the teachers extra for this extra work. The extra work was having a Bible period each morning. There was singing, praying and studying the Bible, perhaps using 20 to 30 minutes. So, the school which I attended through tenth grade was a public school run by Christians and was taught by Christians. This was an ideal situation. The high school in which I had my 11th and 12th grades of study was also a public high school but was taught by Roman Catholic sisters and by approved Roman Catholic men. The same idea. The public school which I taught for the two years immediately following my graduation from twelfth grade was one in the

same district as the school which I attended. Hence, I, too, gave the Christian instruction and was happy in this situation. There was one Roman Catholic family in my school and the parents asked whether it was acceptable for their children to come 15 or 20 minutes after starting time so that their children would not have to hear the Protestant interpretations. This approval was readily granted and all was in good harmony.

The school which I attended was not exactly a typical country school. Ours had two rooms, with the lower five grades being taught in one room, and grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 or 10 in alternate years, being taught in the other. A four-year high school was not to be found close, so, by teaching 9th and 10th alternately, those who wanted high school would have to go far from home only two years instead of three or four. There usually were 18 to 25 children in each room.

Our school also had pit toilets beneath the school. However, eventually these had too much bad odor so they were closed and outside "privies" were erected. Beside the outhouses there was also a barn as some of the children rode horses or had pony carts. Members of my family always walked, except when there was a lot of snow. Then

an older brother or my father would take us to school and again get us from school after 4:00 p.m.

Our school days ran from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00p.m., with an hour off at noon and fifteen-minute recesses at 10:30a.m. and at 2:30p.m. At noon we ate our lunches which we had carried from home, and during the recesses we often had a cookie or two, this having been planned when the dinner pails were packed.

There were traditions. One in our family was to occasionally have the teacher to our house over night, having come with the children and then going back to school with the children the next morning. This was beneficial to the parents and to the teachers. Packing the lunch for the teacher was a bit scary. I recall that we had Mr. Leih to our home one time. I had prevailed upon my mother to have something special. She had gotten store cookies, the round chocolate cookie with a big marshmallow topping! Those were real treats to us! I could hardly wait to see him eat it the next noon. I would eat mine very slowly and enjoy it to the full! What would he do? I watched, and then it happened. I could hardly believe my eyes! He put the whole thing into his mouth at one

time and chewed it down! How could anyone treat such a fancy cookie like that ? Man, he could have enjoyed it so much more!

During the cold months, at times, we would bring a little pail of milk-chocolate along and set this on a flat place of the furnace. By noon this would be pleasantly hot and was distributed among the members of the family. Other families did the same. During the depression there were times when our lunch was just bread and butter, perhaps with jelly or peanut butter. Often there was an apple, grapes were had at times, rarely a banana. Cookies, cake or even fudge appeared once in a while.

I remember helping my mother prepare the lunches for school. One time I was working on Albert's lunch, was doing my best to conserve the butter, putting just enough on to color the bread, when my mother said, "You can put on a little more butter than that." Was I surprised! I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I thought that the goal was to make the butter go as far as possible, putting on only enough that one could see that butter had passed that way. I learned that she did think about nutrition, not

just appearance. Evidently my mother was planning the lunches more that I realized.

One time my mother had made cinnamon rolls for the lunch pails. For some reason I did not get my roll. Whether I did not go to school that day, or whether I ate elsewhere, I do not know. Anyway, that roll was in a container in the pantry and I knew that it was there. I figured that I had a right to that roll. I had that coming. It would not be fair if in tomorrow's lunch I had that roll and the other kids would have another type of goody. I should not have to miss any "goody". So, some time during that evening I took the cinnamon roll out and ate it. After all, it was mine, it had been destined for me. The next morning after breakfast, the lunches having been prepared, my mother asked whether I knew what had happened to that cinnamon roll. I told her that I had eaten it the evening before. "Well," she said, "I had been planning to put that into your dinner pail because I was just one apple short." I said, "That's just what I expected. I didn't think it was fair that I be cheated out of something else because of the cinnamon roll, because that roll really was mine anyway." I came to understand that preparing six school lunches did require planning.

There were different types of parties at school. One was the peanut shower. This was usually had for the teacher's birthday. Ahead of time peanuts would be purchased, using several pennies assessed from each student, and these would be put into several bags. Likely the committee members got the bags, hid them in their desks, and then, about an hour before dismissal time, someone gave the sign and the peanuts were showered over the teacher with all of us shouting "Surprise." Then we all dashed toward where the teacher was and gathered up as many peanuts for ourselves as we could. Perhaps we had other eats, perhaps not.

We usually had Christmas parties, sometimes with a tree, sometimes without. We drew names and exchanged gifts. I almost become nervous now thinking of how the teacher attached wax candles to the tree and lit them! Yet, we never had a fire. They must have respected fire! Home-made ice cream, home-made fudge, cake or cookies, plus pop corn, filled our stomachs.

At the end of the school term there was usually a picnic to which all the family members were invited. This was a big event with the mothers planning a big dinner, assigning certain food to certain families.

There could be insults given because of certain food, or because of certain amounts of food or because of the amounts consumed by certain people, but that was just part of being educated! Games were played, a ball game was had, horse shoes were pitched, races were run and usually a good time was had by all.

Dress codes were not written, but they could still be powerful. Perhaps the most respected for the boys was, "I will never, never, never wear a washed blue denim overall to school!" As a result, some overalls became a bit smelly. We were all very careful to change our clothes as soon as we came home from school, so they not often appeared dirty, but the smell was not so easily dealt with. I don't recall which rules the girls bowed to. Perhaps they enjoyed freedom.

Play Day was an annual day for competitions. All the students and many of the parents from perhaps three or four schools in the district would meet at one school to compete. Most of this was physical. There was chinning, running, shot-put, broad-jump, high-jump and the like. Winners received ribbons, blue for first place, red for second and white for third.

First had five points credit, red had three and white had one. These were all recorded and counted so that at the end of the day the school with the highest number of points was honored. All of this was very boring to me because I was not an athlete. I was heavy and slow. I remember one time when chinning was the competition. A man would lift the child so that he got his hands on a rod and then he was to pull himself up as often as he could. When he could do no more he let go of the rod and dropped to the ground. I had never tried this before, it looked interesting, so I stepped up to the man for him to lift me up to the rod. He lifted me, noticed that I was quite heavy, but gave me time. There I hung. I could not lift myself even once with my chin above the rod. So, I dropped to the ground! Eventually came the day when they had competitions in arithmetic, reading, spelling and the like. That was more interesting! Finally I did add to the total score!

Drawing conclusions is a worthy challenge. All of us engage in it to some extent. To my mind comes the recollection of a time when I drew a conclusion which was poorly based. In my catechism learning and Sunday School life I had learned to



pronounce a certain big word as Phil is tines. Then, in school, in our Bible study, the teacher pronounced the word as Phi lis tines. This confused me. Why did we not all pronounce it the same? I concluded that this must be one of the differences between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church!

My favorite teacher had his favorite types of disciplines and methods. His favorite method for reprimanding was having the student go to the front of the room, stand facing the class and then bending one leg at the knee, thus standing on one leg. It did not take long for the student to fall or to admit defeat. No one wanted to have to stand up front either.

When this teacher saw someone who was just sitting and daydreaming, he would often throw a piece of chalk at the student to get his attention. This was dangerous, but he threw quite a few pieces of chalk. I remember that one time he threw a piece at a student near me. Either the pupil ducked or the throw was not too well aimed, but the end result was that the piece of chalk hit me in the face. It was near the eye but did not damage it. However, it hurt enough for me to begin to cry. So, Mr. Leih came over to

comfort me. He sat in my seat with me to console me. As I sat there I remembered that I was wanting a sheet of drawing paper. I had not asked before as I was not certain that he would give it. I concluded that victory was certain under these circumstances. I asked for the sheet and he very willingly agreed to giving me such. What a psychologist!

My memory produces another experience where my scheming did not work. There were several of us appointed to be the Valentine Party Committee. We had to make plans for the snacks and for the entertainment. As I stated before, the denominational lines did make a difference in friendships. I knew that I would likely not receive a lot of valentines in our exchange. So, while we were having our committee meeting I suggested that because we were a committee it would be nice if each gave a valentine to each other member of the committee. There was silence. No one promoted the idea.

## Chapter 5

### RELATIVES

As a child I did not have much association with relatives. From my father's side there was just one aunt and her husband who lived in the Westfield area. Their children were all older than I was, they were adults. The other uncles and aunts from my father's side lived in distant places such as Sioux County in northwest Iowa. There was one in Montana, one in Minnesota, who later moved to Washington state, and one in Michigan. These relatives came to visit from time to time, but that was not frequent and not of sufficient time to really get to know them. Often those relatives visited as a surprise. The surprise was interesting and sort of thrilling, but it did cause certain pressures at times. Arranging sleeping and meals, and arranging for work, per chance it was during the harvest season, could be a major problem. As a result, there was not always the cordiality that there should have been. Some of these families had children of my age and some did not. As a child, listening to the teenagers proved interesting. They were trying to sound superior to one

another. I guess we all indulged in the comparison game.

I remember hearing adults bragging about their home states. Iowa was better than North Dakota; Dakota was better than Iowa and so it went on. Who could prove what? With all of my knowledge, never having visited any of those distant states, it was easy to come to a conclusion, to an "intelligent" conclusion. My conclusion was, "Those dumb Iowa people! How can they think that Iowa is a better state? Anybody can plainly see that North Dakota is a much better place in which to live!" In my mind it was easily settled, even though there were the foolish who argued about it! (I have to admit that my first visit to Iowa made a change in my thinking!)

One uncle who came with his family had diabetes. He carried his own rye bread! That was something! Somehow I got a little piece of it, and it was solid! How could anybody live on that? Meditating on the subject, I concluded that perhaps he was not too happy about it either. It was just one of the facts which he had to accept. Having to eat it was bad enough, but having to carry his own, realizing that no family was likely to have it on hand, was even more painful.

Such new experiences did make a difference to me.

Then there was the time when two couples, with some of their children, came to pay us a visit. They traveled in two cars and had agreed to travel together. I heard tell of what some of the difficulties were. The first couple eventually noticed that the second couple was not in sight. So, they parked and waited for the second car to catch up. It did not come and it did not come! What was the trouble? Better go back and find out. The first couple turned around and back-tracked. Eventually, meeting them was the second couple, driving along at about 35 miles per hour. They stopped to discuss the situation. The trailing uncle said, "She won't let me go faster than 35." Hence, the leading uncle suggested to his trailing sister-in-law, "why don't you ride with us if you are afraid that your husband is going to have an accident?" The reply was, "No, if he is going to get killed, then I will get killed with him." The issue was settled. It just took longer to make the trip. Devotion has its consequences!

When I think of devotion I think of one of my aunts, a sister of my father, and older than my father. As I stated earlier, my paternal grandparents moved to near

Strasburg, North Dakota, toward the end of the nineteenth century, 1886. Aunt Minnie married during the time the grandparents lived there. In fact, she had two children during that time. My grandparents were not satisfied with Dakota living, so they decided to move to Missouri. They moved, including my father, but Aunt Minnie and Uncle Henry stayed in North Dakota, living near Westfield. After a few months Uncle Henry died, leaving Minnie with two small boys and a pregnancy. Now what was she to do, being all by herself in the strange land? There was not much choice. She took the train where it was available and moved down to her parents in Missouri. That, of course, was increased financial strain for my grandparents.

After a few months there arrived a letter from Westfield. It was written by the store-keeper who knew the Ten Kley family well, and knew Minnie Wester quite well. The letter stated that there was a single man near Westfield and that this man wanted a good wife. He had discussed the matter with the store keeper, and the storekeeper was of the mind that Minnie Wester might be just whom Arnold In't Veldt needed. Upon request, the store keeper wrote to Minnie

telling her that this man would like to marry her, even though never having met her. Down in Missouri Minnie received the letter. That was a shock! What an unheard of development! She discussed the matter with her parents. Having three children, she could not support herself. She could not expect her parents to support the four of them, What was she to do? Finally it was agreed that marriage had the most to offer. If this man was willing to take three children along with the woman, he must be a mighty fine man. At least it would be bread and butter for the family. Also, the recommendation of the store keeper did mean something as he knew both people. They sent a letter back to the store keeper telling that Minnie would accept the proposal. Before long there came a second letter from the store keeper. Arnold was happy with her acceptance. He would meet her and her children at Ipswich, on a certain day, and they would be married. She wrote back that this would be good. He chose the date, let her know when and she began her few preparations.

When Minnie got off the train, here was this strange man with his team of horses and wagon! They found a minister and were married! The trek of ninety miles from

Ipswich to Westfield was begun. They made it and they settled near Westfield. This turned out to be a good marriage. More children were born. After a few years the little girl died, Minnie's third child. One of the In't Veldt children said later that her father mourned as much for the little step daughter as if she had been his own. They were always favorites to my family! It was in their home that my parents were married in 1904. Earlier in my writing I mentioned my father and I as stopping in Strasburg after doing our shopping and of an aunt and her daughter serving us noon lunch, including pie. This was the aunt, Aunt Minnie Wester In't Veldt.

Now I must return to telling about when relatives came from a distance to visit us. Usually it was arranged that all the relatives in the area would get together for a family reunion, in this way giving the young married folk, the older married folk, and the children opportunity to meet these relatives from afar. These gatherings were often in the Linton Park, About 20 miles from my home. Some were afraid of the poison ivy which grew in the park, but, it was the best place available. It had many picnic tables so that's where we gathered. Those usually



were festive occasions. I remember that we kids enjoyed the pot-luck picnic-dinner. In the middle of the afternoon we had "boughten" ice cream. That was a treat usually. I recall one time that we had maple-nut ice cream. It was dry, so dry I could hardly eat it. Imagine ice cream being dry, but it was! It was a chore to eat it, but I even went back for seconds! After all, having free ice cream, at least to me, was not a thing to be passed over, dry or not.

I recall one reunion especially. Uncle Albert and Aunt Nellie and some of their children had come from northwest Iowa. We had a reunion in the Linton Park. One of the children was Marie, my age, about ten, eleven, or twelve. She had brought a fishing pole along and wanted to fish. I had never fished, but she was a nice girl and so I said I would go fishing with her. But, we did not have any worms. I caught some grasshoppers and pierced them with the fish hook. They stayed on and we did catch some fish! We had a lot of fun. What began as a rather cool relationship fanned into a rather warm relationship, so much so that we almost thought of ourselves as "going steady". We did write letters for a couple of years. She had a brownie box camera.

Before long I had one too. We exchanged some pictures.

Linton Park was significant for various reasons. Some place in that park was a bird house which I had made, but I never found it. This was in the WPA days of the depression. Many men who had little or no income worked here improving the park. The leader of the work crew got the idea that having a lot of bird houses scattered about the park would improve it. Hence, a county-wide contest was arranged asking people to make bird houses. There would be prizes but the houses had to remain in the park. I made a little house. Later on I received the message that my bird house did not win a prize, but that the leader of the work crew thought it really should have received a prize so, out of his own money, he gave me a quarter. Perhaps the house is still in the park, but I never located it.

This park had a good sized creek meandering through it, and there was always running water. Along one side was a very steep cliff, straight up in areas. At certain points it was climbable. Hence, climbing the cliff was often a part of the picnic for the kids. The WPA project did build steps, inviting more people to make the climb.

My paternal grandfather died in 1924, when I was about three years old. I do not recall ever seeing him. He died in northwest Iowa and was buried there. My father went to Sioux Center for the funeral. I recall seeing him kiss my mother before he made that trip. This was a memorable experience! Several of my brothers and sisters speak of this as being the first time they saw such! How difficult it was for many of the previous generation, as well as for many of the present generation, to outwardly express love or affection!

From my mother's side of the family there were more who settled in the Westfield area. Therefore I saw them more frequently and remember a few more experiences with them. Uncle Tom was the oldest of my mother's brothers and sisters. They had an Andy who was a bit older than I and a Lena who was a bit younger. We visited there from time to time, usually going there as a family, being transported by horses and buggy. We had the noon meal there and then returned home in time for evening chores. With shame I think of an incident at one noon meal. Uncle Tom read the Scripture and offered a prayer. He had the misfortune of stuttering when he was a bit nervous.

This struck Ellsworth and me. We could not control ourselves. We giggled and giggled!

One time we went to visit my Uncle Ed and Aunt Clara. We liked to visit there. Uncle Ed was a tease and a story teller. Aunt Clara was a pleasant person. When we were there for a meal one time she served banana pie. It was good and several commented on it. Her reply was, "Well, I just happened to have some bananas on hand so I made some pies." We were all amused. Those bananas didn't just happen to be in her cupboard. They were placed there on purpose after having been carefully purchased. After dinner some of the boys went swimming in a little pond in the pasture. I remember one of the cousins said that he had learned to swim when someone just pushed him in and said, "Swim or sink." He swam! I thought, "How mean!"

Visiting Uncle Sam and Aunt Myrna was more difficult as they lived much farther away. After we got our car we could go there, and we did. However, even so, we had to stay over night. To make sufficient sleeping space several chairs were placed beside the bed. It turned out that this was my sleeping area, on chairs beside the bed. I slept and, it seems, slept well. When I

awoke there was no one else in the bedroom. Upon listening it was evident that the others were having breakfast. All I could do was to get dressed and join them. But, as I stirred to get up, I discovered that the chairs were wet, and there was no one else to blame. I was the doer of this situation. Admitting this was one thing, but what was I to do? I couldn't get dressed. I couldn't stay there. So, I crawled, not out of bed, out of chairs, went to the closed door, opened it a crack and called my mother. She solved the problem.

Later this family visited us. Chester was one of the cousins and he wanted to impress us as to how hard his head was. He stood in our dining room, back to the wall, and hammered his head against the wall. My mother told him that if he wanted to hit his head against the wall that he should go to another certain place. She pointed it out to him. He moved, gave his head a powerful thrust and remarked, "Wow. How come this is so hard?" The answer was that this place was the chimney, solid bricks. His demonstration ended!

## Chapter 6

### CHILDHOOD WORK

Work was a part of growing up. Learning to work was as important as learning to eat. Often people in small families are puzzled at how parents in large families ever get all of the work completed. The answer lies in sharing . Not only were added children the reason for added work, they were also the reason for added productivity. Children can produce a lot of energy, and when this energy is harnessed it can be made to produce a lot of result. In our family each child was expected to share in working as well as in eating. One task existing in our family for twenty-five years was diapering the baby. At times there may have been several in diapers, but always, always, always for twenty-five years there was at least one in diapers. Perhaps the task most commonly shared at the earliest time in life was changing a diaper. Mother, or an older sister, would say, "Ralph, get a dry diaper for me to put on ???"whoever the baby was at the time. It was work, it saved steps for someone older. The mother who takes all the steps for changing a diaper is needlessly consuming energy which does not

really have to be expended. The wise mother gives children opportunity to share in expending energy. My mother was wise, and we children learned to work.

Helping set the table for meals gave opportunity for work. Placing about thirty pieces of silverware, better described as tableware, no silver present, was something that had to be done, call it work or play. I helped with that at an early age. Then, the cups had to be set. As they were made of metal of some type, it was not serious if they were dropped once or twice in the process. Setting the plates was different. They could break, so an older child would have to place them. After the meal all of this had to be gathered again and transported to the kitchen for washing. If a greasy spoon dropped on the floor that was not too serious because there were no carpets to protect. The scraps had to be carried outside to the dog. Feeding the dog could be a pleasant task if one enjoyed seeing a hungry dog making himself happy. As I became a bit older I was the one who placed the breakable plates and someone younger placed the knives and forks. I was not always happy for having to wash the dishes, but it was still part of my work in certain stages of my life. I recall

complaining about having to do the dishes and my grandmother said, "Be happy that you have dishes to wash. Some people don't have any." Such sermons were not appreciated! Did complaining about work have to be synonymous with being unthankful? Did it have to be synonymous with sinning? Naturally, I didn't want to sin, but couldn't I not like washing dishes and still not be sinning? Did my conscience have to condemn me? Wasn't complaining just part of being a child, something for parents to hear but to let come in one ear and go out the other? Did my grandma have a right to prick my conscience? Wasn't that for mother and father?

Picking up my toys was not a major work. There were not that many toys to be picked up. Those I had were appreciated and cared for. That was true for everyone in my family. We had a cupboard for our toys, we knew that they belonged there, and that's where they were kept. Incidentally, to prove my statement, let me state that I have a set of blocks which was given me when I was five years of age. Now, at 72 years of age, I still have that set. There are twelve blocks. On the six possible sides there are six pictures when the blocks are laid out beside one



another, four from left to right and three from bottom to top. When you take the four top blocks and turn them over a quarter of turn up, take the middle row and turn this a quarter of turn up and then take the bottom row and do the same, you have a new picture. By turning certain rows in certain sequences one can show six different pictures, each of them composed of twelve smaller sections. I also have a set of dominos, double nines, saved from those younger years.

One of my earlier works was helping my mother feed the chicks. After the eggs had hatched, the chicks and several hens were moved into the grove, or to some other protected area, and there they had to be fed. Hence, we had to carry some grain and some water to them. The amounts were small enough for me to carry. This was an interesting work. Seeing all of those little chicks, and the mother hens as well, rushing to eat what was offered them, was exciting. As I grew older I had complete responsibility. Most of my brothers went through this cycle. With many in the family, as in my family, job changes were frequent. This added to the interest.

In our kitchen we had a coal-burning cook stove, but it could also burn wood, cow chips or anything else that was offered it, within the realm of the combustible. Corn cobs were usually used to start the fire and to add a spurt of heat when a food was not quite finished cooking and yet one did not want to add coal because that would continue to burn too long. Hence, we had to gather corn cobs from the hog-feeding area. At times this was dirty business if there had been a lot of rain. In fact, if we had weighed the cobs we would have found more weight to be in the mud-manure mixture than in the cobs. This mixture could cause a bad smell in the house if one was not fast in feeding this into the stove. Outside the house the smell was evident if there was only a slight wind. However, gathering cobs could be a pleasant task. I enjoyed it at times. If the corn had been shelled by a machine, then the cobs would all be clean and bringing them to the house would be a pleasure. But, for the most part, our hogs were their own shellers so our cobs came from the feeding lot.

Now, one step further for heating material. When times were extremely bad during the depression years, when there was no corn to feed the pigs, and as we did not

live from milking pigs, they could be sold when there was no corn for them. However, we did sell our cream, which had been separated from the milk, and money from this cream is what was used to buy groceries. Hence, we could not just sell the cows and go on living. We had to keep the cows and buy feed. Cows which ate did produce manure! This was as true as the fact that spring follows winter. When there was need of fuel for the kitchen cook stove this need could be met by gathering, "cow chips". We also called them "cow pies". These were usually well-shaped productions about a foot or fifteen inches in diameter, something like a large pizza. When the cows had to have bowel movements they stood still, thus making a well shaped production. After a few days these were well dried and could be picked up with no difficulty. There was a lot of good heat stored in these "pies", and a lot of good meals were cooked over them. In pioneer days many of the settlers gathered "buffalo chips" and used them for cooking and heating. Well, anyway, one of my tasks was gathering "cow chips" and bringing them to the kitchen.

Cattle were important in my younger days. For the most part, we lived from them.

We did a lot milking. We ran the milk through a "separator" and sold the cream which had been separated from the milk. The skimmed milk was fed to the hogs and to the youngest calves. We also drank skimmed milk with our meals. As there were many boys in our family, it made sense to milk many cows. (Milking the cows made many "cents" too!) When one was inducted into the "milk force" there was no turning back, at least in our family. I felt honored when I was first asked to milk a cow, but it was then a responsibility from which I could not withdraw if I preferred not to milk. That was the family work, morning and evening, winter and summer! There would be few vacations! Fortunately for me, I enjoyed milking. In fact, at an early age I decided that I would like to be a dairyman when I "got big". That decision stayed with me until I was in the eighth grade. Until I left home to go to college, I usually had a part in milking two times every day.

What was a cream separator, or milk separator? Well, it was a machine which had what was called a "bowl". This held about fifty discs made of metal. These discs were shaped like a deep cereal or soup bowl, but had no bottoms in them. All fifty were set

inside each other like you would stack cereal bowls. These were all placed into a large container about ten inches high and eight inches in diameter. This container resembled having two kitchen serving-bowls set on top of each other, the top one being upside down. This was hung in a metal chamber and was hung on a hook which could rotate. The hook was connected to a large crank. When someone turned the crank the hook would rotate and the bowl would rotate. The milk was run into the bowl from a tank above the machine. The speed of this bowl caused the milk and cream to be separated because the cream is lighter than skimmed milk. The cream came out of one spout and the skimmed milk came out of another. Somebody had to keep turning the crank about 65 revolutions per minute until all of the milk had gone through. This cream was sold and the creameries made butter from it.

When a farmer sells the cream, as my father did, what is left after separating the cream is called skim milk. Obviously, this is not as rich as the whole milk so is not as attractive a food as the whole milk. That is a sacrifice which the young calves make when growing up on such farms. When calves run with their mothers, as they do on ranches,

they can have all the whole milk they want and they don't need as much other food. But, our calves had to make that sacrifice, even though not by their choosing. In this situation we had to be certain that the young calves were fed this skim milk twice each day. Consequently, a job for which I, as a young boy, had to take my turn, was rounding up the calves and driving them to where they would be given milk. Often they came without being driven by a young boy. But, if they did not come on time, one of us had to go into the pasture, find where they were and drive them home twice per day. I enjoyed that task, except when they were gathered at the water tank. I did not like having to be so close to the highway, per chance a car might stop.

The fear of being kidnapped was a powerful fear in my life. I recall that once, when I was hitch-hiking to the Strasburg high school, a car stopped to give me a ride, and there were four men in the car. I was seventeen years of age at that time, I welcomed rides as this was a seven-mile distance, but this time I was afraid. Getting into a car with four full grown men was taking a chance! I told them that I was not far from home, that I did not need a ride.

They caught on that I was afraid and told me that I need not fear, that a couple of years earlier they had given my older brother rides from time to time when he hitch-hiked back and forth to high school. I did accept, upon hearing that. This fear produced many unpleasant night dreams. I remember dreaming that I was taken into a car, shot through the head several times, but still lived!

The cattle to be milked had to be gotten from the pasture for morning and evening milking, but this was a job for an older person. There was always a bull with the milk cows and there were times when this animal could be vicious. We spoke of him as a "mad bull" when he could not be trusted. It was not often that we had a bull so dangerous as to cause even an adult to fear, but there were times when one had to be very alert. The bull respected an older person more than a seven or eight year old child. Hence, that was not a young boy's work.

Thinking back to childhood days, I am certain that I was never over worked. I was never given jobs which were too dangerous for a boy of my age. That could not be said of all farm boys, but it was true for me.

Perhaps this was true because there were so many of us boys that we did not have to be pressed into service before we were ready. But, I recall that at one time I declared that I was over worked, that I was treated as a slave, that my parents were not fair, that they were expecting more from me than from the other boys. I recall also that my brothers and sisters had the same complaint at various times! It seems that self-pity comes to all at one time or another.

I remember that one Saturday afternoon I felt like I was really being treated as a slave. What was the solution? Just run away and find a better place! That was drastic action, but I was not going to be a slave! I was standing north of our threshing machine where no one could see me from the house or the barn. Which direction should I go? Finally I decided that going northwest was the best. I walked a little distance through the pasture where the young calves were and then I saw in the field ahead our herd of cattle, plus the bull. I had not figured on that. At this fall season of the year the field had been harvested so the dairy cattle had been turned into it to eat what might have been missed in the harvesting process or what might have grown along the fence-



line or elsewhere. There they were, in the exact direction I had planned to go. What was I to do? I pondered, and then decided that life was really not that bad. It was not bad enough to risk an encounter with that big bull! Homeward I turned. No one knew how close the family had come to losing little boy Ralph! And it wasn't even by kidnapping! I venture to state that there probably were as many of such stories in my family as there were brothers and sisters. Who does not feel unappreciated at times? Who does not feel mistreated at times? Who? Perhaps no one. That's part of life for most young and old.

## Chapter 7

### BOUTS WITH SICKNESS

As I think backward over the time when I lived in the parental home, I think of how the relationship with doctors and hospitals was so different from what it was in my first twenty years as a parent. When I was a child the number of visits to a doctor or the number of days any of the family spent in the hospital was very small. It's true that, as we see it now, some who died during the days of my childhood would not have died had there been medical help as now. However, it still amazes me how home remedies were so successful. When I think of what the pioneers, my grandparents and my parents, went through, it is difficult to believe that they lived as long as they did. My father lived to be 90 years of age, my mother to be 89 years, my maternal grandmother to be 95, my maternal grandfather to be 74, my paternal grandmother 87 and my paternal grandfather 87.

Thinking of the first 20 years of my life, the contacts with doctors and with hospitals were very few. Before I was born my sister Elsie died at the age of eleven, in

1919. She had appendicitis and there were complications. She was in the Linton hospital. A younger brother, born when I was nearly six years of age, died in the birth process. This death occurred at home on the farm, but there was a doctor present.

In 1926 my brother Henry had pneumonia. He was hospitalized in Bismarck. One afternoon when someone was going to visit him several of my brothers and I were sitting in the west end of the horse barn. We were feeling very sad, thinking about him. One of us said, "Is he going to die?" I do not recall any answer to the question. He did improve and lived.

When I was in the fourth grade, in 1930, John was thrown from a horse at school. He landed on his shoulder. He went home looking very pale and feeling very uncomfortable. He was taken to the doctor in Linton and it was discovered that his shoulder was broken. This necessitated going to the Bismarck hospital to have it set and cared for. His arm was in a sling for quite some time, but it healed well.

I recall that when I was about 7 or 8 years of age I was having pains in my knees, as well as a few other difficulties. We made a visit to the doctor in Linton. He examined

me and concluded that perhaps I had tuberculosis. He gave me a test. Clearly I remember that he made three little injections on the inside of my wrist. He covered these with a bandage. After a day or two this was to be removed and if there was any reaction it was to be reported. He also gave me a pill to swallow, but I could not get it down. The doctor told the nurse, his wife, to get some jelly and hide the pill in it. She did this. I neatly swallowed all of the jelly, but the pill was still roaming in my mouth. I can't recall whether the pill won or whether the nurse did. Anyway, there was no tuberculosis. It was categorized with other indefinable abnormalities which people have----growing pains. I must have improved!

No doubt there were visits to the doctor in Linton at various times, but the number was small. The above-mentioned constitute what I can remember as being serious bouts with sickness. For a family with so many children this seems quite remarkable.

## Chapter 8

### TEENAGE SCHOOLING

My teenage schooling, as I thought on it when I became thirteen, would not go beyond fourteen years of age. Living in rural North Dakota, transportation to a high school was not easy as there was quite a distance involved for many families. My family was one of those. Hence, the usual pattern was to complete the eight grades of grade school and then call schooling "quits". That was the pattern in my family too. However, my brother Albert, four years ahead of me, did go through high school. My brother Henry did not attend high school but, after being out of school for a time, decided to take correspondence courses and was admitted to college even before Albert. As for me, I did not like school. I said that I hated school. I remember arguing with my favorite teacher, Cornelius Leih, asking him, "Why do we have to study Geography, what good is it for us to know about Germany and those other places?" He didn't convince me. I decided that when I completed the eighth grade I would quit and eventually become a dairy farmer.

The grade schools in North Dakota were under the supervision of a county superintendent. Part of his work was to visit the schools and to ascertain that the state-supplied examinations for seventh and eighth graders were taken and that the pupils stayed in school until completing those examinations, or until they were 16 years of age. Having the state examinations did set a standard for education, and I think the standard was very acceptable. My goal was to complete the eighth grade acceptably, but to go no further.

When I was in the eighth grade I felt that the Lord was calling me to eventually become a Minister, a clergyman. I had given myself to the Lord, I was serious about living for Him, I had accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior. Feeling this call from the Lord was not met with resistance. If the Lord wanted me in that type of work, that was fine with me. I wanted to live for Him and I wanted to serve Him. Accepting this call from the Lord, I knew that grade eight was not the end of schooling. That was all right too. My attitude toward schooling changed. Facing eleven years of schooling did not appear as suffering. It just meant that life would be different, that I would not become a dairy

farmer. That was good, too. However, I did hope that the Lord would not call me to become a foreign missionary.

In the Hull school, which I attended, there was the pattern of offering different subjects alternately so that a student could take both freshman and sophomore schooling. The only strange practice was taking 10th grade English before 9th grade English. But, that worked. Hence, I had my first two years of high school in what was my regular grade school. My favorite teacher had advanced to teaching on high school level and he was my teacher for my first two years of high school. Interestingly, about that same time he was feeling the Lord calling him to become a pastor. It took several years, but eventually he did become a Baptist pastor. (When I was in the military in 1943 I visited with him as a pastor in California.)

High school was not all study. I recall that during the winter months we played Jacks at recess time or during part of the noon lunch hour. In this little game one throws the jacks on a table and then picks them up or moves them in certain ways between bounces of a little rubber ball. One needed to be quick and rhythmic. I did quite

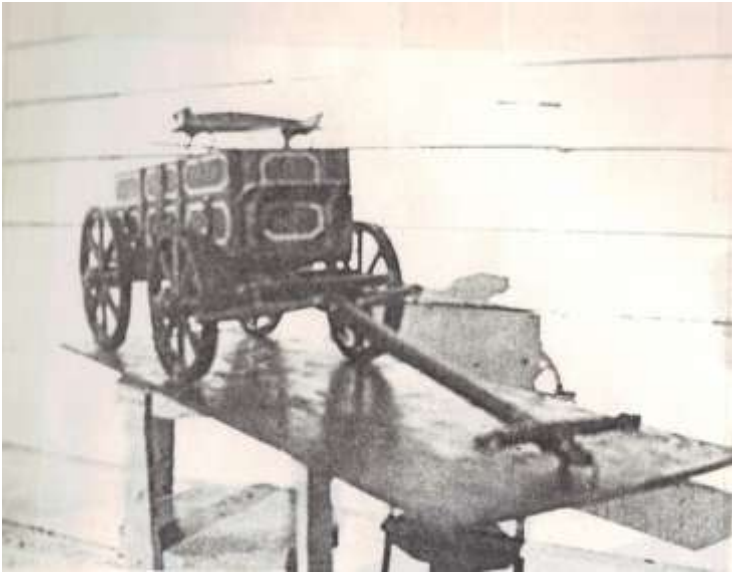
well in this "recreation". In fact, I was one of the champions! A certain girl said to me, "You bounce up and down so smoothly because you got rhythm in your bones".

We had our social life in different ways. We visited in the homes of our friends over night, going from school, and they visited in ours. I remember one occasion when I was a freshman. A sophomore friend Teddy, and I were going to spend the evening and night with another sophomore friend, Merrill. He was boarding with a relative family in Hull. We would sleep the three of us in one bed. This family had a retarded son, nearly full grown, and he observed the way Merrill lived. That evening Merrill decided to smoke a cigarette while we walked to his boarding place. He said to Teddy and me, "When we get home Jakie will smell cigarettes and he will smell my hands to find out whether I have been smoking, so I'm going to wash my hands as soon as we get into the house." This is what he did. In a few moments Jakie did smell cigarettes and took Merrill's hands to smell them. He passed inspection! The issue was dropped. Later on in the evening it dawned on me that if Jakie smelled the cigarettes, and if Merrill had not touched them, then it must



be either Teddy or me who was guilty, according to his thinking. Neither of us had felt the need of defense. Past was past! We had a good time together.

During my sophomore year Mr. Leih gave us some training in woodwork and in other types of creative ventures. He sponsored a contest with prizes. I made a replica of a farm wagon, on a scale of one foot to one inch. Thus, the wagon was one twelfth actual size. I enjoyed the project and did a lot of work on it, with the result that I received the first prize. At age 72, I still have the little wagon. I'm still proud of it. The raw material from which it was made was of quite a variety. I used three-ply plywood, wood from a window-shade roller, wood from wooden thread-spools, wood from fruit boxes, wood from a one-inch board, baling wire, packing-box metal bands, shingle nails, small brads, stays from a discarded corset, thumb tacks, tin from an emptied canning-can, glue and, of course, paint. These, plus hours and hours of work, both at school and at home, when all were related according to plan, resulted in the finished product, a replica of the common farm wagon.



My prize-winning farm wagon.

Scale: one inch to one foot.

1936-1937

There is one exception. As I viewed the tongue, which is the long pole between the two horses who pull the wagon, it seemed that the tongue was too short. Here I broke the scale and made the tongue a bit longer.

It was during this time also that, during the summer, Mr Leih offered to take a group of boys for an over-night camping excursion. None of us had ever participated in such a venture. It would be near the

Missouri River, about twenty miles from home, and we would travel in a stock truck. I was enthusiastic about it and received parental approval. There must have been about twelve or fifteen who went. We had to take our own food and had to prepare it ourselves when it was time to eat. I remember that my mother allowed me to choose which cereal I wanted. It was rice krispies. I would need some evaporated milk to go with it. What was evaporated milk? I learned. We were told that we could not take regular milk as it would sour. I didn't starve!

When we arrived in the chosen area, the first challenge was finding a suitable sleeping place. We drove around a bit and then discovered an old broken-down hay shed. We were excited, and, as we came a bit nearer, we could see that there was some hay or straw on the ground! This would be great! We could lay our blankets on the hay and have real comfort! Sleeping bags had not yet been invented. Then we came closer and looked more carefully! What did we see? We saw what we didn't want to see. The place was alive with snakes! The longer we looked the more we saw! There were regular garden snakes but also large bull snakes and we did not know what else there

might be. It could even be a den of rattle snakes! That was enough. At least we were glad that the snakes made their appearance before we had our blankets spread out over them.

We drove around a bit more and found what seemed to be a suitable place not far from the river. We had our supper. Then, en masse, we were visited by mosquitoes! We didn't have spray for such visitors as there was no such thing, to our knowledge. We could not endure that for a night or more! We loaded up again and started driving. There was a rural school. That looked pretty good, but if we invaded it, we might be arrested and spend the night in jail! That would not be too good either. Our leader knew what to do----find someone to give us permission. We drove about and found that person. Now we could admit ourselves with a key instead of by breaking. The mosquitoes had lost! One by one we chose our spots, laid out our blankets and drifted into slumber land.

After completing my first two years of high school in my home grade-school there was nothing to do but make plans to take the next two terms in the Strasburg High School

where my brother Albert had completed his course four years earlier.

Albert had done his traveling by horse. Gyp, the Arabian which we had gotten from Grandparents Renskers, was a good riding horse and Albert used her. Whether that horse, Gyp, as we called her, had departed from the land of the living, or was too old to function properly, I do not know, but there were no plans for me to ride her. For the time being I would hitch-hike! If I had to walk the entire distance, that would be seven miles. I could walk on the graveled highway, highway number 83, the road on which gypsies and kidnappers traveled, and I could do a mile in fifteen minutes. That was good walking, but I could do it. I decided to give myself an hour and a half. If I had to walk the entire distance, then I would be fifteen minutes late, but that was not too likely. However, one time I did have to walk the entire distance, and I was a bit late. That was too much! I prayed for a bicycle. I thought the Lord might send me one from some place, but, from where, that I did not know. One evening after school I walked out of my way to the train depot and asked whether there was a package for me . There wasn't! God must have something else

in mind. Shortly after, a neighbor came over and said that his daughter needed a ride and that he would allow her to take their family car if I would drive it. He did not want her driving through town. I was delighted. Riding that model A Ford was great!

Then the winter had to be considered. We could not expect to drive during the winter months as the roads would likely not be passable. How I heard of the opening, I do not know, but there was a family with a small child needing care at times. The husband was the lone male teacher at the high school. There were four nuns, who did most of the teaching but Mr. Webber had the gym classes and did some teaching. This teacher and his wife, plus their little girl, lived in town, within walking distance of the school. They were Roman Catholic. They knew that I was Protestant. They were interested in me and I was interested in them. So, we discussed my staying with them from Monday evenings until Friday mornings. It was agreed that I work for my room and board, as baby sitter and as general helper in the house. I was not obligated to pay anything, but if we had some meat or eggs or other edibles which we wanted to give them, that would be fine. This worked out well.

They were satisfied, I was and my parents were. It was quite an interesting experience. I recall that I had to carry water from a neighbor's well and that the water was drawn in a pail attached to a rope. The rope ran over a pulley but it had to be lowered by hand and pulled up by hand. One week-end the four of us drove to Pierre, South Dakota, in their one-seated Model A Ford. I was to care for the little girl part of the time, when they would be doing something else while there. When spring time arrived I drove back and forth with the girl from my neighborhood.

When I was a senior I rode with several other students from the area. As far as I can remember, all went well and we drove even through the coldest of the winter.

Earlier I related that my grade school was a public school but was manned by teachers whom the Christian Education Board selected and recommended to the public school board. Thus, there was always a Christian teacher, and one who was willing to give the Christian education. The Strasburg High School, and grade school as well, was a public school, but was manned completely by Roman Catholic teachers. Just how it was worked out I do not know,

but most of the community was Roman Catholic and thus the school board was Roman Catholic controlled. All worked smoothly. They had their religious instruction but we Protestants did not have to attend such classes. We prayed the Lord's Prayer with them, just ended it sooner than what we were accustomed to. The nuns wore their church garb always.

There was agreement between me and my parents that I could attend college, but the financing would have to be my responsibility. What I could earn at home would be little. Hence, I knew that I would have to seek employment elsewhere to earn money. I had an interest in teaching school. This appeared to be a possibility. The policy for hiring teachers was that they had to be certified by the state. Certification could be gotten by attending "normal school" for a time, by securing a college degree or by passing the state teachers' examination. The latter appealed to me and appeared to be within possible grasp. Each spring-time these examinations were given at the county court house, under the supervision of the county school superintendent. Linton would be the town about 20 miles from home.



How could I prepare to take these examinations? How demanding would they be? What details had to be arranged? At the county office of the school superintendent I learned that there were old copies of these exams available from that office. I got as many samples as I could and studied them. I would have to pass each exam with a grade of at least 75%. It was not to be an average grade but 75% in each subject. I studied these samples and got an idea of what was required. I got some grade school books and reviewed as much as I could. When the day for taking the exam arrived I was as prepared as I knew how to be. I rode with three others who were to take the examinations. The outcome was that I did pass each exam! I was a happy person! I now had a two-year teaching certificate!

The next step was securing a teaching position. I discovered that there was need of a new teacher in a school not far from where I lived, a total of two and one half miles if following the roads or of about one and one half if going as the crow would fly. Either way would not be too much. The building was the newest in the district. The school board member having responsibility for this school lived less than a mile from where I

lived. I made my application to him. However, he informed me that I would have to meet the approval of the Christian School Board also as this was in the Bakker School District and it was this district which required the Christian emphasis. The school which I was hoping for had some Christian-Reformed-Church students, some Reformed-Church-in-America students and some Roman-Catholic-Church students. I applied to this board also. Both boards approved me and I was hired! I rejoiced! I could even live at home and help with some of the work there. My salary was to be \$50.00 per month, for nine months. How great! For doing the Christian instruction I was to receive extra payment. Living at home, and helping with the work, my parents said that they would charge nothing for room and board. I had it about as good as anyone could ask for.

The next problem to be solved was regarding transportation. I could walk across the country, about one and one-half miles, and that would not be bad during good weather. However, having an automobile would be better, I concluded. Consequently, I began auto-shopping. I found a 1934 two-door Chevrolet at a used-car dealer. It

appeared to be in good condition. When I looked at it there was a "neat" radiator-cap ornament on it, That was special. When I came back to get the car that ornament was gone. I confronted the sales person. He defended himself by telling me that I had not bought the car immediately after viewing it and that between the time when I looked at it and the time when I said I would buy it he had given one of his friends permission to take the ornament. Technically, he was correct. I was much disappointed because it was "neat".

I proudly showed my car to my friends. When my friend Teddy looked at it he said , "Is this the car that so-and-so had, the one that had a rod go through the cylinder wall"? My heart sank ! Had I gotten a "lemon"? We opened the hood, he pointed out where the damage should be, and, sure enough, there was evidence that this place had been welded shut. I was deflated! However, if the welding had been done properly, there should be no trouble.

I knew that certain items needed repairing, and this was to be expected. I knew that it was using too much oil and I knew that the steering sector needed replacement, but I could do what needed to

be done. I ordered the repairs from Sears or Montgomery. When these parts arrived I proceeded to "operate". In my family it was expected that any of the boys having a car should be able to overhaul it if needed. So, I proceeded, and I got the work completed. It all worked! However, some of the "spunk" was leaving. That car was not really giving me the satisfaction which I had expected. I was disappointed. But, on the other hand, it was a great vehicle! It had an automatic gadget working the accelerator, the foot-feed. When one pushed the accelerator down it engaged the starter, and then after the car started, the starter button would not function when pushing the accelerator. What a feat! But, the trouble was that it didn't always work the way it was supposed to! I was not certain that I wanted to depend on that car for going to school every day, and especially during the cold winter months. What was I to do? A horse would be much more dependable. Years ago people did trade horses for a car, but who ever traded a car for a horse? That was cultural regression! And, who would buy my car?

My older brother Charlie was looking for a good car, to be his first automobile. He wanted something new, or nearly new. He

heard of a demonstrator owned by the Studebaker dealer in Linton, about twenty miles from our home. This was a 1940 Studebaker Champion. A Champion was a smaller car, a six cylinder, but had much inside space. It was the first car to come out not having a place to use a crank in starting the motor. That was all right if all went well, but if the "self-starter" didn't work, then there was no crank as a back-up, as might be needed in cold weather! That was always the problem--would all these new things work? But, there was something else which would draw admiration. There were no running boards! How would one get into such a car? Well, upon opening the door there was a small running board for stepping, but it just could not be seen from the outside. That was progress! Also, it was built quite low. Was that good for country roads? Would one be dragging the ground? Then again, it had space! That was quite the car! And Charlie wanted it. He had no car to give in trade. That would be strange! Then I got an idea. That 1934 Chevrolet could be traded in. It wouldn't be like trading it for a horse. It wouldn't be saying that it was no good. It would just mean that Charlie had a car

instead of Ralph. Charlie agreed that this working together might benefit both of us.



### My 1934 Chevrolet

We presented the idea to the car salesman, he agreed and the deal was made!

The 1934 Chevrolet being a possession of the past, how would I go back and forth to school? There was one solution, and it was a good one for mild weather,

walk, walk, walk. This I did. But, that could not be the permanent arrangement.

What would be a suitable permanent arrangement? Buying a good car would cut down the amount of money which could be set aside for college expenses. Hence, that would defeat the chief purpose for teaching. Riding a horse seemed to meet the challenge quite well. But, we had no such riding horse. However, perhaps one could be gotten. Perhaps we could ask around and hear of one which was available. There was a good barn at the school, the distance was only two and a half miles, or one and a half if I could ride across the fields, so this appeared to be a likely solution.

We asked around and heard that the man who had been my Sunday School teacher when I was seven or eight years old had a young horse, a riding horse. My father and I went to talk to the farmer. He was one of the leaders in our church and was respected as a fine man. In Sunday School he always appeared to be so friendly and so accommodating. What would he be in doing business? Would he be so agreeable, so friendly, so kind? Surely, being that type of man, he would about give the horse to me! He would just smile and give me a good

deal! This would be an adventure. The farmer told us all about the horse. He was four years old, was properly broke so could be ridden without fear, was a nice looking gelding animal and appeared to be just what I needed. Then he gave the price, \$35.00. That was much less than an automobile. And it, no doubt, was more reliable. My father had always taught us "maturing-business-men" that you don't always just pay what is asked. You must do some thinking too and know that what in "Jewed down" is the first money paid. You pay this by your talking. So, I offered a lesser amount! Now, how Christ-like would this former Sunday School teacher be? He didn't smile. He just looked at me in a friendly way and said, "Ralph, this animal is worth that much to us, you will find him to be a good pony. We don't have to sell him and my price is \$35.00." I believed him and I bought the horse. The former Sunday School teacher had conducted himself as a Christian. He was pleasant, he knew what he wanted, he was firm and he showed me that business can be hard business and yet be Christ-like. Even though I was no longer a child, looking at him now as one adult to another, I could still respect



him and be assured that business can be conducted in a Christ-like manner.

I don't recall where I purchased a saddle for riding, I do not recall how I brought the horse to my home but it must have happened. I named him "Dick". I don't know why I chose that name. Perhaps it had been given to him before I purchased him. I don't know. I do know that he gave me two good years of service. I taught in that school for two terms, each being for nine months duration, and he always served me well.

This pony served me well, but I also remember that in some ways I had to serve him. He had a mind of his own, too. For instance, he was willing to serve me by permitting me to ride him, but I had to serve him by conceding the point that having my dinner bucket in my hand while mounting him was not to be. We argued, but he won. Dick said, "Ralph, when you decide to put your left foot into the stirrup, then I decide to give you just a few seconds to get that right leg over the saddle and into the stirrup. You will discover that when you have your lunch bucket in your right hand that you can not get into the saddle soon enough." I didn't believe him. I tried. He was right. I landed behind the saddle, or even more behind

than that. I needed that right hand to grab the saddle pommel, or horn, as quickly as I could in order to stay with the saddle. I recall one afternoon, after 4:00 p.m., when school-time was ended, I thought that I would continue my argument with Dick. I led him from the barn, placed my dinner bucket in my right hand, took the reins in my left hand, which was lightly placed on the pommel, and then did the act of magic. I put my left foot into the stirrup. Magic was correct! As soon as my foot touched the stirrup he began his count-down of seconds, finished his count-down almost before he began, and off we went! My right leg had not gotten its foot into the stirrup. My landing strip was immediately behind the saddle, and neither foot was in a stirrup. The lunch bucket was still in hand, as were the reins. Now I faced a new debate, having both parties within me. Do I attempt to ride behind the saddle all those two and a half miles, with my legs dangling dangerously near the horse's "tickle-zone", the flanks? (At times horses become extremely jealous in guarding the "no-mans-land" approaching the horse's private regions.) Or, knowing that I can never get into the saddle, do I jump to the side and rear of the pony and hope that

he will not feel obligated to stomp upon me at least once? After all, he must acquaint me with the fact that he has won the argument! I concluded the latter approach, rather, the latter descent, to be the wiser. Hence, I toss my lunch bucket as gently as I can, surrender the reins and propel myself into space as rapidly as I can. I land on terra firma, conclude that there are no broken bones, and rise to repossess my steed. Having won the argument, he is of mind to humiliate me further and begins his jaunt homeward, giving me to understand that we travel separately. I retrieve my lunch box and begin my trek, following him. I dare not walk the short-cut through the fields because, should someone see the riderless steed and begin looking for me, I would not be on the path between the horse and the school.

To admit my defeat in mounting, I took a long spike and drove it into the outside wall of the school barn. I placed it about six feet from the ground. Before mounting I would hang my lunch bucket on this spike, would mount the horse according to his count-down, and then ride by the spike, take the lunch bucket from it, and be on my way. At home there was a small shelf

on the front of the barn and I could set the dinner box on it before mounting.

Riding two and a half miles or one and half did make a difference. I could take the shorter with my horse, but there were a couple of problems. Our neighbor owned land on the north side of the section-line road, he rented the land south of the line-road. During certain seasons he wanted his cattle to graze in the south rented field, so he had set a few yards of fence, thus making a little alley for the cattle to cross from his own land to the rented land. This was fine, as no one ever traveled that line-road because there was no road, just a line. The hills were far too steep. However, I could travel those slopes with my horse! But, if I dismounted, to open the gate and to let myself through, then I would not be able to get back on my horse. At least it would be difficult. If I left the gate open the problem would be solved. But, if open, then the neighbor's cattle would be free to leave either pasture. Hence, a new debate was set within me. Side one argued, "The line-fence area where the road was intended is not his property so he has no right to close it off with a little fence. This is public property and I have a right to use it without having to

open a gate. That's the law." Side two argued, "The letter of the law is on our side. True. But think of the great advantage for the neighbor if his cattle can graze from both fields on the non-existent line-road. What would I do if I were the neighbor? How should I as a Christian view his situation and mine? Should I just surrender my "right" and consider his "need"? Should I just take the longer route, be kind and not cause possible trouble?" The debate raged! I knew what I should do, but I also knew what I wanted to do. Right was right! So, I decided that , at least for this time, I would open the gate and leave it open. Perhaps the neighbor would admit that he had no right to close off this line-road, which road did not exist. This I did.

It so happened that on the day following I was to go to Linton and that is where a lawyer lived who could tell me what were my "rights". I decided to stop at the lawyer's office and relate my situation. This I did. He was very gracious. (He had been a friend of my parents since even before my parents had married. His son courted two of my sisters many years before this time.) He was quiet for a bit and then, in effect said, "You have your rights. You can leave the

gate open. But, what do you think this will do to your relationship as neighbors?" I knew. I had known all along. How could I be so selfish? How could I be so short-sighted? How could I be so stupid as to visit a lawyer with a question to which I knew the answer? I didn't have to answer him. (I never did check on the gate. I never did go that way again. I never did hear any comment on the open gate. Perhaps the neighbor just wondered who could have been so mean and then quietly said, "Lord, I forgive.")

## Chapter 9

### TEENAGE HOME LIFE

Teenage home life was much different back in the 1930's and 1940's from what it is in the 1990's. Some aspects of it were much better and some the opposite. Debate over which was superior gives little benefit as no one can make the change from one to the other. I presume that the logical approach to take is appreciating what we have and doing the best possible with it. We may bemoan what we did not have, or did have, but that cannot be changed. In some areas of life changes can still be accomplished. Consequently, relating some information about my teenage life can, perhaps, lead to some comparisons which might produce benefit. One's attitude is very important.

My teenage years were lived on a farm in North Dakota. As a school teacher I was still a teenager for the most of the time. I became twenty years of age during my second year of teaching, so I taught school only a bit more than two months without the categorization of being a teenager. Living at home as I did while teaching, my home life was not that much different from high-school home life. No doubt, the greatest difference

was having more money during the teaching days.

Much of my teenage life was lived during the great depression of the 1930's. To accentuate, there were also the violent dust storms. It was very dry for several years and so the ground was easily blown from one place to another. A popular casual remark during that era was "Real estate has certainly been changing hands the last week". It was a truth. There were drifts of dirt in the ditches of the roads and there were drifts behind rocks or other obstructions such as there would be from snow storms. Ground did move from one farm to the next. There was an exchange of real estate, even though not recorded in the land office. The dust would sift from underneath the house windows and lay a film over the furniture and floors. Keeping the house "dusted", as my mother would mean, by going over the furniture with a dust-cloth, was quite different from keeping it "dusted" by the wind. Even daylight was replaced by semi-darkness, making it dark enough to have to light a lamp in the middle of the day. Some people were so troubled by what was being experienced that they expected the end of the world to be upon us. But, that too passed.



The depression would have been enough to unsettle living. The dust storms added to the difficulties. Another difficulty, beyond having some of the soil eroded to an other farm, was having the soil produce nothing, or very little, and thus producing a situation of having farm animals but nothing, or very little, to feed them. Having nothing was bad enough, but, having something which required having something more was that much worse. We had cattle, good milking-cattle., but having nothing to feed them caused even greater problems. Some farmers sold what they had, even though prices were poor. It seemed the best solution, and it was for many, but then there would be the problem of getting started with live stock again when the fields did begin to produce. Keeping the live stock, as we did, gave the added problem of buying feed for the animals. Having was not always the answer. Having also meant not-having. Who knew which was better? My parents decided to try to keep the milk cattle, even though they had to purchase the feed to do this. We separated the milk and sold the cream. It was the money from the cream which provided our living. Again, more money would have to be borrowed in order

to buy feed for the cattle. One reason for our keeping the cattle was that we had a very outstanding herd of Holstein dairy cattle. To try to purchase such at a later date would have been very difficult.

I remember that we tried to feed whatever could be used. Russian thistles were a pest to most farmers. They grew when nothing else would grow, and some of them did grow during those years. We tried running them through the ensilage cutter and putting them into the silo. Prepared in this way cattle would eat them, but, they were extremely laxative. Hence, there had to be other feed with the thistles. We fed chopped clover, which was quite dry. The two together made thistle-usage possible. However, I also recall that one needed to be careful not to stand too close behind any one of the cattle when a bowel movement was being accomplished. Perhaps the word "experienced" would be better than "accomplished" because it took little accomplishing. It just came!

Because of the lack of rain, many wells went dry. Many people had to haul water from neighbors, no easy job. Our one well did run low, so we had to deepen it. However, we were fortunate because we had

a large pond produced by damming the creek which ran through our land. This pond rarely dried up. It was accessible to the dairy cattle. Even during the winter we piped it underneath the ground to the barn and had drinking cups for all of the cattle. During extremely cold weather the cattle could stay in their stalls twenty-four hours per day and suffer no discomfort.

As I think about this dammed water I remember how it was "blessed" water. It was dammed because there was a large man-made dam which held it when it came rushing down stream in the spring thawing season or after a heavy summer rain. It was life to our dairy cattle, but it was also refreshment to members of the family who used it as swimming pool. During the dry, dust-bowl days there was little for the men and teenagers to do, as there was no corn to cultivate, no hay to cut and no small grain to harvest. Hence, what was to be done with the extra spare time? Some of the male population found that swimming could be pleasant in our dammed water. So, quite often men and teenage-boys would come to our farm to enjoy swimming, or just milling around in the water. No swimming suits were required because, as I stated earlier,

part of the pond was located behind the corn crib. This served as a sight-barrier between the water and the house.

Because of excess time, many neighborhood soft-ball teams were organized. These were comprised of entire families which met in the corner of some one's pasture and spent the evening playing ball or visiting. Eventually one neighborhood played against another neighborhood for a bit of variety. However, the thrust behind it all was having something of interest to do. It reminded one of the quilting bees and husking bees which the pioneers had.

During winter time there were ice-skating parties from time to time. These, of course, drew from many square miles. Usually those present were teenagers and older singles. It gave dating opportunities as well as recreation opportunities. Refreshments would be served in the house or in the hay mow.

School parties were a part of life when I was a teenager, as well as when I was a school teacher.



The school teacher  
1939-1941

Often there was a program given by the school children, perhaps a Christmas program or some other, and then the parents and small children would go home while the teenagers and older singles remained for a party. Occasionally the social time was a pie social or a box social. The girls prepared pies, or boxes of goodies, and the males present would buy them. This was by auction. At times the bids would go very high, per chance a lover was set on getting his girl friend's pie, or box, and someone else caught on who was involved. The lover could hardly permit someone else to out-bid him. It was not only declared lovers who had these experiences, but also secret admirers. Secret admirers would sometimes consult younger students to learn from them what their older sister's pie or box looked like. When all had been auctioned off, the males had to come forward, pay for the pies or boxes, claim the item and discover who was the female coming with the box or pie. Rarely the lady absolutely despised the male and would not identify herself. In that case, he ate alone, or invited one of his male friends to join him. This was rare. Having attended to all of the details, the couple, or the two couples, if the boxes had been

prepared by two females as a joint project, would find a corner of the room and enjoy their refreshments together. Or, if the weather was not too cold, the two or four, would take refuge in an automobile. That was more private and more desirable.

I recall one such party in the school in which I was teaching. It was a pie social and there were two ladies who prepared a pie. Hence, there would have to be two males purchasing it. Having four made for less intimate social life but also made for less pie, a fourth instead of a half. The pie which another fellow and I purchased had been contributed by a single school teacher and her friend. We ate out in the car and had a pleasant time. Having finished our eating, we went back into the school house for the party which followed. A couple of weeks later I was talking with one of the girls and she asked me whether I had gotten sick that night. I informed her that I had not become ill. "Oh", she said, "I'm glad you didn't. The other three of us did. Afterward I thought back and realized that I had become sick to my stomach later that night. I had not linked my stomach trouble to the pie, so had just forgotten about it. But, when she mentioned it the two did match. Ill-feeling stomachs

were not the normal consequences of such parties. Usually they were pleasant experiences with pleasant memories.

When I was a teenager our most common recreation was roller skating. Our congregation had built a new church structure and had kept the old building for a roller skating rink. It was a bit smaller than it would have been, had it been built for skating, but it was very acceptable. It was also used for basket ball and social events. The young folk of our congregation had catechism classes on Wednesday evening. After class most of us went skating, including the pastor. Outsiders were welcome to attend and this added to the interest. Anyone having the smell of alcohol was not permitted to join the group. Hence all was very orderly and well supervised. The church owned the skates, the sound system and the records. An older man tended the music system. We young people took turns providing the cold drink and cookies. These were contributed and then sold, with the money going into the treasury. There was an admission fee charged each skater, with this also going into the treasury. Skate repairs, phonograph records, new skates and the like were purchased from this treasury. I



enjoyed skating very much, especially when the music had the correct beat and tempo and when the partner had a good sense of "rhythm in her bones".

Our Parish Hall was also used for amateur contests. An organization, perhaps the church Girls' Society, or the young married women, or another group arranged for the contest. This was in the days of the Major Bow's Amateur Hour, coming over the Yankton, South Dakota, radio. People from quite an area attended and also competed. Prizes were given and refreshments were sold.

Plays were given here occasionally. This depended upon how gifted the pastor or pastor's wife was in the field of dramatics. I remember one play especially. It was called, "The Old Fashioned Mother". My sister Hattie played the part of the mother and did a good job. Admission was charged and refreshments were sold. Again, such events were sponsored by a church organization.

When I was ordained to the gospel ministry on July 7, 1948, the reception given in my honor was held in the Parish Hall. It was much used and served a good purpose.

Thinking of this building, and going back a bit further, before it was set on a

permanent foundation, I recall that it stood just south of where it had stood when permanent. It was set on cement blocks so was not as solid as when on the permanent foundation. When someone walked with a heavy step the building would vibrate. At that time our pastor was the Rev. Mr. Matt Duven. He had a heavy step! My parents' family usually sat toward the front of the sanctuary, and when Rev. Duven entered from the rear we did not have to turn around to see who was coming. The entire building shook! His coming in with that amount of distinction made an impression on me. I could recognize his walk with no difficulty. Interestingly, about thirty years later, when I was pastor of the Reformed Church in Hamilton, Michigan, I was sitting near the front of the Trinity Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan, waiting for the Classis Meeting to begin. As I sat there, near the front of the building, I heard heavy steps and felt a slight tremor of the building. Immediately I said to myself, "That sounds and feels just like Rev. Duven is coming." I did not know whether he was still living, and, if he was, where he lived. I was immediately certain and could not wait for him to come close. I turned around and there

he was, coming down the aisle with the same heavy step which he had years before. After thirty years I still recognized his walk! He was retired at that time, being about 83 years of age. He still had a strong voice and was preaching frequently. He lived to be 99 years of age. I do not know whether his step ever became lighter. I think not.

Belated pondering brings to mind another somewhat similar experience. It was while I was in grade school that a certain fellow was courting my sister Hattie. He was an interesting person and did interesting things. At times it seemed that he was more courting the family than the sister. One time he visited her and had with him some fudge which he had made. He brought sufficient that my sister could, and did, share with our entire family. It was delicious! I had never tasted anything like it! Of course, I had not had a lot of experience in the tasting of many varieties. We usually had much the same, even with making fudge. What my mother made was good, but I knew that this was not of her making. I did not ask anyone what the flavor was, but I enjoyed it and I remembered the taste. Later on I was interested in knowing the flavor but no one could tell me. Many years came and went.

How many years later I do not know, but at a certain celebration I was served some delicacies, including home-made fudge. Immediately upon tasting this morsel I recognized it. This is what the sister's boyfriend had given us! This was it without a doubt! I knew it for certain. Even then I did not know what the flavor was. Having the answer actually in my mouth, at last the mystery would be solved. I asked someone what the flavor was. It was maple! I knew what I had eaten.

I stated that at times it appeared that the suitor did more courting of the family than of the sister. An example: one mid afternoon he arrived and with him an uncommon little animal. We did not know what it was, but he did. It was a ferret! According to the dictionary a ferret is "a domesticated, red-eyed albino variety of the polecat, used in Europe for driving rabbits and rats from their burrows." They can also be used to drive gophers from their holes. We did have gophers so he demonstrated the skill by sending the little ferret into a gopher hole. He was slow in coming out, almost leading to the conclusion that he was lost. But, finally he came, the sleek, weasel-like little friend! It is from this animal's name

that we have the usage of a phrase such as, "we ferreted out the truth; brought it to light".

Another time when the family was well courted was an afternoon when it was raining quite much and we children would be soaked if we walked home from school. The youthful suitor was generous in offering that he would get us with his beautiful new car. It was agreed. He drove to the school, we had a dry ride home and, in a car such as most of us had never seen! I think it was called a Hudson-Terraplane. It was really special. And then, what would the kids at school say when we told them that the fancy car we rode in last night belonged to our sister's boy friend! Which sister was being courted at this time I do not recall.

There was also the time when he came with his motorcycle, and it had a side-car! Was it fun to ride in that novelty! He was a fellow with many interests. One time he had a pistol with him and took some of my brothers out away from the house to have a competition. My brothers had never held such a thing, say nothing about knowing how to use it. Out-doing them was no great feat! He was an interesting person! Never did become my brother-in-law!

Teenage living on a farm could be very boring, depending upon circumstances and attitudes. I really do not remember myself being bored. Of course, having so many people in the family did make a difference. We could hardly be alone. And yet, as I think backward, it amazes me how much time I did spend by myself. Working in the field was usually by one's self, except for harvesting, threshing and silo filling. Silo filling was one of my favorite jobs. Often I got to feed the bundles of corn stalks into the ensilage cutter. This was necessary because our cutter could not swallow an entire bundle of stalks. Hence, there had to be a table next to the chute and the bundles had to be pitched onto that table. The feeder had to cut the twine, put half of the bundle into the cutter and the other half at the appropriate time. The loud hum of the cutter was what I enjoyed. This large blade had to be running a good speed because at times it would have to force the chopped corn upward to about twenty-five feet in order to get it into the top of the silo. Then it could fall down again into the silo. If the hum changed in a certain way I knew that I was feeding too much fodder and would choke it if I didn't immediately feed less. When I

went away to college I came the nearest to being home-sick when I would hear a hum resembling that hum of the ensilage cutter. Chopping and putting the total corn stalks into the silo was a type of harvesting. Another type was going through the field of standing corn and picking from it the individual ears, throwing them into a wagon. This was a tedious task to begin with, but, having to do much of it after the weather had turned cold made it even quite a painful task at times. However, I never did a lot of this as the corn-picking season usually began after school had opened. For those who did the picking, the coming of the corn-picking machine was a welcomed blessing. First it was horse-drawn, even as the corn binder which cut the stalks and tied them into bundles had been. Soon the tractors took over, eliminating the horses.

Harvesting the small grain such as wheat, oats, barley and rye, was done usually with either the binder or the header. Oats and barley tended to shell out of the head if they became too dry. Hence, cutting them with the binder a bit earlier was better. After the binder had bound the stalks into bundles they had to be hand-shocked. Shocking was placing eight to fourteen bundles together

with the heads up so as to shed the rain. This grouping of eight to fourteen bundles was called a shock. After the oats was thoroughly dry it was gathered onto a wagon, rather a hay-wagon or hay-rack, and was either stacked or run through the threshing machine.

Wheat does not shell out of the head as easily so it can stay in the field until the whole field is completely dry. Also, usually the wheat is of very uniform height so why cut low in order to make bundles? Why not cut very high and just clip off the heads? That made sense, so someone invented the header. It just clips off the heads. These heads fall onto a revolving canvas behind the cutting bar and then are elevated up on to a wagon. This wagon has a special large box called a "header-box" In this it is carried to a chosen place and stacked. At a later time the threshing machine is brought here, set between two stacks and the wheat kernels are threshed out. Headers were used primarily in the Dakotas and Kansas where the farmers have large, level fields. Using headers eliminated having to deal with two or three feet of straw. Headers were originally pulled, rather pushed, by horses. Eventually tractors were used, but only if the farmer



knew how to engineer cables from the header to the tractor which was pulling the wagon along side of the wheat which was being cut. One could not drive the tractor ahead of the header as that would destroy the unharvested wheat. My older brothers figured out how to do this. We were richly blessed. In fact, I do not remember any other farmer who used the tractor beside, and ahead of the header. My brother Dick must be credited for doing some rather outstanding feats in arranging "big-farming".

Dick made a large drill, small-grain seeder, from two small drills. This one was not twice the size of the ordinary drill, but was much larger, and it was tractor drawn. He made a very wide disc, thus saving a lot of tractor-miles. Large plows were available.

My brother John, younger than Dick, also did some special work in improving methods for doing some of the farm work. He built a row-cropper tractor which was set in front of three horse-drawn cultivators. This cultivated four rows of corn at a time. It required four people to man the cultivators and tractor, but it eliminated eight horses. In our family people were very available. At times they were more available than horses.

I recall a time when I was riding one of the three cultivators. There had been rain and some spots in the field were a bit too wet and some spots were questionable. We were going along normally. I was singing to myself. The song was, "Fill me now, fill me now, Jesus come and fill me now". Just then we were crossing a rather wet spot of the field, the tractor was slowing a bit, and suddenly I heard myself singing, "Pull me now, pull me now...".

## Chapter 10

### SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

As I ponder the past in regard to my spirituality, I recognize that there was a continuity. There was this thread which was present all along, some times more evident, some times less evident, but present. I was fortunate in being born into a Christian family, thus providing a solid base from which this thread could be launched. I learned much as pure rote, but the knowledge was stored into my mind and later came to have meaning. It is with gratitude that I think about having had to memorize from the catechism before I knew what it meant. I remember with gratitude what my parents did, what my grandmother did, what older brothers and sisters did, what I was encouraged to do by myself and then what the teachers did in going over the lessons in the classes which met at the church, usually on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. I also remember with gratitude what was taught by the Christian teachers in public school. All of this was prelude to what was to follow. This prelude became prelude to what followed it. All of my living has been prelude to what followed. I still live in the

prelude. There is still preparation for what is to follow. When my life ends, the prelude ends. Until that time, nothing is completed "goal". It is a segment of "goal". The goal all along is praising the Lord. Each segment of "goal" should praise the Lord and be a stepping stone to praising the Lord more. All along I have been "pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Nothing is final here until the last breath has been breathed. That alone is final.

One of my earliest recollections attached to things spiritual relates to a calm after a violent wind-and-rain storm when I was a child. The wind had blown powerfully, the rain had fallen torrentially, and then all was quiet. My mother and I left the house and walked east toward the driveway. I was walking beside her, a hand in her hand. There was not a breath of wind, not a drop of rain. It was complete peace, almost to the extent of being vacuum. I felt the Lord's presence, and then I said to my mother, "this must have been how it was when Jesus stopped the storm and stopped the waves on the Sea of Galilee." She smiled and replied that it could have been. I can

still visualize our standing near the clothes line and speaking this conversation.

Spiritual growth usually is slow, and I am sure that mine was. However, I remember one giant leap that I experienced. It was part of my responsibility at that time to wash the cream separator each morning before going to school. This was done in the milk house in the barn. I did not like the job, and I presume that no one did. One morning I delayed going and told my mother that I didn't understand why I had to do "woman's work", and that I wasn't going to do it any more. This must have been a Saturday morning as we had time to experience what we did. She looked at me with great disappointment. Then her tears began to flow. She said something to the effect that she could not understand how I could say such a thing and act as I was doing. Then she said, "All right. If that's the way you feel about it then don't do it and I will have to do it myself." After a bit she said, "All right , you don't have to. But just sit in that chair and do some thinking about it". I sat in the chair as she had commanded. Her tears really got through to me. I began to realized what a fool I was, how selfish I was, how mean I was, how thoughtless I was, how

inappreciative I was, how little I understood of her work-load. Then my tears began to flow. Her's continued as she worked in the kitchen. I repented. Could I ever admit that I was wrong? That took humility. Could I be that humble? Was I really that sorry? I was! The tears gushed out, and her's continued. I knew that I had to do it. Pride or no pride, I was wrong and I would have to confess it. I had never done anything like that before. Suddenly I got up from my chair, walked to her and told her that I was sorry. I said, "Mama, I'm sorry that I said what I did. I was wrong. Will you forgive me? Will you let me wash the separator again?" She agreed. I took the hot water and went to wash the separator. I never complained about it again. I never forgot the experience. It was one of the high points in my life. I still shed tears when I recite the experience to myself.

When did I become a Christian? That is a question which many people ask themselves, especially those who have grown up in a Christian family. As I scan my life I come up with no definite answer. It was during the first thirteen years of my life. That is about as specific as I can be. I know that I was taken to church services from the

time of being a baby. How soon hearing the pastor's sermons registered with me I do not know. Sunday school attendance began at an early age, Catechism classes began at first year in day- school. Reading the Bible at meal times was carried on by my father from the very beginning of my life. Learning Bible knowledge was a part of grade schooling. All of this background played a part in my relationship with the Lord, but how much from each one, or at what age for each one, that I cannot tell. At which age I understood what had to be done in order to become a Christian, I do not know. I do remember that my greatest consideration regarding receiving Jesus as my Savior was done in the Sunday worship services. No doubt this happened at those times because the pastor explained the way of salvation and then confronted the congregation with the challenge of deciding. I know that I faced this issue very clearly and that I really did want to be sure that I had received Jesus. The pastor made it clear to me that I had to repent of my sin, believe that Jesus was God, believe that He took the punishment for my sin when He died on the cross, and that I had to ask Him to forgive my sin and to save me, that I had to accept Him as my Savior. I

recall that I prayed such prayers of surrender, and was serious about them. Then, after a few weeks I was confronted with the same question, "Have you received Jesus as your savior?" Had I or had I not? How could I know? Had my sin really been forgiven? Of one matter I was completely certain, namely that I loved Jesus and that I wanted to belong to him. I knew that He loved me and that I loved Him. I do not think that fear of hell was driving me. I felt a sense of love. I wanted to belong to Jesus. Where was I in God's sight? Was I in His family or not? So, to be certain, I prayed the prayer of surrender and acceptance again. I remember that this happened over and over, and usually in a church service. Perhaps if I had prayed such a prayer aloud that I would have felt it to be more effective. I do not know. (Many years later one of my sons told me that he went through the same period of uncertainty.) The time did arrive when I was certain that I was a child of God.

Being a child of God, having been born again, I was happy. I was assured that my sins had been forgiven. I was not ashamed of the fact that I was trusting in Jesus. I was glad for others to know what had happened. Having observed that in our



church people "made confession of faith" or "joined church" when they believed, I decided that it was in order for me to do this too, and I wanted to do it. However, I had not observed this being done recently in our congregation, and I had never observed anyone doing this at the age of fourteen. Was I too young for this? After much pondering I concluded that I meant it, that I was not too young and that I was not afraid of doing so even if I had to be the only one. So, how was I to accomplish what I planned?

I concluded that the best starting place was in telling my mother what I had in mind and in asking whether this would be all right. When could I talk with her when no brothers or sisters would be present? Early in the morning seemed the best possibility. My father and mother were the first of the family to leave their beds, get the fire going and make coffee. As soon as appropriate, either mother or father would go to the bottom of the upstairs steps and call each of the children by name. When all had answered, the first step had been taken. That did not mean that eager feet would be hitting the floor in rapid succession. It only meant that step one had been taken. After a time the same calling of names took place. When all

had responded the calling ceased. Some times this went on longer than anybody cared to admit. I decided that if I dashed down stairs on the first call that likely I could avoid having others present when I asked my mother. That I did and I made it! My mother was standing by the kitchen stove. I told her that I wanted to "make confession of faith". She said that she was glad that I had accepted Jesus as Savior. When did I want to "join church"? "At the next Consistory meeting", I told her. She remarked that I was only fourteen. Was I certain that I wanted to do it while so young? I assured her that I had thought of all these facts and that I did really want to become a church member. She agreed that if I really wanted to take this step at this age that it would be all right with her. I was happy. Now I had to work out the details. Could it be arranged?

The time of year was mid-winter, 1936. During this season there was no Sunday morning church service, only the afternoon service, but in place of the Sunday morning service there was a Thursday afternoon prayer-preaching service. The next Consistory meeting would be after the next Thursday afternoon prayer-preaching service. That's where I had to go. How was

I to travel the three and a half miles from school to church and be there on time? At that season there was a mail carrier who carried the mail from Hague to Westfield and made the trip in the middle of the afternoon. In fact, he stopped at our school to pick up a couple of high school students who lived in Westfield. If I could ride with him then things would likely work out. He did charge for such rides, but that was all right to me. I asked him and he had space on Thursday and agreed for me to ride. I asked my mother to tell the pastor that I was coming, just per chance I might be a bit late.

The entire plan worked out well. I was on time. The Consistory was meeting in the northwest room in the church basement. I knocked on the door and was admitted. I was interviewed as was expected. In these answers I professed that I was trusting in Jesus for my salvation, that I had accepted Him as my Savior, that I was not ashamed of Jesus and that I wanted to live for Him. It was good experience. When I finished I rode home with my parents who had waited after the prayer-preaching service.

A couple of weeks later, at Sunday afternoon worship service, through answering interrogation, I professed before

the entire congregation that I had accepted Jesus as my Savior, that I believed that he was the Son of God, and was God himself, and that I intended to live for Him.

My pastor at that time was the Rev. Mr. Jack De Jong. From a remark which he made as preface to my making public affirmation of faith, I concluded that he was a bit disappointed in that, to this point in his ministry in Westfield, I was the only one to profess having received Jesus as Savior. He said, in effect, "I am sorry that there are not others who want to declare their faith in Jesus. However even if Ralph is the only one who comes to know Jesus, my ministry here is still worth while. But, I trust that more will be coming." More did follow. Rev. De Jong continued to be my pastor for several years. I valued his leadership. Once while I was teaching school I visited him to get his advice on a certain matter. His wife was my Sunday School teacher for a year or two. He played the violin and once or twice I accompanied him on the piano.

In my parental home Sundays received special attention. Perhaps it was some of that special attention my mother gave which resulted in Sundays not being boring times. Perhaps I was bored at times, but I do not

remember those experiences. I do remember some of the interesting aspects of the day. Eating is important to most people, especially to children and teenagers. I am numbered in that "most people". I attribute to my mother the credit for making Sunday a pleasant part of the week. She and my sisters spent much energy on Saturday in preparing food for Sunday.

Morning worship was attended by some members of the family, and when they returned home we had "coffee time". That midmorning snack was common for all, but on Sunday we had loaf cake with a good covering of frosting. When I was grade-school age there were times when I wanted to prolong this pleasure as much as I could so I would save some of the frosting to enjoy later. On Sunday noon we did not have potatoes, meat and vegetables as usual. My parents believed in refraining from work on the Sabbath if it could be avoided. But the Sunday noon meal, in my estimation, turned out to be more interesting than the others. Often, especially during winter time, we had hot chocolate instead of the traditional lukewarm skim milk. We had cold sliced ham on home-made bread many times, and this was very acceptable. To top it off, we had home-

made pie! This, too had been prepared on Saturday. The variety included custard pie, lemon pie, apple, pumpkin, sour cream raisin, plain raisin, rhubarb, peach, carrot, butter scotch and banana. The pies were cut into six pieces, giving good sized wedges. Some were double crust, some had regular meringue, some had whipped cream and some had no special topping. Of course, we all wanted the biggest piece, but that was determined by which was next to be taken from the pan as it circled the table. No one dug out in between other pieces, except the first in line.

On Sunday afternoon everyone attended church, unless there was sickness or some other special reason for not going. Church was at 2:00 p.m. usually. In winter it often was at 1:30 p.m. Following the worship service there was Sunday School for all ages. When we returned home it was time, past time, for the afternoon "coffee time". Youngest members of the family had to change their clothing immediately, but the older ones might delay changing until after the snack. The snack was usually a wedge of layer cake. Again, there was a good thickness of frosting; chocolate, whipped

cream, brown sugar, powdered sugar or coconut.

The snack time having ended, it was time for evening milking. But, there was still eating to be thought of. For supper there may have been sandwich left-overs or something else, but usually the meal was ended with "sauce". This included canned peaches, canned pears, canned plums, canned cherries, Italian prunes, apricots, apples or there might be pudding of one type or another. Such desserts were not common during the week so they were appreciated, at least by me.

At times one of my sisters would bring a girl friend along for supper and she would go back to church for the young people's meeting, Christian Endeavor, with whoever were the "young people" in our family at that time.

Thus, putting everything together, Sundays became for me very interesting days. They were not boring. As I stated earlier, I attribute much of this to my mother's making so many special goodies for that special day. There was always something to anticipate.

In our community Sunday night was "date-night" for the young people. It was

expected that all the youth would attend Christian Endeavor at the church. The fellows could see which girls were present and perhaps ask to take one home, or two fellows would ask two girls and make it a double date. Fellows did make arrangements ahead of time too and escort the girls to Christian Endeavor. However, for me there was little of this social life. There were several reasons. Coming to C.E. with several brothers caused complications. Which one would have the car after the meeting? If such were decided, then what was to be done with the brothers who had to go home? Young people who had their own cars had no such difficulty. My brothers and I did not all have our own cars. When it came time for me to logically have a car, then I went off to college. Hence, Sunday night as date night in North Dakota was no big matter. At college it was also date night, but walking was the usual means of transportation there.

A part of my church life was music. As I related earlier, I took music lessons and learned to play well enough to play for the singing in church, Sunday School, Christian Endeavor, funerals or whatever. This had its pleasures and also its responsibilities and burdens. The Holland language was still



used in some of our Sunday morning services, which meant playing the organ for Dutch psalms. The trick there was to understand which psalm. For instance, in the English language we say "number 23". The Dutch say "3 and 20". Hence, one had to switch the numbers and not interpret it to be 32. I knew that I always had to switch the two around. Knowing was not always doing. The pastor on one particular Sunday morning announced the psalm as usual. I did not make the switch, but thought that I had the correct psalm and began playing the organ. At the end of the introduction I swelled the volume but no one sang. After a few measures I stopped. The pastor knew what had happened so he said the number in English. Instead of listening, I was saying the number quietly in Dutch. Then I said to the pastor, "That's what I have". He said, "Good". I began the organ again but again had no singers join me. Again I stopped and the pastor started from the pulpit to the organ to help me solve the problem. Before he had taken many steps in my direction I realized what I had done and told him that I understood. I began the music for the third time and I had a following! Embarrassments do come at times!

When I think backward of the music which I used for Sunday-services preludes I am filled with uncertainty over what visitors, or the pastor and his wife, must have thought. Most people of the congregation did not know what I was playing, whether it was sacred music or whatever. I just played it slower or whatever I thought should be done to make an acceptable prelude from it. But, when people visited who knew something about music, they must have wondered about my choices. Fortunately the pastor and his wife remained graciously silent when I played waltzes for preludes or whatever. They knew that another pianist was not to be found. Usually my preludes were variations of hymns, either from purchased magazines or from my own composition. My sister Edna did the same, as did my brother Ellsworth. Sister Hattie did the same several years earlier. Tradition! Tradition!

During the playing of the prelude the pastor and Consistory members came in through the front door and took their places, either on the pulpit or in the front pews. I recall one Sunday afternoon when the prelude did not produce what it was supposed to. I had played the prelude over a

couple of times but still no pastor or Consistory. I decided that an investigation was in order. I ended my playing and went out the front door to see what had happened. I do not know what had happened, or had not, but I met them coming in my direction. I struck up the music again and in they came!

When I was in my upper teens I taught Sunday School for a year or two. I had the boys of grades one and two, as I recall. I tried to promote memorization and faithfulness by offering a Bible to each student who accomplished what was asked. I know that I gave several copies, but I do not remember the details. I remember two students who were in the class. The one I remember because several years ago he told me that he had been in my class. The other I remember, perhaps because his father had been one of my teachers years before, and his grandfather had been one of my teachers even before that, but all in the space of fourteen years!

As I contemplate the past it becomes more and more evident that I did not choose God but that He chose me. How thankful I am! Life would have been quite different if all the planning had been my responsibility.

God does work in mysterious ways, but it is evident that HE WORKS! I rejoice that I was destined to hear the gospel, to hear the good news that Jesus died to take the punishment for my sins, that he was forsaken by the Father on the cross so that I would not have to be forsaken by the Father here in this life or in the life after death! How I rejoice that, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16. Who can comprehend such love? I cannot! But I am grateful that He loved me so much! Now I love Him too. Jesus is my Savior! I belong to Him! Belong! Belong! How wonderful! I belong, He will never forsake me! I'm in the family of God! But that did not just happen by itself. I had to admit, confess that I was a lost sinner. I had to repent! I had to believe that Jesus paid the price for me, that He took my punishment while on the cross, that He was forsaken in my place. I had to ask Jesus to come into my life, to forgive my sins and to save me. And I did it! I repented! I believed! I used the faith which He gave me! And He pardoned me! My sins have all been forgiven! God looks upon me as though I had never sinned! What grace! What a God! I can never repay

Him! The best I can do is to thank Him, to praise Him, to worship Him, to honor Him, to try to live so that my life honors Him! Now I belong to Jesus ! Jesus belongs to me! Praise be to God! What a relationship!



My farm home in 1944



My parental family in 1948.  
I stand behind my father.

## EPILOGUE

Perhaps some readers will wonder how and where the next years of my life were spent. Therefore, I will give a brief outline of the years which followed the first twenty. Most of them were not spent on the Dakota prairies, even though I frequently returned there for one reason or another.

In the fall season of 1941 I went to Pella, Iowa, where I attended Central College. This was, and is, a four-year liberal-arts college belonging to the Reformed Church in America. My brother Henry was graduated from there several years earlier, as was my brother Albert. My younger brother Ellsworth was to be graduated from there after I left. Pella was about six hundred and fifty miles from my Dakota home. This distance made frequent visits impractical. However, I did make visits back there at Christmas times.

At Central I majored in philosophy but did considerable work in music. I took voice lessons, was in the A Cappella Choir, took organ lessons for a time, took violin lessons briefly and took several other music courses. When I want to boast I tell that I was the official college marching band bass drummer. It was not for long. I accepted the

appointment about 9:30 one evening, slept as the official drummer, but went to the conductor and resigned at about 8:30 the next morning. (My rejecting the appointment came when I concluded that I would not be



My college days.  
1945

able to carry the drum because of a neck injury sustained from World War II.)



Our nation became involved in World War II shortly after I came to Central. After some months I joined the Reserves, as did many of the students, and was sent into active duty on March 11, 1943. My entrance was at Camp Dodge near Des Moines, Iowa, and about fifty miles from Pella. I did go home to Dakota before entering military training. My girl friend, who became my wife, was schooling in Pella, so she could visit me the Sunday before we shipped out. After we were riding the train we were informed that we were going to Camp Roberts in California.

My active military life was brief. On the tenth day of active training I had a simple calisthenics accident and suffered a broken neck. A fractured 6th cervical vertebra, they called it. I spent time in several hospitals, wore a partial body-cast for several months, was fitted with a metal brace and was given a medical discharge from military life on September 11, 1943. This was from the Torney General Hospital of Palm Springs, California. I was sent to the Veterans Hospital of North Dakota at Fargo for a week or two and then went home. Within a week or two I was back at Central College, being the first veteran to return to that college. As

I had attended summer school in the summer of 1942, I was graduated with my original class, the class of 1945.

I wore the brace for another month or two and was able to be free from it by the first of December. College was quite different from what it was when I left because many, many students had left to serve in the military. I was no outstanding student. I did compete in oratory and earned the desired Pi Kappa Delta key. It was a joy to display that on my pocket-watch chain as it crossed from vest pocket to vest pocket. I was also included in the volume, "Who's Who among students in American Colleges and Universities". My graduation came in May of 1945.

Unexpectedly, I was asked to be summer pastor for the Reformed Church in Strasburg, North Dakota. Western Seminary in Holland, Mich., the school which I planned to attend that September, did not have sufficient students to meet the needs of churches asking for summer students. As Strasburg was only six miles from my parental home, where I planned to live that summer, I was asked to accept this position. I agreed, upon the condition that I need conduct only one service per Sunday instead

of two. The congregation agreed to this stipulation. Serving the congregation was a pleasant and meaningful experience.

Serving a rural congregation, I needed an automobile. Before I left Pella I went to Des Moines with two of my friends, and we found a suitable car. As this was still war time, not many cars were available. I felt fortunate to get a 1937 six cylinder Chrysler. It was a gem and gave good service. It even made two trips to California and was sold there. (The buyer still owes \$40.00.) I named the car "Kara Kardia", meaning , "Joy of the Heart", Greek words!

The heart can have more than one joy. Another joy of my heart was my girl friend, Jane Rozendaal. We met at summer school in Central college in the year 1942. It was at a get-acquainted party that we met on the two sides of a grapefruit. It was a relay and we were to pass a grapefruit from person to person, having to hold it under our chins. As I have a rather short chin, I had troubles. The huge ball frequently dropped to the floor as I tried to pass it to this certain Jane. Doing my utmost to keep the grapefruit in place, I put one arm around her, then two arms, holding her as close to me as I could, but to no avail. Our team lost the relay. I

often say that we squeezed a grapefruit until it turned into a date. That was the beginning of our romance. It continued during military days and eventually we were married on June 14 of 1946.

In the autumn of 1945 I went to Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. I lived in the men's dormitory and there met the two other fellows who, together with me, would constitute the Class of 1948.

We were quite different, but we became close friends. To this day we exchange letters in recognition of the three birthdays. Even though one has died, his widow still receives a copy of the two letters written, and she writes in recognition of the other two birthdays. I took my three years of seminary training at Western, but the last two years I lived with my wife in an apartment.

Jane Rozendaal and I were married on June 14, 1946. Some of our courting days were spent at Central College, but many of them were spent with miles and miles separating us. However, letter-writing was not a lost art in our younger days. I did visit in her parental home and she visited in mine. It was while she was a guest at my parental home that a small area of the living-dining

room, a place about three feet west of and three feet south of the hard-coal heater, became very significant. It was there, while on Christmas vacation, that I asked her to marry me. She had made her decision earlier, so little time was needed. She accepted my invitation. I was happy. The ring was in my suitcase upstairs. It was soon presented to her, was accepted, but it was not soon completely on her finger. It was too small. The end result was the same. She gave me a beautiful black onyx ring later.

We were married on June 14, 1946 in the Harrison Reformed Church in Harrison, South Dakota. Jane's father was the pastor of the church and he performed the ceremony. It was on his 25th anniversary that we were married. Our honey-moon trip was to the Black Hills of South Dakota. After that it was back to work, to Amherst, South Dakota.

Seminary life was rewarding and interesting. During this time Jane and I were consulting with the denominational Board of Foreign Missions in regard to becoming missionaries to China. We were accepted, and on October 9, 1947, we were commissioned as missionaries for the Reformed Church in America, the field of service to be China. I was graduated from

Western Seminary in May of 1948. My ordination as a Minister of the Word took place at my home church in Westfield, North Dakota, on July 7, 1948.

During my seminary years there were special assignments for summer training for all of the students. As stated before, I served the Reformed Church in Strasburg, North Dakota, during the summer of 1945. In the summer of 1946 I was assigned to the Reformed Church in Amherst, South Dakota. I served for two weeks as a single man and then on June 14 was married and came there to serve with my bride for the remaining ten weeks of summer.

For the summer of 1947 I was assigned to the Sobrante Park Reformed Church of Oakland, California. Living on the west coast was different. It was a broadening experience for us.

The summer of 1948 was spent in visiting the churches which would be supplying our financial support, as well as others. We also attended some conferences as leaders or as learners.

In the fall of 1948 we journeyed to Berkeley, California, to take schooling at the University to learn the Chinese language. The plan was for us to take one semester of

work. However, because of a pregnancy, it was decided for us to take two semesters. Soon after that, the international situation with China became such that no new missionaries could enter China. Even those who were in China had to return home. It was decided that we take a third semester of language. This we did, but it was evident that no entrance to China was to be had. We were advised to accept the pastoring of a congregation in the United States. This we did.

On January 31, 1950, we arrived in Racine, Wisconsin, and I was installed as pastor on February 3. The church building was located next to a railroad. This caused much disturbance during the services. There was good life within the congregation so the challenge to build larger and in a better location was met open-mindedly. A new building was erected and dedicated to the praise of God on August 25, 1953.

Three of our six children were born in Racine. Elliott had been born in Berkeley, California, on January 4, 1949. He was baptized in the Sobrante Park Reformed Church by the Rev. Mr. Charles Dumville.



Dressed for the pulpit in Racine  
1952

This was the church in Oakland which I pastored in the summer of 1947. Lowell was born in Racine on August 19, 1950. Eloise was born on February 22, 1953, and Donovan on October 16, 1954. These three I baptized in the Reformed Church in Racine.



Our youngest two children were born in Indianapolis, Indiana, Twila on August 21, 1956 and Charla on November 28, 1957. These two I baptized in the Christian Park Reformed Church in Indianapolis, Indiana.

On January 31, 1955, we arrived in Indianapolis, Indiana, at the Christian Park Reformed Church, and was installed as pastor on February 3. Our stay in Racine had



Dressed for the pulpit in  
Indianapolis and later.  
1957

been five years, to the day!

On January 31, 1961, we arrived in Hamilton, Michigan, having lived in Indianapolis six years, to the day! I asked to be installed as pastor of the Hamilton Reformed Church on February 3, again six years to the day, after having been installed in Indianapolis. However, a wedding had been scheduled for that evening, so I had to be installed a day sooner, on February 2, 1961. That broke the pattern!

On June 28, 1967 we arrived in Rock Valley, Iowa, to serve the First Reformed Church there. We had lived in Hamilton about six years and five months. I was installed on June 30, 1967. Our five youngest children were graduated from high school in Rock Valley. The oldest had been graduated from the Hamilton High School and had been in college for a year when we moved. The Rock Valley church is remembered especially for the Lay Witness Mission held there in April of 1971. On Sunday, April 4, there were ninety-nine people at the evening service who came to the front of the sanctuary to witness to experiences of one type or another. The



Our family  
1970

service lasted until 11:30 p.m. About thirty-five young people appeared at the next Board of Elders Meeting to profess faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

After serving in Rock Valley for nearly eight years, we moved to the First Reformed Church of Evansdale, Iowa, a suburb of Waterloo. We arrived there on June 17, 1975 and I was installed as pastor on the 19th. At Evansdale a drive-in facility was added to the church structure and the inside seating was about doubled. This was

Iowa's only walk-in drive-in church building at that time.

On August 31, 1982, we moved to Rochester, Minnesota, where I became a part-time chaplain at the Mayo Clinic Hospital Facilities. I served primarily patients from the Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches.

After serving there for four years, I retired to Orange City where Jane and I had a house waiting for us. We had purchased it in 1978 and had been renting it out from that time until we needed it. We moved into it on June 7, 1986.

Beginning on September 1 of 1986, I served as a part-time Minister of Visitation and Pastoral Care in the First Reformed Church in Orange City. It was arranged so that my responsibilities could become less as I desired such. My final, complete retirement was on April 30, 1991.

Since moving to Orange City in 1986 we have been living in our purchased house at 509 4th Street N.E.; Orange City, Iowa 51041. I look upon my life as having been rich and meaningful. I think of it as an adventure of faith and I hope that it continues to be such. The base on which I rest my hope is written of in II Corinthians

12:9 where God encourages Paul, "He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'". I believe that God's grace will be sufficient for me. I need have no fear. Each day can be an adventure with God! May each be such!



My wife Jane and her husband Ralph  
Retirement, 1991