

# **My Life**

by R. C. Skoe

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## ***Foreword***

Upon beginning this narrative I had grave reservations. (I swear, that was not meant to be a pun, it just came out that way. Not bad though, eh?) I doubted that I wanted to relive it all. After overcoming that reluctance I then questioned if I would ever want to release it or even to save it. After overcoming that reservation I doubted that I could release it before my death. But now I have come full circle:

Having lived so much of life alone,  
I find, I do not want to die, unknown.

If here you find someone, you did not know,  
Belatedly, I say, "hello".

To you, and those who thought they knew,  
To each of you, a fond adieu!

RCS

### **Note by Ralph Skoe**

I scanned the text using an Optical Character Reader so there may be some strange characters or mis-spellings because of this. I also scanned the pictures and put them into the appropriate places. I also tried to retain the same page content as the original document.

Ray did not have a spell check so there are spelling mistakes than have been left in the document. How ever for the purpose of accuracy I note the following errors.

1. His sister's name was Emilie and not Emelie.

2.

***This Narrative is Dedicated.***

**To**

My Father and My Mother  
My Sisters, and Their' Husbands,  
My Brothers and Their Wives.

"We Cared For One Another"

### **Appreciation**

To my brother-in-law Stan Petzel and my sisters Gladys Barren and Marie Rozycki for encouraging me to undertake this project; to Nina Seery for helping me with the photo layouts and my travails with my computer; to Ed Grayden for offering advice and encouragement; to all of those who supplied me with photos. Thank You.

All happenings reported herein are actual and are related accurately according to the best of my remembrance of them. Some dates, in the absence of recorded data may be approximate.

## The Verdict

"In Japan when people have a terminal disease they are most often not told that they have it. They go to their death believing that they have some indisposition that will soon clear up, they'll then go home well and hearty. In short they are lied to by family, friends and doctor. Do not lie to me. I want to know what you know, I want to know what you think you know."

"I think you have ALS"\*

"Do you think I have it or do you know I have it or do you think you know I have it?"

"I think I know you have it".

"The odds?"

"99 to 1".

Wham! Right between the eyes. I suppose one should not complain if one gets exactly what one asked for. It was I, talking to Dr. Parry at the University Neurology Clinic.

I left the clinic, went to the Decathlon Club and had a martini. A martini "up" with Tanqueray gin, my favorite.

*There is something about a martini, A  
tingle, remarkably pleasant; A yellow, a  
mellow martini, I wish I had one at  
present.*

*There is something about a martini,  
Ere the dinning and dancing begin.  
To tell you the truth,  
It's not the vermouth:  
I think it must be the gin.*

Ogden Nash.

I had a second. I went to Nina's. I told her. She cried. And I? I did too, but then I cry easily.

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, ALS, commonly referred to as Lou Gehrig's Disease. An inexorable, irreversible deterioration of the nerve cells controlling all muscle functions, resulting in total weakness and death. At the time of this writing there is no known treatment.

It had begun in the spring of 1992. I was experiencing some discomfort, an odd feeling, in the back of my throat. I suspected a bad tooth but it was not that, not strep throat, not tonsils. I dismissed it as a nervous twitch. I was in Las Vegas, walking down a hallway, some guy behind me said, "Don't let it bother you, I can't walk straight any more either". What in hell is this guy talking about? Then I realized, I was putting my hand out to the wall to steady myself. At home, walking around the lake, my left foot "sounded" different than the other, flopping, as if I was wearing one of those flapper shoes used by clowns--and why was I so short of breath?

Before I had noticed any symptoms I had signed on to go skiing in Argentina in August. The previous winter at Big Sky I skied better and harder than ever. Like red wine my skiing was improving with age.

By August, time for the trip, however, I was having my doubts. I felt weak and un-coordinated, short of breath, and unable to condition myself as I usually did before a ski trip. I went anyhow, with a friend, George to Newark, across town in a 1-imo forty feet long, to Kennedy where we met the rest of the group. To Buenos Aires and thence to Las Lenas in the Andes. The runs were above the tree line, big sweeping slopes. Beautiful. Unfortunately it had not snowed for sometime, the runs were icy, and the wind just howled. Never mind, I can ski that. I rode up the lift, put on my skis and poled off. George never could stand being behind, nor I either, so it was a pissing contest at the outset. I went five meters and fell flat on my face.

I couldn't rise. Had to take off my skis to get up. Started again, my left ski seemed to have a plan of it's own, but it never told me what it was. Again, my skis crossed and I augered in, flat on my face. I tried the bunny slopes. No problem getting down if I skied on my right ski and let the left go along for the ride. But is that skiing? I fell at the top and couldn't rise. I wept. Someone came and helped me. I tried for three days and then I knew it was not to be. I went back to Buenos Aires to salvage something from -the trip.

Back home, a visit to Dr. Coates; a brain scan, an MR I (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) of my head. Could it be that I

had had a minor stroke? The scan showed not much, nothing to which my symptoms could be attributed. Next, Dr. McKelvy, a neurologist at the Noran Clinic. Nerve conduction tests. I asked if I had ALS. He assured me that I did not. Everyone believes what he wants to believe, I believed him. Could it be that he didn't know or was he a "Japanese" and lacked the courage to tell me. Another month, it is late October (1992), no improvement, in fact a gradual worsening. My breath' is labored, legs weaker, voice and swallowing changing, and muscles twitching.

"We don't know what you have, perhaps you had better go to the University Neurological Clinic". It was Dr. Coates speaking. And so I did. It took Dr. Parry all of ten minutes to do -his examination and clear his throat, and look at me as if he didn't know what to say. I told him what to say and hence the conversation above.

Winston Churchill, when they had driven the Germans out of North Africa, said, "This is not the beginning of the end, but, it is the end of the beginning." I don't want to misquote a hero of mine, but, in my case he would be wrong. It was not the end of the beginning, it was the beginning of the end.

I have always fancied myself a lover of the language. Have always thought that I could put together a decent sentence if I tried. So when Gladys and Stan suggested that I put down something of my life, the suggestion didn't fall on completely barren ground. Being both a Skoe and a Norwegian, I, of course, could not admit that there was any merit in a suggestion not my own. To write of oneself, seems to smack of immodesty, and man, we can't have that. Perhaps I can say, as Pa Kettle said to Ma Kettle, "I'll do it but I ain't agonna like it".

There is a problem. Does one write about all the fun and funny little things that happened along the way, all the harmless anecdotes of childhood, and of family lore? Does one write about the successes and the triumphs (if there were any), about the moments of peace and happiness and leave out all the rest?

Or--does one write about the grief, the loneliness, the anguish, the "angst", the failures, the pain, the dreams that

never materialized, the hopes never fulfilled? Are not all of us made of two people; the outward person that the world sees; the inner person never yet revealed? Or is that only I?

So what to do? If I write only of the happy times, and leave out all the rest, it may be quaint but it will not be me,. To include the pain and anguish? I do not know if I can do it. All my life I have had a protective shell about me, rarely opened, and then by only the smallest of a crack. It has been my protection from pain, mostly self-inflicted, but pain nevertheless. I don't know if I can come out now, (from my protective shell). I don't know if I want to. Perhaps it is after all, of interest to no one but myself. So why relive it all, it's over? Perhaps, perhaps..... In any event, I approach it gingerly.



Above: Pa's Homestead Shack      Below: Pa in boat in Island Lake



## The Beginning

"Beware the Ides of March". Julius Caesar ignored the warning and was killed that date, the 15th. The other great adventure of life is being born and that is what I did that date. Was it a warm, early spring day with icicles dripping water on the south side of the house, and the ice honeycombing on the lake? Or was it cold and snowing? I don't know, I can't remember. I was the eighth of eleven children born to Ener (Einar) and Lena (O'lena?) Skoe. My sister, Viola died in infancy. My brother Russel died in 1984, at the age of fifty-three. The rest of us yet survive, as of this date, August, 1993.

My father, whose mother had died in Telemark, Norway, and whose step-mother had rejected him (we believe) was brought, mother-less at the age of eleven, to America in 1882. He came with his father, a sister, and two brothers.

He must have lead a nomadic (and lonely?) life as a farm hand, store clerk, and lumber-jack until, finally, filing a homestead claim on a small piece of land in Ardenhurst township in the very northwest of Itasca county. This was nearing the end of the great Scandinavian immigration to America, the end of the great homesteading era. The fine farm lands of Iowa and Minnesota had been claimed. All that was left were the timber lands in the North and after the timber was cut what was left? Not much- swamps and rocks, flies and mosquitoes. It must have been a hard choice.

My mother, from Redalen in Norway, was brought to America at the age of three in 1890. She came with her parents and two sisters. A brother was born shortly after their arrival. She graduated from high school at Bagley and taught school for some time after. Much to our astonishment, Gladys has recently learned that the log schoolhouse in which she taught, at that time, was situated a mere mile and a half from the site of Clearwater Rice, a family owned wild rice farm at Clearbrook. Photos of her and her sisters, taken at the time, reveal her as having been extraordinarily pretty - and perhaps too fragile for the hard life ahead.

I know little about our parents meeting but we believe it was a classical Miles Standish-John Alden enactment, a case of unintended results. We know that father had a friend named



Above: Pa's Second Shack Below: Pa, with Tom and Prince



Carl Magnuson, they home steded side by side. Carl was illiterate which was a problem for him because he was wooing, or trying to woo, a young girl by mail. He enlisted Pa to write the letters for him. We don't know what happened to Carl but "Priscilla" became our mother. Years later about 1929, Carl's long abandoned homestead shack burned to the ground. I remember well it's happening and to this day that little patch of brush and swamp remains, to me, "The Carl Magnusson place". When Emilie and I were kids we would go to his old hand dug well for clay. It was beautiful blue clay and made fine "dishes". We didn't know what a kiln was and we had no way to glaze them but we baked them in a fire anyhow. They were quite suitable for mud pies and lasted well with care.

After my father and my mother were married, except for a few years in Grand Rapids, and La Prairie near Grand Rapids, they spent the rest of their lives on the homestead on Island Lake in Ardenhurst township. It was not an easy life. In the summer the heat, the flies, and the mosquitoes drove man and animals half mad. The house was uninsulated, if the fire went out it was freezing in minutes. It had no electricity, no toilet, no running water. Wading through the snow and sitting in an outdoor biffy in forty below weather is almost incomprehensible now but it was a fact of life. Toilet paper consisted of last years Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalogs. The shiny pages got used last. Clothes were washed by hand in captured rain water, or from melted snow, or in water hauled in fifty gallon barrels from the lake. Well 'water was too "hard" for the old P&G soap. We kids survived, Mother did not.

If I have referred to our parents as Father and Mother, it is almost an affectation, they were Ma and Pa. The older siblings, who knew Pa when he was younger, may have called him dad or daddy, or even father. But I? I have no memory of him that would enable me to think or speak of him as, or call him, Dad or Daddy. He was fifty-two when I was born and sixty three when Willis (Gordon) the youngest was born. I think we younger ones never knew the father that our older siblings knew. It was almost as if we were of a separate generation. For me he shall remain ever "Pa".



MOTHER  
Above  
Mother, her Father & Siblings  
LC: Holding RCS

Ma as well, was "Ma". "Ma, can we go barefoot"? "Ma, can we go swimming"? She died in 1939, now fifty years later I do not think of her only as "Ma". I think of her as well as "Mother".

There were ten of us kids, eleven actually, for a sister Viola died in infancy. Of those that grew to adulthood, Earl Thomas was the eldest. He was born in 1909 and as of this writing, in 1993, is eighty-four years of age. He and his wife, Vera, had four children. Next born was C. Stanton, he and his wife Beatrice, had five children. My eldest sister, Bena Luverne, married Stanley G. Petzel, from Chicago and had three sons.

After Bena came Stanley Oliver. He and his wife Rose, who had one daughter, lived most of their life in California. Marie Alice, the second oldest daughter and her husband, Dr. Tony Rozycki have four children. Next, Emelie Josephine, who's husband was Wesley Karkela, had five children. I was eighth born. I married Gisela Schubach who had one daughter.

Gladys Ann was the youngest daughter. She married Don Barron and had three children. The next-to-youngest boy was Russel Leroy, he and his wife Margaret had five children. The youngest of the family was Willis Gordon, he and his wife Connie had one child. As children we called him Gordie, now he goes by his first name, Will.

It seemed almost as if there were two separate generations, with Emelie and I, and perhaps Gladys, falling in the middle, not quite of either generation. The experiences and memories of the eldest I am certain, were quite unlike those of the younger.

We always referred to the three older brothers, Earl, Stanton and Stanley as "The boys" "The boys were away 'working out'" or "The boys aren't home yet". So shall I here in writing of them. Russel and Will (Gordon), and sometimes Gladys, were known collectively as "the kids". Emelie and I again fell somewhere in between.

The farm was situated on the shores of Island Lake. The lake was the focal point of our life. Whether swimming, fishing, skating, sliding, trapping, falling in or breaking through the ice, the lake was it. I've often wondered how we all kept from drowning. No one taught us how to swim, we learned to



Mother & Fathers Wedding

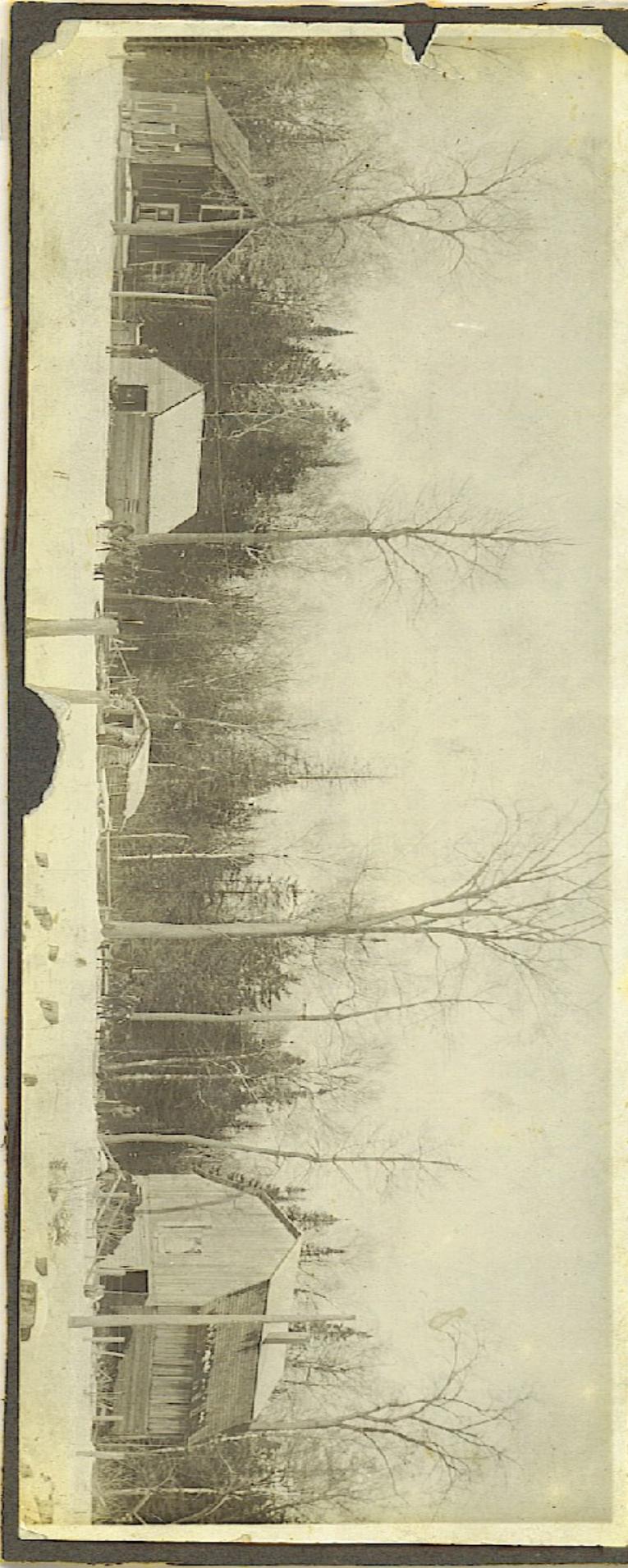
swim when we learned to walk. It was only a few hundred yards to the lake, we had no life preservers, no one sat on the shore to watch us, we survived. Now I often watch amused as mothers hover over the children, children so swathed in "personal flotation devices" they can hardly waddle to the water let alone drown.

The farm was a subsistence farm, hardly more than a big garden. There were thirty or forty acres of tillable land. Pa and the older boys, Earl, Stanton and Stanley, labored for years clearing off the trees and digging out the stumps from these meager acres. They did it all by hand, with grub-hoe, axe and shovel, a team of horses and occasionally, if they could afford it, a bit of dynamite. The irony of it is that years later Earl planted these labored-over acres back to trees. They are once again a forest. I sometimes wonder if Pa's ghost, sweaty, with aching back, gnarled hands, and broken fingernails, I wonder if he may not drive old Tom and Prince among those trees and shake his head confused.

The rest of the farm consisted mostly of swamp, suitable only for pasture and barely that. We always had half a dozen or so cows for milk and meat and butter. Occasionally there was a bit of cream to sell, I recall seeing creamery checks of two and a half and three dollars. Was that for a week or was it for a month? Mother had a "green thumb" and sometime grew a few tomatoes, and potatoes, which she traded to Neary's store for sugar and the like. The only real "cash crop", ie, one that was actually sold for money, was a few sacks of alfalfa 'seed. To this day I wonder how that farm could consume so much labor, every one worked from dawn to dark, and yet produce so little.

We did not, however, lack of food. I do not remember ever once going to bed still hungry. We had all the milk and butter we needed, meat as well, in the winter. In the summer meat was more difficult for lack of any way to keep it, but if one of the boys shot a deer (Pa was not a hunter) Mother would can what we did not immediately use. We had a large garden so we had almost unlimited amounts of fresh vegetables in the summer. Mother and the older girls, Bena, Marie and Emelie would "can" for the winter. Yes, they would "put up" hundreds of quarts of fruits, vegetables and berries- anything they could lay their hands on and put them into mason jars. Often working from dawn on into the night they would pick and wash,

8A



THE HOMESTEAD - Circa, 1910

Note: 6 people, 2 horses, 2 cows  
Original shack in background

peel and shell, slice and dice. After boiling whatever it was, it would be put into jars that were also being boiled so as to kill all the bacteria. Then the covers, also boiled, would be screwed on and they'd be set to cool. Can one imagine the heat of that little kitchen, with one little window, the sun beating on it's uninsulated roof and that big old wood stove going full bore. How could one survive a day in it, let alone work in it? It must have been an oven.

Food, ah yes, food. Yes, there were moments. The first fresh food we had in the spring was rhubarb, good, but what we really waited for was when the corn was "ready". All spring and early summer we looked forward to that. And then pale, cream colored ears (none of that tough, starchy, yellow, over ripe stuff one gets now) they were hardly more than ten minutes off the stalk. Dripping with butter, one hated to leave them long enough to try the creamed baby peas and new potatoes (Mother would "steal" the little potatoes from underneath the still growing potato plant). And what about some homemade ice cream covered over with fresh picked raspberries? Soul food, soul food, pure and simple. I have been around the world a bit, have eaten in those places where it's called cuisine, not cooking, but I have yet to eat anything that could compare to that. Soul food, simply, soul food.

Money. Where did it come from? Money. Even during the depression when things were cheap, even with a subsistence farm, some things could be had only with cash. Flour, sugar, spices, salt, soap, kerosene for the lamp, shoes and taxes, all required money. It didn't come from the farm. It came from "working out". Pa, and the boys, as soon as they were old enough, "worked out". Now the term conjures up health clubs, and girls in spandex. But then it meant a job, a job, any place and any time to earn a buck or even half of that. It meant working in the woods, cutting, skidding, or "working on the road" for state or county, it meant going to Dakota for the wheat or potato harvest. Hand labor that, with pitchforks and horses. Money, it came from older sisters, when they sent money home from their meager teachers salaries. Some money came from selling a bit of lake shore to old L. T. Grilley. He built a small resort, a resort that played a role in our lives later. Money. There wasn't much, but enough apparently, to get by. Yet now when I go out and spend a hundred bucks for a dinner and a bit of wine for two, I often wish it were



Sister Viola

as Richard Feynman claims, that time runs both forward and backwards. It would be nice to rewind it back to then and hand the hundred dollars to Mother.

It was winter. There had been a storm and a big, it seemed to me at least, drift of snow had formed an arc around the house. I was pulling a sled along the top of this drift at play all by myself. I must have been about four or five. Pa came out and brought me into the house. It was warm and sunny there. It smelled of fresh brewed coffee and of a cake just out of the oven. I was alone with them, the older kids must have been in school, Gladys not yet born perhaps, or sleeping. I was alone with them. They spoke quietly to one another, they seemed to be at peace, there was no tension in the air. I ate cake and basked in the warmth and security of it all. I do not think it's significance lies in it's having happened. I think it lies in the fact of my remembering it so vividly. It has never left me.

### **1925**

I have escaped death nine times in my life, by inches only or by seconds, even a fraction of a second. The first time I am told, was when I was two. I am told that I dropped my slipper into a tub of water and went in after it. After an indeterminate time, Mother, fortunately, came around the house, as mothers will, to see what I was up to. She found me standing on my head in the water, quite out of it, I guess. Blowing bubbles perhaps. Apparently she picked me up by the hind legs and let the water run out and shook me until I showed some life. Mind you that, although I was an interested party in this affair, I can't vouch for the accuracy of the reporting. That I count as Number 1 of my nine lives.

### **Circa 1927**

One day I accompanied one of my sisters to Grilleys, at the little resort, on some errand I presume. On the table were these pretty round disks about the size of a half dollar; red, white and blue. How could they have gotten into my pocket? I have no idea. We went home, shortly the phone rang on the party line, three shorts, our ring. Had perhaps some poker chips gotten mixed up by mistake and carried away? Bena and I had a little talk in the backyard and I went for a little walk- a very long walk or so it seemed. Except for a few peanuts in a grocery store , I believe I have never again taken what was not mine, well nothing of significance anyhow.

I remember, our pasture was too small. It was my and Emelie's task, later mine alone, to herd the cows along the road so they could graze. One day we would go south with them, the next day east. We were supposed to stay out until noon. "Face north and if your shadow is straight in front of you it is noon and you can bring them home" . Living sun dials we were although we had never heard the term. When we went east we rarely went past old Joe Fellner's place. When we did we crouched down low in the ditch so he couldn't see us. We were afraid of him, I don't know why, we seldom caught sight of him. Perhaps it was because he was a German and a recluse. Likely he was just a lonesome, harmless old man. One day he shot and killed himself. I wonder what his life was all about.

When we went south with the cows we had the lake to play in, the road followed the shore. The cows more or less took care of themselves. I have since wondered why we had to go along, they knew the way and came home voluntarily when full. When they neared the bridge over the lake "outlet" we would sometimes run ahead and get under it with a couple of big sticks. When they were in the middle we'd holler and pound on the planks to scare them. After awhile they got used to it and it wasn't worth it anymore. We used to ride them sometimes but couldn't control them and inevitably they would go under some low branches and wipe us off. Sundial or not we made sure we were home by noon.

### **Christmas**

Christmas is for kids. We longed for it. The toys and guns and dolls section of the catalogs would be worn to a frazzle. At school we would "draw names" and enter into endless intrigues to learn who drew our own. There would be a "Christmas Program", plays, poems and carols, we all had parts.

*They sent me here to speak a piece I'll  
do the best I can, but I'll tell you  
this, it's, A hard place to put a man.*

Anon

Afterwards we got a bag of candy.

The day before Christmas was the big day. Always there would be one or more of the older brothers or sisters home. There

would be hustle and bustle, cooking and baking, the house would smell good. After chores in the morning I would take an axe, strap on my skis, homemade ones until Marie gave me a pair of "boughten" ones, and ski out in to the spruce swamp southeast of the house to cut a tree. It was always difficult to pick one from thousands, made somewhat easier because it needed to be good on only two sides. The tree always sat in a little crook in the wall so hardly more than two sides was showing. I'd drag it home and submit it for inspection. I never had one rejected. It was decorated with tinfoil icicles and heavy green and red ropes. We clamped on candle holders that held real candles but we never dared to light them for fear of fire. A very realistic fear when the snow is deep and the temperature is ten below. For supper we always had lutefisk and lefse, mashed potatoes and lots of melted butter. Once or twice we even had oyster stew in milk, a treat. After supper we hung up stockings, went to bed and waited for Santa. Somehow he always came with something.

#### **Rose Petal Cake**

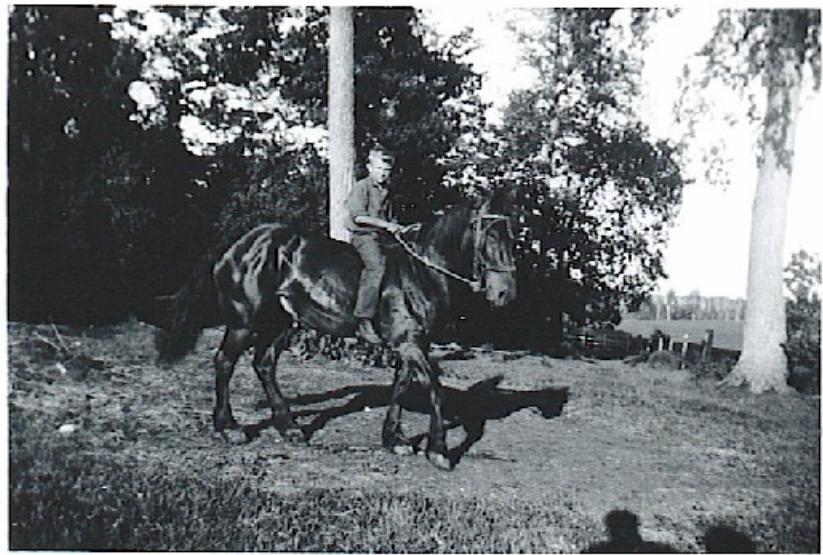
Has anyone in the audience ever made or eaten "rose petal cake"? We did, the recipe is simple. I'll give the time required as well.

Pick one bushel of wild rose petals--Two kids five hours - each.

Pick one quart of wild strawberries--- " " " " "  
Line a single-loaf bread pan with wax paper. Put in a layer of rose petals about one or two inches thick, cover with a 'layer of strawberries, sprinkle lightly with sugar. Repeat, pressing down when necessary, until the pan is full or supplies are exhausted. Fold paper over the top and weight with heavy object. Old fashioned sad irons, yes, "sad irons", (see dictionary) work best. Let sit for three days if you can wait that long. Eat with whipped cream, preferably, when there aren't too many people there to help. It's pretty tasty.

#### **The Root Cellar**

We didn't buy fresh vegetables and rarely any fruit. We had oodles of vegetables in the summer but it was difficult to keep them for the winter. Under the house there was a little cellar, hardly more than a hole in the dirt, unlined, with no floor. There were shelves there to store canned goods, and room for a few potatoes but little else. To solve the storage



Top On Molly  
L NIGS  
BL RCS



problem Pa and the boys had dug a cave into the side of a hill. It was lined with big cedar logs standing on end much like a stockade. On top, for a ceiling, were more logs and all was covered over with sawdust. Over this a roof was built to keep the sawdust dry. The entrance was through a passage, quite long, with three doors spaced about six feet apart, like air locks of a space ship. In there we stored potatoes, carrots, cabbages, rutabagas (for the cows) and sometimes a few parsnips. They were safe from freezing in there except in the very coldest weather. In 1936 there was a "cold spell" that lasted a month or more. It got as cold as minus fifty-two and for weeks it never got above minus twenty. Each evening I would light a gas lantern, take it out and put it in the rootceller for added warmth. By spring every thing was getting pretty limp but they were still edible. In retrospect I think that, in spite of being short of vitamins in winter, our diet was quite adequate. Plain but adequate, healthier, perhaps, than the junk foods kids eat today.

### **Horses**

I don't remember the first team we had. They were before my time although I knew their names well, Tom and Prince. The first team I drove was Pete and Dan. Like walking and swimming, I can't remember when I started driving them. I just always did it seems. They were not very well matched. Dan, the roan, was slower than Pete, the black. Pete was a big rangy horse. I think we credited him with more than just "horse-sense". When skidding logs he would go up and down the skidding trail without being led or driven. I don't know if anybody ever saw him do it but we all believed that if the log he was skidding got caught on a stump or rock that he would free it by himself. He would first swing far to the left to jerk it free. If it didn't come he'd do the same to the right. If it didn't come loose that way he'd hunch up a bit and lay into it with all he had. It would either come loose or the singletree (see dictionary) would break. Or so we believed. I still do, I like to.

The team got old and Dan became ill. When he died Stanley and I hooked Pete to his old mate and dragged the carcass to the edge of the swamp. We dug a grave, and dug and dug. It takes a big hole to bury a horse. When we were worn out, or thought it deep enough, we rolled the carcass in, it ended up on it's back, all four legs straight in the air. It wasn't deep enough to cover them, we could see that at a glance. We

were tired of digging and we couldn't get poor old Dan out anyhow, to dig deeper. We covered him as best we could, four legs sticking up like fence posts. It bothered us, old Dan deserved better than that. Next day we took a "one-man" saw and sawed off his legs, flush with the ground. We buried them beside him.

Our next team was Babe and Molly. A lighter team but the same colors and the same mismatch. Molly was faster. I used to ride Molly, she was good natured and gentle, and fast for a draft horse. In the evenings after work I would unharness them and turn them loose in the yard. They always rolled in the dust and then grazed peacefully about the house. I always liked that. Sometimes in the evening if the mosquitoes were bad we'd build a "smudge", a fire of chips in an old bucket. When it was burning nicely we would put green quack-grass on the fire, almost smother it. The smoke would roll out and spread about the yard. It smelled good and was of course "organically correct" as well, non chemical. Best of all it worked.

### **Lady**

Lady was a water spaniel of some sort. Earl brought her from a family, Jerome Meyers, where he lived while going to high school in Grand Rapids, but I have no memory of that. Lady was a lady, patient, tolerant, forgiving, playful, always ready for whatever was afoot. Gladys and I, and to a lesser extent Emelie perhaps, worshipped that dog. She returned our love in full measure. Our lives without her would have been 'immeasurably poorer. She was long-haired, black with a white chest and boots. We have a photo of Gladys kneeling in the front with her arms about Lady. It tells it all. She was born to be a mother. Twice each year the message went out that it was time and every would-be swain within five miles would gather about and wait for an opportunity. It was futile to try to thwart them, they would wait until they were gaunt with hunger. I remember one winter when Rowdy, our neighbor Nesseths dog, an ugly creature with brown spots above his eyes, came and waited five days in the cold. Cold? It was twenty and thirty below day after day. He huddled on a little bunch of hay that had fallen from a sleigh and moved only when he had to let a car or team go by. Did he succeed, I do not know, but one always did. In a few weeks Lady would disappear for a few days only to emerge, gaunt and hungry. We would feed her and follow her back to where she had hidden her new



1937



Top: Gladys and Lady  
Left: Gladys

family. At first she was protective, would even snarl half heartedly at us. But that pretense soon ended and we had not one, but six or seven dogs to play with. It couldn't last. We gave away as many as we could but finally we had to bite the bullet. It usually fell to me. I would wait until the other kids were gone somewhere, then would gather up the puppies in a gunny sack, tie it shut with a heavy stone inside, row out on the lake and drop it over. If it was winter I would chop a hole. It was over quickly and it didn't seem so bad, it was the normal thing to do. It would be unusually quiet that evening but things were quickly back to normal. We all knew that in six months she'd do it all again.

Lady had one other passion, she lived, I think for it. She hunted woodchucks. I never went in the woods or pasture without her and my gun, a .22 rifle. The countryside then was full of rock piles and wood and log piles of various kinds. They were the favorite refuge of woodchucks. Little did they know, that hiding in one would be their last and fatal mistake. Lady knew every pile, she checked them all. She would take us a half a mile out of our way to check a favorite pile. If I didn't go she would go alone, I think she had a route, maybe even a schedule. And when she found a woodchuck in a pile she would settle down to bark. Bark until I came and dug away the rocks or wood so she could reach it. It didn't seem to matter to her whether I came at once or later. She stayed there, she would bark far into the night, and resume the vigil in the morning. When I came she would watch and quiver while I opened up the pile. At first chance she'd grab the woodchuck by the neck, just behind the head, three shakes and it was dead from a broken neck. She never missed. She would lie down then and give me a look of total bliss. Sometimes, for what reason I don't know, it couldn't be from hunger, she would eat one. Starting, always with a foreleg, she would chew her way in and devour it. Strange.

One year the county commissioners, in their wisdom decided that woodchucks, altho totally harmless, were nevertheless a varmint to be rid of. They offered a fifteen-cent bounty for each one killed. One needed only to present the tail. I couldn't believe it, one might as well be paid for eating ice cream. Hunting began in earnest. Lady and I ranged far and wide, scouted new territory and even encroached on neighbors fields. It was lucky we didn't have a small range war.

We had a neighbor, Keeno, who, we believed was somewhat mentally retarded. Perhaps he was, perhaps not, but he was smart enough to know that baby woodchucks grew up and had tails and that dead woodchucks don't have babies. When the bounty was first announced, I, in full possession of my faculties, rushed out to kill every woodchuck I could get my hands on. He had a better plan, "why kill the goose that lays the golden eggs?" He captured them alive and lovingly amputated their tail, smeared a bit of salve on the stump, and sent them forth again to make love and multiply. Ah me! I love it, it could be straight out of Russian folklore, the lowly peasant making asses of the Apparacheeks. I didn't know this at the time, Stanley told me recently. I love it.

Although I was raising hell with next years "crop", it wasn't long before I had enough, 24, to buy a bicycle for \$3.50. It's tires were flat and the front wheel was bent but no matter, I knew I'd get enough tails to send away to Sears for new tires.

Lady was growing old, she was over-weight, it was hard for her to get up, she slept a lot. We could see the suffering in her eyes. The spirit remained but her body was failing her. (I think I know the feeling) . Soon she developed terrible lesions on her teats, she could not rise and she whimpered in pain. There was nothing else to do, but I could not do it. Stanley, I think, was the unfortunate one that finally had to do it. Someone had to do it. We kids buried Lady beneath a tree and framed the grave with white stones. She left behind a terrible void.

*Child: "Do dogs go to heaven?"  
Mother: "Do people go to heaven?"  
Child: "Yes"  
Mother: "Then dogs do too. Without dogs it would not-be heaven".*

Anon

### Nigs

After Lady died came Nigs. I don't know where he came from, did Stanley bring him home? We all, except Pa, loved him from the start. How unlike Lady he was. No quiet, patient, matron he. He was a big and boisterous Lab, full of life and tireless. When you called he came at a run, leaped at you from ten feet out, knocked you over and licked your face when

you were down. When he retrieved, which was as long as he could find someone to throw the stick or ball, he had but two speeds- full ahead or full stop.

His feet were always cut from sliding as he tried to stop or reverse direction. One year the lake froze smooth as glass, a five thousand acre mirror. We harnessed him to a sled, someone got on and someone else would throw the ball far down the lake. Digging his toe nails in for all he was worth he would go after it, full out as fast as he could go. With out slowing he would grab the ball and only then would he try to reverse direction, around and around they'd spin, dog, sled and kid. Then more clawing and scratching to get started and back he'd come. Everyone would scatter for fear of getting killed. The dog was all heart, he brightened our lives.

It was late afternoon. No one was at home, Nigs was there alone. I was a mile away, across the bay with Stanley's truck, we had been hauling gravel for the township. Andrew Urness was the boss, he looked at his watch, "Quitting time boys". I started home. Half way home, there was Nigs, lonesome, he had come out to meet me. I should have taken him into the cab. I hardly had time to think of it when there was a sickening thud, thud. I slammed on the brakes and rushed back. There was Nigs, his hind legs terribly twisted, his back broken. I sat in the ditch and held his head, he took my hand in his mouth and held it. We stayed there I do not know how long. Did someone come along and find us? Did some one bring a gun and shoot him? Mercifully I can't remember. We buried Nigs beside Lady. "Do dogs go to heaven?"

Nigs was gone. I had killed him. We never had another dog. Oh yes, there was another one for awhile, a snivelling, crawling little cur. When you called him he crawled to you on his belly and whined. Who could love a creature such as that? Pa thought that he was great. We kids ignored him, he was not our dog.

## SCHOOL

**1929**

I started school, first grade, in the fall of 1929 at Bergville. It was an almost new building, the old having burned down a few years earlier. It was a "large" white frame building with two rooms, the larger being the classroom where we all sat, all eight grades. The smaller was alternately a "library" and living quarters for the teacher, although the teacher usually boarded with a local family. The west wall was almost all windows, nice in the dark days of winter, but distracting when everyone had spring fever and the outdoors was calling. The east wall was covered with blackboards, genuine slate blackboards quite unlike the green plastic so common now. Sixty years or more later the building still stands, abandoned but little changed. It was well constructed. From the present owner I obtained most of those beautiful slate blackboards and have made some of them up as mementos for brothers and sisters. On either side of the main entry were cloakrooms, one for the boys and one for the girls. In each was a chemical toilet, they didn't work, we didn't use them. Outdoors, across the ball field were separate biffys for the genders. The word "biffy" was not in our vocabulary, they were "cans". The school was heated by a big, jacketed "Holland" wood stove and there was a little alcove with a kerosene stove where we made cocoa or soup for lunch. That apparently was a rule, that we have something hot for lunch.

We boys had to carry in the wood but lighting the stove in the morning was the teachers job. It must have been fun, to trudge a mile or more in the snow and minus 20 degree weather to light a fire in that cold building " before they started work". In the back of the room hung a thermometer that said:

*Keep me at sixty eight  
You'll be healthy and feel great!*

My first teacher was Miss Almquist. A large buxom woman. She wore print dresses, printed with large flowers. I thought she was okay. I learned to read. "Cock-a-doodle do, said the rooster". A skeptic even then, I thought to myself that I had never heard a rooster say that. Then came three fish that swam up the rain and sat in a tree. The sun came out, the rain stopped, and they were stranded. Not unlike a lot of

human behavior. But to read, it is a wondrous thing. The love of it has never left me. When all else has failed, it has not. I pity those who do not love to read.

Next was Miss Hamn, Catherine Hamn. Our school bus driver, Lauren Williams, who was so shy he would blush if he even saw a girl, was, we were certain, entranced by her. We would tease him and ask, "Which do you like most, Lauren, Hamn, ram, sheep, or mutton?" He would turn beet red.

Next came Miss Stonefield, and then, for the first and only time, in grade school, a man teacher. Leonard Bengston. A good teacher if I recall correctly. I was in the fourth grade, we began history and geography, a revelation about the greater world, I liked it. But what made the greatest impression was he himself, he was unlike any man I had ever known. His hands were always clean, absolutely clean, no grease, no ground in grime, as if he had never done a days "work" in his life. And his nails also were perfect, trimmed round and filed. I don't know why such a minor thing made such an impression but to this day hands play a major role in my judgement of a man.

#### **1934**

A new teacher, Mae Peloquin. She was different. Not for her some confining room in someone else's house. She made her quarters in the "little room". A curtain closed it off from the classroom. It was forbidden territory. And rightly so, it was her home. But we older boys, who might have been feeling stirrings of our own, speculated endlessly about it. Some mornings we would find strange tire tracks in the yard and one morning we found men's footprints on the tops of all our desks. She stayed two years. The second year her younger sister stayed with her. I can't remember if then there were more or fewer tire tracks. Likely more I would reckon.

The school was a quintessential one-room school. All eight grades together. Everyone heard all the recitations of all the others. It was very easy, by the time one got to the eighth grade he, or she, had already heard it seven times. The enrollment was very small, sometimes as few as eleven or twelve kids total in all eight grades. I was alone in my class the last three years.

**May 1933**

Each spring as the school year end neared, there was an "Achievement Day" when five or six of the rural schools of the north end of the county met in competition. There were ball games, foot races, chinning, and jumping contests. The major events, however were the spelling and the "declamatory" contests. There were two spelling contests, an oral spell down and a written test. The declamatory was also divided, one for the lower grades and one for the upper. One gave a talk, a memorized speech.

For some reason it was always held at our school, perhaps we had a better yard. It gave us the "home field advantage" anyhow. But for some reason that didn't help me. It was a measure of my insecurity, even then, that I dreaded the athletic contests. I hated being a fielder for fear that the ball would be batted toward me and I would be humiliated when I muffed it, I hated to be at bat "knowing" I would strike out, and I hid during the chinning contest so as not to be shamed. Of course my dread was groundless, but it was real to me. It was a foretaste of things to come, something to struggle with all of my life, something that was almost impervious to reason, something that seemed to be endlessly reinforced.

Somehow the athletics ended and the main events began inside. I can't remember my mental state, perhaps I was more confident there, but I represented our school for the lower grade speeches. I won. Emelie won the upper grade speech contest and both of the spelling contests. The Skoe kids had swept the field. Mother, I am sure, was pretty proud and even I, I expect, got a bit of self esteem from it. We were to go to Grand Rapids to compete in the regionals. It was there that I was to see my first movie. I was ten years old.

Grand Rapids was the county seat. It was where kids went for grades nine through twelve. All the older siblings had,- or were, going there. Some of them stayed at a boarding house run by Mrs. Hagen. We stayed with her. I don't remember much about my talk except that the auditorium seemed immense, would hold an awful lot of hay, I thought. Leonard Bengston was helpful, reassuring. "Rinse your mouth out with water before you go up, " he said, " many people have too much saliva, in their mouth". I liked that, he didn't put me down, he made it sound as if it was normal to have "too much saliva in your



First Grade - Bergville

LL Bob Anderson

LR ? and RCS - Grand Rapids



mouth". It didn't go too badly, I don't recall being especially scared. Neither Emelie nor I won but we had gotten there.

Someone took me to my first movie. King Kong. It was not "virtual reality", it wasn't even reality but it was something! I have never forgotten that, it scared the hell out of me. I probably would have crawled under the barn if there had been one around. Forty years later I saw it again- I understand why I was scared.

I finished grade school in 1937, the only one in my class the last three years. My last teacher was Miss Paciotti. She was the first person of Italian descent that I had ever seen. She was nice, I liked her and being the oldest boy in school I developed some sort of rapport with her that was comfortable for me. I liked that.

Next year I was to start high school, not as usual in Grand Rapids, but in Northome. It was out of our county but closer, within bussing distance. It could hardly have been otherwise because I was, by then, doing almost all of the farm chores and most of whatever farming was being done. The boys were "working out", or getting established in the timber hauling business. Grand Rapids was out of question.

#### **The Chicago Connection.**

The resort that old Grilley built on the land he bought from Pa was called "the Cedars". I don't know when he built it, it was there when I first remember. Island Lake was yet a fishing lake. People came from Chicago and elsewhere to camp and fish. They were "exotics", from a land unknown to me and they talked strangely. They didn't know a spruce tree from a balsam, usually called every thing with needles a pine. But they had kids and I played with them and played tricks on them. One trick was to get them to chew a leaf of smart weed. I was currently playing with a kid named Norvel, Windy Norvel. He deserved the title, he bragged all the time. Suddenly a new kid appeared on the scene.

His name was Bob, Bob Anderson, from Chicago, Berwyn actually, but I didn't know the difference. He was a year or two older than I, bigger, stronger and "street smart". When he walked

he raised up on his toes at every step, I can see him yet. Ah fickleness, I switched allegiance at once and poor Windy now became a pest. I think this began when I was about ten and continued until I was fifteen or sixteen. As long as they were there and I was not working we were inseparable. We had BB guns and shot at every thing that moved, including frogs. Bob's father worked at Bell Telephone, and they seemed terribly rich to me, bought exotic foods that I had never tasted before, like graham crackers and corn flakes.

I was fascinated by the way he rolled his shirtsleeve's. Every man I had known, when he rolled his sleeves, rolled them all the way above his elbows, half way between elbow and shoulder. Not he, he turned them only twice so they lay casually just above his wrist. To this day I never turn up my sleeves but that I think of Murray Anderson.

#### **June, 1943**

I was in the army, basic training, at Camp Kohler, California. We were on the firing range, with rifles. I thought it would be a snap, had I not grown up with a rifle? "Load and lock. Ready on the right? Ready on the left? Fire at will!" The white flag waved, Maggie's drawers, a miss. Again, "Fire at will". Maggies drawers, another miss. I couldn't do it, I simply couldn't hit that target very well. Another nail in the coffin of my self-confidence. Little did I know that I had scar tissue in my right eye. I couldn't see the sights clearly. I had had several eye examinations, no one had told me.

It was summer, in 1936, Andersons were there and Bob and I were playing with slingshots. I was in the can (outdoor biffy) holding up a piece of white glass to a knothole. He was to shoot at it with his sling-shot, we had been doing it all after noon, no one had hit it yet. I waited, and waited, nothing happened. I took down the glass and looked out the hole to see what was the matter. Bulls eye! The stone hit me squarely in the eye. Every thing went black, I awoke in bed. I could not open my eye, it was too painful.

In those days no one, at least not us, went to a doctor unless they were dying. I was not dying, so the eye went untreated. The pupil dilated to it's fullest and never came down. I always wondered why I kept that eye half closed when in the sun.





TL      The House - Circa, 1932  
TR      Pa  
C      Wesley & Larry  
BL      Gladys, Marie, Gordon, Russel  
BR      Emelie & Wes





TL Chip, Stan, Bena  
TR Emelie, Larry, Karen  
LC Bena, Chip, Larryu, Emelie  
BL Marie  
Circa 1942

It was in the seventies, I was having an eye examination, "What did you do to your right eye?" "What do you mean?" "You have a cataract, a scar right in the center of it." Of course, now it became clear, not the eye, but the reason I couldn't see the rifle sights. It was the slingshot stone of years ago. The cataract is still there, I have learned to shoot left handed but, it is always awkward.

After 1938 or '39 Andersons came no more. I lost track of Bob, he went into the army I believe and had psychological problems of some sort, I know not what. In the spring of 1943 I was enroute from a school in Missouri, on my way to be inducted into the army at Fort Snelling. I visited the Andersons in Chicago. Bob was home, discharged or on medical furlough. He was lying down upstairs, too ill or too distraught to come down. It was all rather mysterious and I never did understand it fully. I never saw him again and believe he died somewhere out west at an early age.

There was more to the Chicago Connection than that however. The boys, while on a visit to Chicago for the Worlds Fair, stayed at the Andersons, and Bena, while visiting there, met her young lothario, Stan Petzel. A fortuitous meeting for us all. A better brother-in-law has never lived, but then I ended up with three more just as good.

Bob had a sister, Marjorie. She was Stanley's age. It was a summer romance. I don't know how serious it was or how many years it lasted but it seemed like a big deal at the time. It seemed as if saying goodbye each year took them an awful long time. That suited me fine, I dreaded their leaving each year, life seemed so drab when they had gone.

One year, near the end, they rented Mutt Neary's cabin and Mrs. Anderson and Bob stayed all summer. Bob had a fancy new .22 rifle, it had a magazine and was self cocking. When the bolt was closed it was ready to fire, unlike mine that had to be cocked by hand. His dad had given him an entire case of shells, not a box, a case of boxes. Twenty five shells in a box, fifty boxes in a case, or was it the other way around? It doesn't matter, it was to me an unbelievable quantity of ammunition. He used them up as if there was no end. A box cost fifteen cents, I used them sparingly. One box would last me a month or more.

My old single shot .22 had no safety, it needed none since I had to pull the hammer back by hand. One day three of us were walking abreast along the road. For some reason I was carrying Bob's gun, not my own. I was carrying it across my chest with my finger on the trigger as I did my own, never thinking of the safety. It went off, the bullet passed through the collar of the kid beside me. So close, an inch, at most, from tragedy. I can still see the look on that kid's face and I have never been careless with guns since.

#### The Raft

We always had a raft, a floating raft out in the lake. We would get four or five or six of the biggest cedar logs that we could handle. We'd skid them into the lake with the horses and lay them side by side, butt to top. Across them we'd spike planks for the deck and anchor it in deep water. We used, at least one year, an old Model T block for an anchor. It must lie there yet, where we dropped it.

We would get the biggest, longest plank that we could find and make a spring board. One end was chained to the deck, the middle propped up on a block and the other end reaching out over the water about six feet high. With burlap from a sack nailed on the end we were ready for the Olympics. To get to it one had to swim, how no one drowned I do not know. I remember one time when I could swim, but not that far, Stanley agreed to tow me out if I hung onto his ankle. Half way out I lost my grip but he kept going. I sank to the bottom, the water over my head, and started walking. God must have been my compass for I walked the right way and made it back to shore.

#### The Well

*You can talk of gin and beer  
When you're quartered safe out 'ere,  
And you're sent to penny fights at Aldershot it  
But when it come to slaughter  
You will do your work on water,  
And you'll lick the bloomin boots,*

*of 'ims that's got it.*

Rudyard Kipling

Our first well was little more than a hole dug at the edge of the swamp, down the hill from the house. It was a long way to carry the water. The well, I think was about twelve" or

fourteen feet deep, perhaps somewhat more. For curbing, to keep the dirt from caving in, it had been lined with wooden stave barrels from which the ends had been removed. Once, it got pretty dirty from frogs and mice that had fallen in and died. I being the only one small enough to slip through the barrels was elected to be lowered down on a rope, down into that cold, wet, slimy muck at the bottom. Stanley lowered down a bucket and a little shovel and I was to shovel between my legs and fill the bucket, which he would then haul up and empty. I could look up and see his head framed in a circle of light above. It looked like it was an awful long way away. I didn't much like it but didn't know enough to be real scared. I should have been, the barrel staves were rotten, the dirt crumbling. There was no such thing as OSHA then, people hardly ever considered risk in the things they did.

Later a new well was dug near the house. With a bucket on a windlass and a short handled shovel it was dug by hand to a depth of nearly thirty feet and curbed with used bricks from an old sawmill. It was, it is, a good well, the water is clear and sweet. It has not been used in forty years but it is as it was dug sixty years ago, the brick curbing still intact.

Current law says that it should be destroyed, filled, if not in use. Current law can go to hell. I put a new concrete 'cap on it and there it remains, waiting I hope, for someone to use it again.

#### Circa 1934

*I meant to do my work today But a brown bird  
sang in the apple tree, And a butterfly flitted  
across the field, And all the leaves were  
calling me. And the wind went sighing over the  
land Tossing the grasses to and fro, And a  
rainbow held out it's shining hand So what  
could I do , but laugh and go.*

Le Galienne

There were no brown birds, no apple trees, but it was spring. A warm day in March, perhaps the first warm day. It was afternoon recess, we scooted down the icy road, one ski each. One foot on the ski, the other foot pushing, much like a skate board of today. We were out of sight, we heard the teacher ring the bell, by mutual, unspoken consent we kept on going.



Marge Anderson, Stan, Emelie  
Stanley, Leo & Earl

RCS



Stanley



RCS & Earl



Stanton's K-7  
Circa 1942

We skipped, the Parr kids, the Kneables and I. We came to our place, there was Pa, sitting on the woodpile sunning himself. We joined him, he talked to us. There was no mention of the fact that we had skipped, no mention whatsoever. I don't remember what we talked about, I remember only that it was easy, and comfortable, and I felt very good about it. I had never known Pa like that, he had never talked to me like that. Was it because there were other boys there too? I don't know, but like the cake in the kitchen, it was so unique it imprinted on my mind, never to be forgotten.

#### The Trucks

It was 1934, the depth of the recession, but things were changing in the woods. The log drives on the rivers were ended, horses were giving way to trucks. Primitive as they were, with their skinny little tires, they changed logging forever. The boys bought one, a 1934 Chevrolet. I -was eleven, I remember it well. The first night they had it, Stanton drove, I rode with him to Kneables, for some reason. He parked it at the beginning of the driveway into their place, with the engine running, while he walked in. "Watch that dial" he said, "if the needle gets up to the red, shut it off". I sat there in that warm, new-smelling cab with my eyes glued to that needle. I was enchanted, it was the beginning of a life long fascination with trucks. To this day there is nothing more satisfying than the sound and feel of taking a good truck up through it's gears. For my older brothers it was the first step away from manual labor toward businesses of their own.

#### The Radio

The first radio we saw, or heard, was at Nick Johnsons. It was an ungainly thing with a set of earphones, only one person could listen at a time. Then one day someone brought home one of our own. It was oval, like a sawed off beehive and needed three batteries, an "A", a "B" and a "C". Ten years later I learned what they were for. The radio changed our lives, it changed every ones lives.

Jack Armstrong, the All American Boy

Lum and Abner

Amos 'n Andy

Major Bowes

The Hit Parade

"This is the half a million watt transmitter of the Nation

Station, WLW, the Crosley Radio Corporation, Cincinnati.

"My friends! The only thing we have to fear is fear itself"...

The neighbors would come, everyone would sit, almost afraid to breath or make a sound while their hero, almost their god, would give his "Fireside Chat" to the nation.

Later we got a newer radio, a Coast to Coast model. It needed only a car battery to operate but the battery ran down quickly. Stanley had brought home from Dakota an old Windcharger, a small windmill-like affair. It worked but no one knew how to connect it properly so it was little help. I got an old Maytag washing machine motor, coupled it to an old car generator and hooked the generator to the battery. It worked. I think it was, although he never said so, the only thing I ever did that Pa approved of. Each night after school I would fill the tank with gas and start it up and let it run while I did the chores. Unfortunately, I didn't know how to connect a "cutout" to prevent the battery from draining back through the generator when the engine ran out of gas. So I listened for it and when I heard the engine cough would -run and disconnect it.

### **The Washing Machine**

Bena bought Mother a washing machine. What a seemingly innocuous statement, but what a major event. Where did she get the money? She must have scrimped and saved it from her meager teachers salary. God Bless her. It was from Sears Roebuck, a "Water Witch" it was called, it was green, with brown spackeling. I can see it yet, and hear it. Prior to that time everything was washed by hand, work clothes, dress clothes, towels, linen, diapers every thing for twelve people. Hour after hour, scrubbing on a board, wringing out by hand, rinsing and wringing out again. Endlessly. In the winter Mother would hang the still wet clothes outdoors on the clothesline. They would instantly freeze stiff as a board. After a few days they would be partialy dry but still stiff. She would bring them in, a few at a time, and dry them on a rack. Before they thawed the long underwear could be stood up stiff, erect and grotesque, which somehow amused us greatly.

The machine had a one-cylinder Briggs & Stratton engine, Pa cut a hole in the wall for the exhaust pipe. The engine was coupled to the washer by a roller chain. It was so noisy that

no one could be heard, it was impossible to talk. Later we replaced the chain with home-made pulleys and a v-belt and it was somewhat quieter then. The pulley edges were razor sharp, the belt was tight. Somehow I got my thumb in them, it went around the pulley. It almost cut my thumb off in two places. I still have two scars around my thumb.

Above the tank was a set of hard rubber rollers for wringing out the water. They were fed by hand, a dangerous set up. On top there was a bar, which when struck would release the pressure on the rollers. One day Mother's hand was caught and pulled in all the way to her elbow. Perhaps Pa did not know about the emergency release, perhaps in the panic he forgot, but instead of hitting the release he reversed the wringer. The rollers rolled her arm and hand back out, the blood squirting from her fingers. Oh God, the agony of it. And yet, the machine was a blessing, and God Bless Bena For it.

#### **Putting Up Ice**

Each year come March, when the snow was going down on -the lake, when the winter logging was coming to a close, when the "spring breakup" was at hand we would "put up" ice. It was a fun, almost festive time, I enjoyed it. Together with some neighbors an area on the lake would be shoveled clear and marked off like a checker board. Then the sawing would begin, three or four guys with big coarse-toothed saws would saw away for hours cutting out big square blocks. The sleigh would be driven up to the hole, the horses nervous, and the blocks slid up a ramp on to it. When loaded, up to the ice house where the blocks were off-loaded and set down in rows. It was my job to cover them with sawdust, to fill the cracks and pack it down around the edges. One year I hid a bottle of Fitgers beer between two cakes. I found it there one hot day the next August. We used the ice in the icebox and for ice cream. I always enjoyed putting it up and never minded digging it out in the summer.

#### **The Bicycle**

I bought the bicycle from Donald Parr for \$3.50. The tires were flat, unfixable. Never mind, we, Emelie and I, learned to ride it anyhow. Down the little grassy slope from house to maple tree, over and over until we could balance it. Finally Lady and I got enough woodchuck tails to send away to Sears for tires. They came and we glued them on. Marvelous, we seemed to float on air, to have wings. We got enough

woodchucks to send away for a new front wheel, made not of wood like the old one, but of metal, straight as a die, marvelous. But one day Stanley was leaving for work with the truck. It had a steel gravel box. I followed on the bike, down a hill, all out to keep up. I looked back for some reason, he stopped, he had forgotten his lunch. I was still looking back when I hit. I woke up in bed, nothing broken except my new wheel. I said, "Lady we have got to keep on hunting."

### **Muskrats**

I always had a trapline but the truth is I didn't really know much about trapping. I didn't know that it is almost impossible to trap mink except near flowing water. I never got one, and had but scant success with weasels. I knew a bit more about muskrats, enough to know that by the time the legal season opened in March they were already abandoning the houses and it was almost impossible to trap them. One year however the lake froze over clear as glass. I was walking along near shore and I saw this runway under the ice. I put a trap in it, came that way in an hour and had a rat. I put two traps down, got two rats. I had found a colony of bank rats and they all used that runway. To hell with the season, in one week I took seventy rats from that bank. I'd hit a gold mine. But then I couldn't keep up with the skinning, I had to do the chores after school, and anyhow did not have enough stretching boards. So I froze them and put them in barrels to protect them from mice. For the next month I thawed and skinned two each day until I had them done. But what to do with them, they were illegal. I knew of an outlaw fur buyer in Squaw Lake so I got my brother's car, waited until midnight and drove down there. I was sure the FBI was tailing me all the way but I managed to "shake em off". I sneaked up the back stairs and put myself at his mercy. He offered me seventy cents each for them. To this day I think, that under the circumstances, it was a pretty reasonable price. He could have offered me twenty cents and I'd of taken it. I had forty nine dollars, an enormous sum and hadn't gone to jail. I looked every fall for another colony like that but never found one.

It was 1945, I was stationed in Chungking. Chungking, China. Someone from the Red Cross came down, or did they call me up? I can't remember but there was a wire for me. They gave it to me, I opened it. "We are sorry to inform you that your father. . . . " The wire was a month late, he had died five weeks earlier.

What is worse than to grieve the death of your father? It is to not grieve at all. "What's the wire all about, Skoe?" "My father died". "Oh" In the army you are surrounded by men. You are alone. No more was said. But I grieved because I felt no grief at all.

What did I know about the man, what made him what he was? I don't know much. Left motherless and rejected, then carried away to a strange land, what unspoken sorrows did he harbor? If I attribute my problems and my failures to the traumas of my childhood can I deny the same excuse to him? No, of course I can not. But who will break the chain, must it go on forever? Did he try to do better by his children than -was done to him? Did he do the best he could? How much can be blamed on the stroke he had? The questions are unanswerable, I do not know. I know I have no rancor for him, I neither hate nor love him, I have long since forgiven him for anything, real or imagined, that he did or did not do. He must have been, in his later years at least, a terribly frustrated, lonely, bitter man. No one should come to such an end. I feel compassion for him.

Yes, I can now forgive, have compassion, understand and make allowances, all these things. But doing that now did not help me then, and I wonder now what might have been. It's no help now, it's over, done.

*The moving Finger Writes; and having writ, Moves  
on: Nor all thy Piety nor Wit Shall lure it back  
to cancel half a line Nor all thy Tears wash out  
a Word of it.*

Omar Khayyam

He did not lack for intelligence, that I know. He read a lot and took an active interest in politics. At one time he had

been the Justice of Peace for the community. One of his powers as Justice was to perform marriages. I remember -one night, it was quite late, this couple came to be married. We knew them, the guy had a big, red, unkempt beard, the girl not exactly chic. Pa mumbled a few words, they gave him two dollars, and they left. I was pretty disappointed, I thought there would be more to it than that. I don't know what I had expected, perhaps that the marriage would be consummated on the spot, whatever that entailed. Of course that marriage had been consummated months earlier, that was the reason for the haste.

Pa's politics were left wing, socialistic. Minnesota then was ruled by the Farmer-Labor Party and Governor Floyd B. Olson. Never mind the corruption, Pa worshipped him along with Franklin Roosevelt. The party had a paper, a weekly, he devoured that, believed every word of it, I think. We were at Birchmont, an old dance hall across the lake, at some community affair when word came that Governor Olson had died of cancer. Pa and Andrew Nelson sat and cried.

Politically he was most embittered by the "Pension Lien Law", sure that it was the work of bankers and "big shots". He received a small pension from the State, only a few dollars each month I believe, but important to him. The law was written so that upon the pensioners death all the money had to be repaid from the estate, if there was any with which to pay it. There was no money in his estate, but the law cast a shadow on the title to the farm. He hated that and railed against it.

Sometime about 1934 when I was ten or eleven he had a stroke, or perhaps more than one minor strokes. He would have been sixty-three then. He had some slight paralysis of the left side of his face and some also of his left arm and leg. I don't know if it affected his personality. Except for the two incidents mentioned earlier I have almost no memory of him prior to that time. Or, perhaps what followed after over-shadowed all that came before.

He was, he became, moody, he would sit for hours and brood. I had to work with him, to do the chores, to do what farming that we did. I was confused, I didn't know what to do, how to react. He never spoke directly to me, he never addressed me by my name. I suppose when talking to people he must sometime

have said my name. I never heard him say it. I have no memory of ever touching him, nor of him touching me, never. Perhaps when I was a baby he may of held me but I have no memory of it.

I was growing, full of energy and ideas, ideas to make things easier, to do things differently. He killed them one by one with silent, brooding disapproval.

It was in the seventies, forty years later, on the wild rice farm. I was the boss, I said, "Let's do this". I don't remember what job it was, it doesn't matter. One of the men said, "It won't work, we've never done it that way before". I blew up, "Damn it all, let's just do it and we'll worry tomorrow about the fact that it can't be done." I was embarrassed that I had lost my temper, they were good men trying to be helpful. I couldn't explain to them that it was a fifteen-year old boy that had lost his cool.

The alienation worsened steadily. I don't think the older siblings realized the tension. We always were glad when people came, anyone, family, strangers, visitors anyone. It seemed to ease the strain.

One morning I awoke to a terrible sound. It was Lady, she cowered beneath the manger near the barn door. She was snarling and snapping, trying to defend herself. Pa, enraged, stood over her with a pitchfork, stabbing and jabbing at her until she was bleeding from a dozen wounds. What had brought this on? I knew that Pa hated her, but this? I suppose that in bringing in the cows Lady had refused to do his bidding, I do not know. In a panic I ran to get an older brother, no, that would take too long and who knows what would come of that? I ran back toward the barn. Pa saw me then and turned away. Lady ran to me and licked my hand. No mention of this was ever spoken, never. I don't know, perhaps none of the others ever knew about it, I never spoke of it.

Things worsened, Pa would sit for hours and brood, and talk to himself. What does thought consist of, is it not a silent dialogue with ones self, a monologue? I believe we think in words, I believe I do. Does it matter if they are silent or spoken aloud. I don't know that either, there is so much I do not know, but we hated it when he talked, incessantly, aloud, to himself. We never knew what he said. We never approached

him without warning him of our coming. I would rattle a pail, or break a stick, or call to the dog so that he was aware of my coming and would fall silent.

It was 1948, I was going with Sue, Sue Scriver, I was almost a member of the family. It was supper time. I was at one side of the table, Sally and Sue across from me, their mother at one end, and their father at the other. He was joking and teasing the girls, winking at me. He took one bite of supper and started paying their mother the most outrageous compliments. "It was the best roast he had ever tasted!" "Weren't the kids lucky to have a mother that could cook like that?" She looked at the kids and smiled, they just beamed. Of course they had heard it all a hundred times before, maybe a thousand, they loved it. I had heard it before too but could even so hardly believe it. Was this what fathers were supposed to be like?

It was 1992, a tousle-headed little boy was running and laughing. Suddenly something frightened him. He ran for refuge between his fathers knees, turned around with one hand on each knee in total security, got a reassuring pat and took off again to face the world. Can a sixty-year plus man envy a four-year old boy? Yes, yes indeed he can, more than he ever envied anybody in the world.

After Mother died, in 1939, things worsened. The alienation and the tension increased. We kids looked forward even more to visits, visits by anyone. One day the kids came running, "Pa's got a gun!". And so he did, he sat in the back yard with a gun across his lap. We peered around the corner-not knowing what to do. He looked so unnatural, he was not a hunter, we had never seen him hold a gun. We didn't know if it was loaded or empty, or what he intended to do, or what he was saying to himself. We left him alone, not knowing what else to do. Sometime in the night he put it away. It was never spoken of again.

"We are sorry to inform you that..." I grieved because I felt no grief. Now I am an adult, I can "understand", "forgive", "make allowances". Yes, I can perhaps, but it is not so easy.

*The moving finger writes.....*

It wrote all right, and some of us, Emily, I know, and I, were

sorely wounded by it's writing. Wounds that never healed, not even to this day. Ernie Larson, a pop psychologist writes that every adult, every adult, has within him, or her, an "inner child". An "inner child" that searches endlessly,-and fruitlessly, for what he was deprived of as a child; who seeks forever to avoid the pain that he remembers- and so defeats himself.

I can not but wonder what my life might have been, what I might have achieved, if I could have been like that tousle-headed little boy. I wonder if, in spite of his own troubles, if Pa might not have done better by us; I wonder if he did the best he could.

*Listen again. One evening at the Close Of  
Ramazan, ere the better Moon arose, In that  
old Potters shop I stood alone With the  
clay Population round in rows.*

..... but after silence spake  
A Vessel of more ungainly Make; "They sneer at me  
for being all awry, What! Did the hand then of the  
Potter shake?"

Khayyam

## HIGH SCHOOL

In 1937 I began High School at Northome. Northome, like most rural schools at that time had a caste system. The "in" caste were the town kids who had grown up together, who walked to school and thus could "stay after" for all the activities, including sports. The other caste were the farm kids who came by bus, and left immediately, by bus, to go home and do the chores. That obviously included me. The academics were a breeze, simple really, but I hated Phy Ed. I was small, I'd had never seen a football, nor touched a basketball. Painfully shy and inhibited, I hated undressing in front of others; hated to pretend that I knew how to play those games; hated the humiliation of it all. No matter that it was probably all imagined, it was nevertheless real to me. More nails in the coffin of my self-esteem.

There were moments. The English teacher didn't like me. Why I do not know, maybe because she knew I thought the stuff she



XXXIII

#### REPORT TO PARENTS

Name Skoe, Raymond Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ First Name \_\_\_\_\_

School Northome Grade XI

#### SIX-WEEKS PERIODS

YEAR	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth	Average	Final Test	Final Average
19.39 to 19.40									
Days Present	<u>25</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>25</u>					
Days Absent	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>						
Times Tardy		<u>0</u>							
Conduct	<u>U</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>U</u>						
Attitude	<u>U</u>	<u>U</u>							
Industry									
English	<u>C</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>					
Algebra	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>B+</u>					
Geology	<u>C</u>	<u>D+</u>	<u>B-</u>	<u>C-</u>					
Ag. I	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C-</u>					

#### INTERPRETATION OF MARKS

- "F" Failure.
- "I" Incomplete. If work is not made up, mark will revert to "F".
- "D" Lowest passing mark. Work unsatisfactory. Failure possible.
- "C" Average. Student has done work outlined and is qualified for further work in this subject.
- "B" Indicates more than average ability in grasping subject matter.
- "A" Indicates genuine intellectual interest, ability to master subject matter and a spirit of real scholarship.
- "U" Unsatisfactory.
- "S" Satisfactory.

NORTHOME HIGH SCHOOL  
Second from Left, bottom row

"A rebel Without A Cause"

taught was easy. It was easy. One time she gave a test, one hundred and ten questions on Silas Marner, or was it Ivanhoe. I got every one of them correct, every one. It almost killed her to read off the grades in class. I pulled a couple of nails out of the coffin of my self esteem.

During my freshman year my brother Earl had the school bus contract, ie, he hauled the four or five us to and from school each day in his car. The next year he lost it to an "old" (45 perhaps) guy who claimed poverty or veterans preference or something. Naturally I resented that and took great pleasure in the fact that he was a terrible driver. He drove like one who hadn't learned until he was forty-five, he hadn't. It snowed eight inches one night, wet and heavy. He was totally out of his element. Next morning he got as far as our place, but couldn't turn around, couldn't back up, couldn't go forward. I smirked and said, "Slide over, I'll drive it for you". And so I did, made the route, picked up the kids and delivered them and myself to school on time with him sitting like a dummy alongside of me. I loved it.

I went three years to Northome. But, after mother died during my sophomore year and the conflicts with Pa at home worsened so did my situation at school. Other than hanging around with a couple of the roughest guys, and drinking too much at times, I don't know, nor remember, exactly what we were doing that kept us on probation most of the time. Whatever it was, it was enough for someone, some of the older siblings, to decide that I was best out of there. Someone, not I, decided that I should go to Grand Rapids for my senior year. I started there in September, 1940.

## MOTHER

Mother was the absolute authority on baked beans. Be it picnic, party, or pot luck supper it was a given that she would bring the baked beans. No neighbor woman was presumptuous enough to challenge her on that. They were good. But she did more than that, she was a "doer". She could rise on Sunday morning, fix breakfast, wash the dishes, take care of the milk, pull a few weeds in the garden, get five kids ready for church, dress herself and be ready while Pa was still shaving. She was also the pillar, the anchor of the family. As Pa withdrew more and more into his private, moody, world we depended more and more on her.

I have been told that when she was young, and not so burdened, that in the evenings she would read to her children. I like to believe that that is true. When I knew her she had little time for that. The memory of her that I cherish is that one summer night she finished all her work, or did she just put it aside? She washed, and changed her clothes, and said to me, "Come, we'll walk over to Grilleys". And so we walked, together, through the warm evening, just she and I. For a brief time I had her all to myself. I suppose that I was twelve or thirteen but it is as clear in my memory as if it had happened but yesterday. It is the way that I like to remember her.

It was November, 1938, the depth of the depression. In spite of the worship of Franklin Roosevelt he had not ended the depression, it was not to end until war came. The boys were scouring the country for work and finding little. It was dark, the days short, and gloomy. No one realized how desperately worn out and weary Mother was.

I came home from school one evening. Mother was "gone". No, physically she was yet there but she had gone, gone to some place we could not reach her. Had she retreated to a kinder, easier place? I do not think so, I think she had escaped to a place of terror. I sat by her bed, and held her hand, she sat upright and said, "I am the Mother Magdalene, I am the Mother Magdalene". Her voice was pleading and her eyes were full of sadness. She sank back down on her pillow and clutched my hand. I could not reach her.

What to do, oh God what to do? How to help her? The older brothers and sisters came to help, but what to do? How could we care for her? One time I found her wandering, freezing in the snow, I brought her in, what could we do? We took her to the hospital in Grand Rapids, they could do nothing for her. How could we care for her? I was fifteen, Gladys eleven, Russell eight and Will only five. The older kids were married, were struggling, had obligations of their own. We could not care for her. She was taken to Moose Lake, oh God the thought of it, that ugly, cold, red brick asylum. To leave her there... I never saw her alive again.

This was 1938. Even today, fifty-five years later there is a stigma attached to mental illness, what euphemism does one use, what does one say? Then it was much worse, much worse. And so it was bottled up, if possible revealed to no one, never spoken of. A private sorrow shared with no one.

It was the coach, Benny Dixon speaking, "Why don't you try out for basketball"? "My mother is in the hospital". "What hospital?" "Moose Lake." "Oh." He turned away and said no more. No help, no comfort, nothing. Later he married the English teacher, I was glad, I thought they deserved each other.

So life went on somehow, we survived. We packed lunches, went to school, Gladys and I and the kids. Pa brooded as before. We had no idea of his thoughts, he never spoke to us. On Saturdays Gladys and I brought in snow and melted it and gave the kids their baths. The older siblings came when they were able. We must have had a Christmas, I can't remember but I think that was the year that Marie bought me a pair of skis.

Tootle lima, luma, tootle luma, luma Ta-  
oodle li yay  
Any umb-a-rellas, any umb-a-rellas To  
fix today  
He'll fix your umbrella and go on his way  
Singing tootle luma luma, ta-oodle li yay  
Pop Song, 1939

The juke box was hammering it out. We were in a small restaurant in Grand Rapids. Stanton and Beatrice and I, we were on our way to Moose Lake. The call had come- Mother was dying. I remember the menu, I had never ordered from one.



TL Gordon, Chip, Russel  
TR Gordon, RSC, Russel  
LC Bonfire at the pines  
BL Gordon and Russel

There was something called veal. "What is veal?" "Calf meat". "Oh, why didn't they say so?" We ate and left, the juke box still drumming:

Toodle luma luma, Toodle luma, luma, Ta-  
oodle li yay

*It was bitter cold in February, the roads were snowpacked and icy. Where were the kids, Gladys, and Russel and Gordon, were they left all alone at home to wait and wonder? Please not that. We drove through the night. Mother had died before we got there. We did not see her.*

Next morning we drove the long ride back to Grand Rapids and stopped in front of Libbey's funeral home. Did we have them bring her home once more? I can hardly remember but we must have because I remember shoveling a path so the hearse could back up to the front door; a door that had been nailed shut for winter. I remember filing out of the church, past some of my classmates, out in to the cold. I remember the pile of frozen dirt in the cemetery, how could they have dug the frozen ground? The minister intoned something about returning to dust. But there was no dust there, only frozen chunks of clay. I could hear them thudding against her coffin as we walked away. Then home to a cold and empty house. It's fire had gone out. I think we all grieved privately, I think we did not know how to share in it, nor how to comfort one another. I don't know what Pa's feelings were, nor what loss he felt. He never spoke to us.

Afterwards, as we rode past the cemetery to school each day we could see that awful pile of frozen clay-until mercifully it snowed and covered it.

The winter wore on. We went to school, we helped each other and older brothers and sisters came often. Thank God for them. Spring came finally. It was easier then, but I remember little of that summer and the fall, it blurs together. Sometime in the following year, a neighbor couple, Richard Lamoureux and his wife, came and lived with us. I was in my junior year at Northome, in trouble most all of the time. Gladys and the kids were in school. Time passed, another summer came. I farmed, as best I could. Our horses, Babe and Molly, were getting old. Our machinery, primitive

and worn out, was hardly more than junk and always broken down. I went through the motions. Pa, of course, disapproved of everything I did or tried to do.

It was mid-summer, 1940, I was scheduled to go to Grand Rapids for my senior year. I needed money for clothes. A sawmill was starting up at Alvwood, a lath mill sawing laths for snow fences. The foreman was a big, tall, dour, guy, I asked-him for a job, and got it, at thirty-five cents an hour. Little did I know what I was in for.

In sawing laths from logs there is much waste, slabs, and bark and edgings. They come down a conveyor into a cradle. When it became full I was to switch the conveyor to another cradle while I tied the first bundle at both ends with twine and carried it across the floor and loaded it on a dray. By the time I got back the second cradle was already overfull, I had to go faster. I ran both ways. The slabs were rough and splintery, I had no gloves, my hands were bleeding. I was used to work, and wiry for my size, but this was something else. I hung on until the noon whistle, a half hour for lunch, I couldn't eat. The whistle blew and we started up again. I stuck it out until the whistle blew at five. I think that foreman enjoyed it all. I would have died rather than give him the satisfaction of seeing me give up. I got home and collapsed in sleep. I believe that was the first time ever that I was home and didn't do the milking.

I can't remember how long I worked there, or even if I went back the next day. Stanton rescued me. He said, "Come along with me and drive one of my trucks". He had three trucks and was working them on a highway construction job in southern Minnesota. The pay was seventy cents an hour, a fortune it seemed to me. Seventy cents for driving a truck? I loved to drive a truck, I would have done it for free. It was like being paid to hunt woodchucks or to eat ice cream. I drove, about a month, until it was time to go to school in Grand Rapids. I had some money for clothes.

Someone had arranged for me to work for my board and room on a little farm just south of town. A shopping center is there now. In the morning I got up and did the milking and fed the cattle before cleaning up and catching the bus to school. In the evening I came home, changed, and hauled out the manure,

fed the cattle again, and did the milking and whatever other chores needed to be done. I had just come from a world of men, and machines and camaraderie and now, here I was, a little boy again. The man, Bill Brown, was nice enough, mild and easy going but his wife was big and mean. And not very clean. She wasted no time in putting me in my place, and that was in the barn- or in my room.

I rode the bus, I didn't know a single kid. No one spoke to me, I spoke to no one. I had no idea what to say. School was no better. Grand Rapids was a big and busy school, I knew no one, took no part in anything, hardly spoke to anyone. When classes ended I got on the bus and went back to the cows. Loneliness and isolation were almost unbearable.

I came back one evening, passed through the kitchen on my way to change my clothes, and saw their baby on the floor. It's diapers were wet and worse, it's nose was running and her hands were grimy. Somehow she had pulled the butter dish onto the floor and was playing with the butter. It was smeared all over everything, the floor, her clothes, her face, her diapers. The woman saw it about the same time as I. She snatched up the dish and scraped the butter back onto it from the floor and the baby, as much of it as she could get. She formed it into a neat little mound and put it on the table. It was there for supper.

I knew then that I was going to move. I had been cleaning barns and milking cows all my life, I didn't want to do it anymore, I didn't want to live like a hermit any more.. I couldn't bear it anymore. I told Bill, I was sorry. He was a decent man, I rather liked him.

The Hagens lived in town. They "boarded" out of town students, usually girls in their house. In their back yard they had a little trailer house that they rented to boys. I moved into it. It was about eight by twelve or fourteen feet in size. There were four of us, two Finnish kids from Squaw Lake, a little freshman kid named Beckman from Dora Lake and I. There was just room for four bunks, no place to walk or study, no bath, but also, no smell of cows.

I got a job, I got three jobs. Each afternoon, after class, I did janitor work at the school, sweeping and mopping, four to seven. At eight I went to a bowling alley, the Rainbow,

and set pins until twelve or one in the morning. Pin setters were not automatic then, you sat in a pit behind the pins with your feet up to avoid the crashing ball and pins. Then, quick like, you put the ball into the 'return track" and the fallen pins into a rack above. I could pick four pins at a time, two in each hand. Some guys with big hands could pick six. When the frame was finished, and the pins all picked, we pulled the lever down, set the pins and got out of the way. If the bowlers weren't too good or fast we often set two lanes simultaneously, thus doubling our take.

In the morning I got up about six and ran a paper route. I think the guy took advantage of me and gave me a "clean up route", a lot of scattered addresses that didn't fit in a regular route. A house here, a house there. I walked miles it seemed to make a half a dollar.

I found that most of my time at Northome had been wasted. I had had no math, no chemistry, no science. I had learned to cut the horns off a bull and how to castrate a sheep. Great, but of what use? And even then the waste continued because, for what reason I don't know, even at Grand Rapids I ended up in "Ag" classes. It was all a snap, I could get my sleep in school, but it left me standing in a hole when I enrolled in engineering at the University. Of course, at that time it never occurred to me that I could make it at the U. That was not in my scope of thought.

The caste system in Grand Rapids was more rigid even than at Northome. It only served to increase my isolation. I took no part in school life, no sports, no activities. But in town my social life improved somewhat. I made some friends among the out-of-towners, mostly among the Finnish kids from Squaw Lake. Most all of them knew what cow manure smelled like. I felt more at ease with them.

Social Science class, I was one seat from the front. Doris C. in front of me, a cutie. John Evans the teacher. He seemed to like me, he never put me down. He asked Doris something, of course she didn't know the answer so I whispered it to her. She repeated what I said. He laughed and said that everybody already knew that I knew the answer, that I was pretty bright and was that why she was saying what she said? Couldn't-she try to come with something on her own? A trivial matter soon to be forgotten? Not to me it wasn't, I never forgot that he

had complimented me in front of the world. Thirty years later I heard that he was dying and I drove five hundred miles to visit him. I'm not sure that he remembered me, let alone the incident. It didn't matter, I was glad that I had come and told him why.

It was the Ides of March again, my birthday. The day before I had bought a bottle of whiskey. I can't remember how big it was nor where I had purchased it, not even why. To mark my birthday I presume. I had left it under my pillow in' the trailer house. I came back to the trailer house after class, about three o'clock. There was little Beckman laying on his bed, mumbling incoherently, foaming at the mouth, his eyes glazed. Good God, the kid had drunk most all of that bottle of whiskey. It must have been a pint; a quart and he would have been dead.

What to do? I didn't dare tell Hagens, his older sister stayed there. I didn't dare call for help, I would be blamed. I got him out of bed and on his feet, with his arm around my neck. He couldn't stand alone. I got him to vomit, and we walked up and down the alley for what seemed like hours. I was afraid that someone would see us but nobody noticed. Finally toward evening he stopped raving and eventually I took him back and put him to bed. He slept and I watched to see that he did not vomit again and choke on it. In the morning he was pale and shaken but out of danger. I was much relieved. After school finished that spring I never saw him again. I wonder if he ever drank again. I think I heard that he was killed in the war.

June, 1941

The school year ended. Marie gave me money to buy a suit for graduation. It was from Lasker and Upin's, green with two pair of pants, one pair pleated, the other not. That was an ever repeating experience in our family, the older siblings helping the younger. Thank you Marie. I didn't go to the prom.

Gladys and the Kids

Where were Gladys, and Russel and Gordon (Gordon goes by his first name, Willis, now, but then we called him Gordie, and I still do) all this time? The memory blurs, it was so long ago. Gladys lived with Earl and Vera for a year, in 1940 and '41, I think. She moved to Cicero and lived with Bena and

Stan in time to start school there in the fall of 1941. She graduated from high school there in 1945, and began college at Bemidji after that.

Gordie and Russel had stayed on at the farm when Lamoreauxs had been there, then for a while with Urnesses, and during the summer of 1942 they stayed with Olga. Olga Rassmusson was, from her waist up, a large woman. She had to be because, she had a heart as big as a washtub, she was also Mother's best friend. She had been married before, her current husband John was a small time logger. We were all half afraid of him because his protruding eyes gave him a fierce look. He was also what today would be called a "binge drinker", we'd never heard the term. He went on what we called "toots" or "sprees". Without notice one night he would not come home. She would wait a few days, there was no use going until it had run it's course, then she would go to town and bring him home. She'd clean him up and put him to bed, he'd be fine until the next time. It seemed to work okay. She loved Russel and Gordon as if they were her own. It would have been a marvelous place for them but there was a problem. The school bus wouldn't come that far to pick them up. She couldn't have them. It broke her heart, she talked about it to me forty years later.

She had been a cook in a lumber camp. She had a huge old pancake griddle. We kids had eaten many a meal from that old griddle. I've made into a little table.

>

Another family had been suggested for Russel and Gordon. I was there, the kids took me aside, they were crying. They didn't want to stay with that family. I knew why and agreed with them, there must be a better place. There was, at Roy and Elsie Simmermans. They were from southern Minnesota, had bought a little farm near school. I always thought they were from the Ozarks, they talked like that. He was a wisp of a little man, had to stand twice to make a shadow. A kinder, gentler man never lived, he never raised his voice, never gave an order. He would say to them, "Well boys, do you think we ought to mow the south field today?" Elsie was a wide as- she was tall. When she wasn't talking she was laughing. It worked out fine. I was always glad that I had intervened. The kids stayed there until they went away to high school, Russel to stay with Emelie and Wes in Grand Rapids, then both of them to Pine River to stay with Tony and Marie. They both

graduated from high school there.

**Summer, 1941**

*There'll be bluebirds  
over, The white cliffs  
of Dover, Tomorrow, just  
you wait and see.*

Pop Song, 1940

The war was raging in Europe, I was eighteen, not much doubt about where I was headed. I was registered, and classified, 1-A, and waiting to be called. I can't remember who was with Gladys and the kids on the farm that summer, the Lamoureuxs I believe. I was not, I went with Stanton again to southern Minnesota and drove truck. From June until Thanksgiving I drove, often through the night, often days and nights, hauling gravel. I liked it and saved some money as well. I lived at times with Stanton and Beatrice, in the trailer house that Stanton had built, at times with some of the crew above a tavern, or in some cheap rooming house. They were a typical construction crew, rough and ready. We boozed and played cards; the summer sped along.

It was November, the weather was turning sour, the job was closing down for the winter. Stanton hooked up and pulled his trailer house home. That left me with two trucks and one driver besides myself. Suddenly we got a spell of Indian Summer, beautiful. We ran night and day, two ten hour shifts a day, for three days running. There was barely time to eat and to service the trucks, no one went to bed. On the morning before Thanksgiving it was snowing, we shut down and started home. I had persuaded the other driver to come along and drive one unit. Up Hwy 71 to Park Rapids, I knew a shortcut, we'd go east through Akeley and Cass Lake. We stopped in Akeley, at a little tavern on the east edge of town, to have a hamburger. It was stifling hot in there, we ate and had a drink. I had a peppermint schnapps, it was ghastly sweet, but kids like sweet drinks, I guess.

We left to get in the trucks, I in the lead. The next thing I knew I was wandering around a field in a daze. The truck was upside down, the gravel box was torn loose, the engine torn out, the cab crushed. The front wheels were lying apart, one still turning. A dozen old batteries that had been in the box were scattered everywhere. The highway east out of Akely



**BEFORE**

**AFTER**



goes first south down a hill and turns abruptly east at the bottom. A built up street from the west met it there, a perfect vee. I have no recollection of driving down that hill, I must have been asleep from the time we started. I hit the vee perfectly. The truck didn't roll, it somersaulted, completely over that street and into the field beyond. I had been thrown clear, and if it then rolled, it hadn't rolled on me. Only my elbow was bruised, and that not badly. I had used up the second of my nine "lives".

We got a room somewhere and slept. Next morning I had to view the pieces before we drove on to home. It would never turn a wheel again. What was I to tell Stanton, he needed that truck? The war was shutting down civilian deliveries, how could he replace it? It was Thanksgiving, we drove into the yard, the house was full of people. I hated to go in. It wasn't bad at all, Stanton said only that he was thankful that I wasn't hurt. God Bless my brother. Somehow he got another truck, a brand new one, far better than the one I wrecked. We ate Thanksgiving Dinner. It would be the last such dinner that I would eat at home.

I worked the rest of that fall for Stanton, hauling pulpwood to Grand Rapids and to Little Falls. I "spun out" on "Devils Bend", backed down and lost one load, otherwise it was uneventful. When Hwy 46 was rebuilt that curve in the middle of a hill was eliminated.

#### **December 7, 1941**

Sunday, some of the family were gathered for dinner, Emelie and Wes among them. Earl and I had gone out with his truck and trailer to get a load of pulpwood before dinner. - The swamp was not yet frozen, we got stuck turning around. We struggled for hours, finally about three o'clock we got out with half a load. We came into the house, Emelie was crying, every one was glued to the radio. The "day of infamy" had arrived, Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. Every one knew that it was a momentous occasion, that our lives would be forever changed by it. No one, however, could or did imagine, how great that change would be.

I had registered to go to Dunwoody Institute in Minneapolis. I was going to be an electrician. College of any sort had not been considered. I knew that the service was now inevitable, I think I even looked forward to it as most people did at that



**WEDDINGS**

- L Earl (oldest) and Vera 1952  
B Willis Gordon (youngest) 1952  
and Connie 1958



time. But in the meantime I would go to Dunwoody. Christmas came and went, and New Years. I packed everything I owned into a cardboard box, tied it with a piece of binder twine and boarded the southbound train in Northome at seven o'clock in the evening January 2, 1942. Childhood was over. I would never live in that house again, it would never be my home again.

Besides the cardboard box what did I bring with me from that house. So easy, yes, to ask; so difficult to answer. I brought some things of value, some that, then I didn't even know I had. I had intelligence, an active, inquiring intellect. I wish that I had known that. I had a basic integrity, a sense of decency, of right and wrong, a basic honesty that has served me well. I came away with a love of reading, the English language, of literature and of poetry. I came away with nine siblings, and their spouses, good people all. Now fifty years later I realize that we have been blessed by having among ourselves few animosities, no petty rivalries to sour our relationships. I brought away some good memories of fun and shared experiences.

I also brought a deep and gnawing sense of isolation and of loneliness, of "apartness", and of insecurity; a terrible hunger for approval, a conviction that I wasn't worthy, a total lack of self esteem; an ever self-fulfilling fear of abandonment. I brought a craving for love and kindness and an inability, a total inability, to accept either. I brought a need to reveal nothing, to conceal everything, to risk nothing. These things have been the dominant factors in my life. No later successes, no understanding, no rationalization, no common sense, no counseling have been able to overcome them.

Recently, when President Clinton's friend, Foster, committed suicide, a psychiatrist named Herman wrote an article. I have never been suicidal, nor even close to it. I have never considered that an option, I always thought I'd "make it", that things would get better. Nevertheless what he wrote about Foster fits me well, better I think than what I can myself write. He wrote, "In this type you are usually talking about a male who is autonomous, independent, prides himself on his performance, proud, but the kind of character who is fairly private otherwise, who plays it close to the vest. They are individuals who are in control but they can be people who suffer from a "sham phenomenon" or an "impostor phenomenon". The outward persona is one of confidence, competence, control and a regard for excellence. But emotionally there can be a deep insecurity, and the looming sense that one is a fraud, is undeserving. They know they have their doubts and insecurities and stuff that people do not see. They have an awareness that they are not the person

that they represent themselves to be. There is a fear that other people will unmask them, revealing them as impostors. When there is a threat of embarrassment or humiliation or loss of stature their ego finds the pressure almost unbearable...." And so he goes on....I can relate to that. The "inner child" was scared, lonely and confused. That is what I brought away, as best I can describe it.

### **The House**

It was 1966. I was home from Europe, hurting, hurting again, hurting as much as I had ever hurt. Another relationship had ended in disaster. I was seeing a shrink in the vain belief that paying someone \$50.00 an hour to talk about my troubles would help. It didn't.

*Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint and heard great Argument  
About it and about: but evermore  
Came out by the same door as in I went.*

Khayyam

Something drew me back to the old place, the old house. It was a night in June. I drove up the driveway, grown up with weeds, past the old plum trees, the road to the root cellar, past the maple tree into the yard. The headlights picked out the house, standing silhouetted in the moonlight.

*The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees,  
The moon was a ghostly galleon, tossed upon cloudy seas*

Alfred

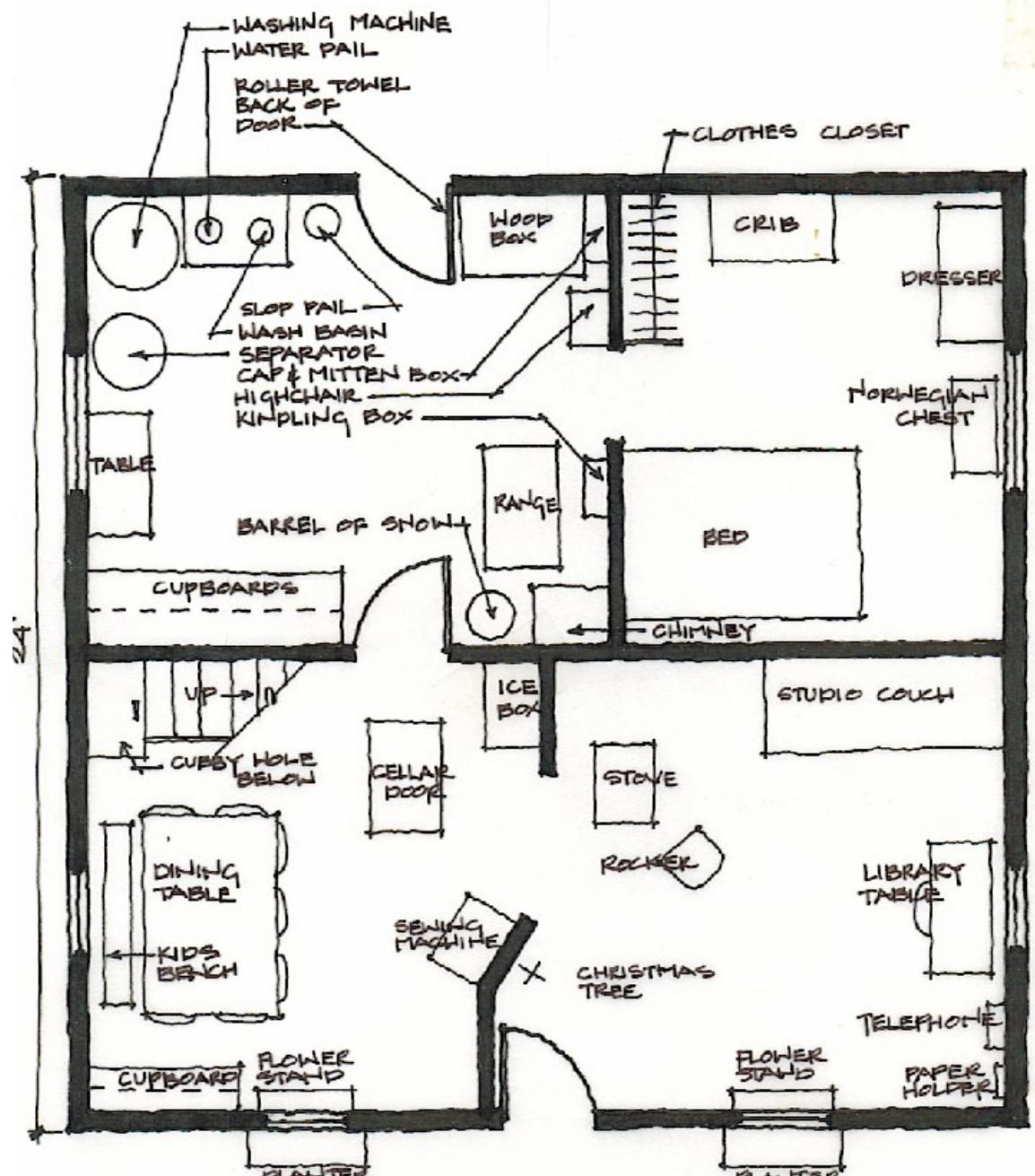
Lord Noyes

The porch was but a few rotten boards. The old pump stood there and behind it in the moonlight I could see the remains of the barn, half fallen down with logs lying askew. I turned off my lights, got out and walked around to the back yard. I tried the back door, it was nailed shut, the front one too.

I pried up a window and crawled in, in to the dining room. It was empty, only a broken chair remained, I could barely make it out in the moonlight through the dusty window. Could this be it, is this where Mother fed twelve people? Where did they sit?

I sat on the stairway landing, underneath was the "cubby" hole, the little door with the spool for a knob. It had been

# THE HOUSE



24'

DOWNSTAIRS	516	SQUARE FEET
UPSTAIRS	288	" "
TOTAL	864	" "

11' 7" 8"

the storage place for old shoes. We used to crawl in it when we were playing. I opened it, it smelled the same, of dried out leather and old rubber. I could see through the archway into the "other" room, to where the stove had been, where Pa had sat and brooded, the little crook in the wall where the Christmas trees had stood.

I went into the kitchen. There on the wall was the medicine cabinet I had made in school, below it the stand for the water pail, always empty, and below that the "slop" pail, always overflowing. The hole in the wall for the washing machine exhaust was open, the plug was gone. The cream separator had stood there and the cookstove there, where had she kept, the food, where were the cupboards, where was the space? I went into their bedroom, the room where I was born. Their bed had stood there, the chair beside it, when I had sat and held her hand.

*I am the Mother Magdalene I am  
the Mother Magdalene*

I retreated back to the dining room. The wind stirred uneasily in the basswood trees, the house creaked a bit. I knew then that I would find no answers here. I crawled back out through the window, pulled it shut behind me and escaped back into the world of chrome and leather. The engine purred to life, the lights swept pass the place where the ice house stood, the woodshed and garage, past the toilet; nothing remained of them. I drove down the driveway and away.

I came back the next day and saw it in the daylight. It saddened me, it looked forlorn. The house had had no foundations, the logs it sat on were rotting, it sat askew. The chimney bricks were scattering, the roofing torn. It could not last much longer unless it was restored. I went back to town, I talked to Earl, I talked to Stanton, what should we do with it? They were of no strong opinion. "Do what you think best", they said.

Perhaps we should have tried to preserve it, it was the first none-log house built in the township. Many years later, as Russel was dying, he and others, collectively drew a floor plan from memory. Looking at this sketch now, in 1993, it is exactly as I remember it as well. The original house was twelve by twenty four feet; two hundred and eighty eight



House - 1966  
Prior to demolition



(All except Gordon -  
in the Navy)  
Stanley, Stanton, Russel,  
Marie, Earl, Emilie,  
Bena, Gladys, RCS



The Skoe Boys, Circa, 1950

square feet. In 1926 a twelve foot lean-to was added to bring the total first floor to five hundred and seventy six square feet. The upstairs was the same size as the original so all told it had eight hundred and sixty four square feet of living area. When Mother was "boarding" lumberjacks it often slept twelve or fourteen people.

In early years the upstairs, an attic really, had no ceiling. The roofing nails poked through the single board roof and in the winter time at night, when it was cold, long beards of frost would form on them. When the stove was lit in the morning they would melt and drip in our faces if we didn't get up.

Under the house there was a cellar, really just a hole, accessed by a door in the dining room floor. The stair down was steep, a ladder really, and it was dark and musty down there. The house was heated by a wood stove in the living room and by, of course, the kitchen range.

But, I loaded up a bulldozer and hauled it out there. I unloaded it, took a deep breath and bulldozed the house in which I was born. The rusty old nails screeched in the dried out boards but soon it was a pile. I burned it. From the barn I saved a few of the logs, one is now the mantel piece in Rodney's house. Where the little cellar was there is a slight depression. Nothing else remains except that down by the maple tree, where Mothers flower garden was, her tiger lilies still grow. There, untended, unweeded, for more than fifty years, they still grow, there, where she planted them. The fence I built for her to keep the horses out is gone,- her tiger lilies still survive, still struggle on without her.

## THE CITY

**January 3, 1942**

I walked out of the Great Northern train station at seven in the morning. It was cold. I knew that Dunwoody was at the foot of Hennepin Ave. The Hennepin and the Nicollet streetcars seemed to run on parallel tracks, it shouldn't matter which I take. I took the Nicollet, got on and tried to put a nickel in the coin box. It wouldn't go, I tried and tried. Finally someone said, "Try a dime kid". I had a lot to learn. I rode and rode, no sign of Hennepin anymore, no sign of Dunwoody.. I figured I'd better get off and walk for it. I walked, and nearly froze to death, I had no overcoat nor gloves, the twine on the box cut my hands. I came to a park (Loring) and then could see Dunwoody on the other side.

I had a job lined up for my board and room. It was up on Lowry Hill, an old mansion in a nice old part of town. My room was a tiny thing in the basement, I came up for supper and stayed to do the dishes. I didn't mind it, it was warm and I could walk to school. Later I found a different place on Colfax, I can't remember why I changed.

The whole concept of electricity was new to me, we had had none at home, I had hardly even changed a light bulb, but I liked it and did not find it especially hard. >

The war of course dominated all the news, the US was in retreat all across the Pacific. I enlisted and went in to a reserve awaiting assignment. There was so much that was new and strange occupying me that the war seemed remote and far away. Classes ended in June and the whole class was hired by Northwest Airlines to work at their bomber modification plant at Holman Field in St. Paul for the summer. They, the B-24s, came in from Consolidated and were fitted out for desert warfare in North Africa. I remember being upset and disillusioned because most of the time we monkeyed around with nothing to do. I was used to working when I was getting paid, the waste seemed terrible to me. I was innocent of course, and knew nothing about ripping off the government with "cost plus" contracts.

I had become friends with a guy from Hastings, Warren Trautmann was his name. We got a room together in the Dale-Summit area of St. Paul. He had a car and eventually I brought down the Model A that Mother's friend, Ruth Peterson had given me. He was going with a girl from south Minneapolis and I got to know some of that crowd. It was all new and strange to me. On one hand they seemed awfully young and juvenile, they had no concept of how I had lived; on the other hand they seemed awfully sophisticated to me and I was always afraid I'd give myself away. But by and large it was a good time, I was learning and adapting, becoming more comfortable, it was fun. If we worked the swing shift we'd get off at midnight and go out for hamburgers at the White Castle, ten for a dollar, and cruise around. Somehow we always were able to find some gasoline although the ration was only four gallons a week. Then it was the Fourth, the Fourth of July.

Warren said he was going to meet a high school classmate and go watch the fireworks at Powderhorn Park that night. Would I like to go along? Why not? He picked her up in south east Minneapolis where she was living with her mother, I met them at Powderhorn. Her name was Frances. The world changed that night for us, for both of us.

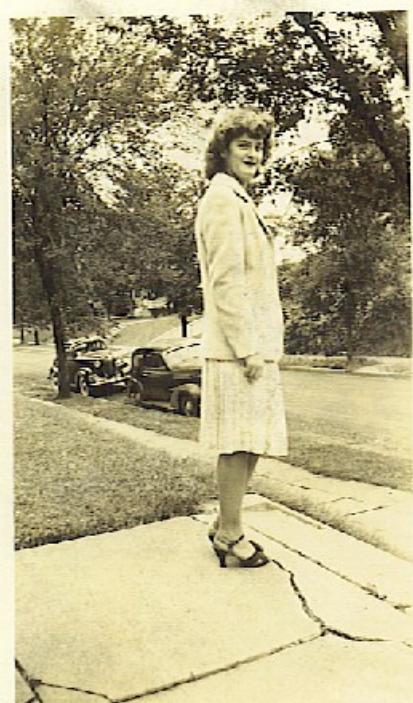
Every poet that has ever lived has tried to put the experience to words. I am not a poet. I will not try. If one has experienced it he needs no explanation; if not, words will not explain it to him. Perhaps everything was intensified by the fact that it was wartime, but the world had become a different, brighter place. We had seventy-three days together-seventy-three days. But, looming over them was disaster. As Warren told me, "Yes, but she is going to marry this guy she went with in high school, everybody has known that since they were in the sixth grade". Was that true? Yes, but we hardly talked about it, as if by ignoring it, it wouldn't happen, that it would go away.

She was Catholic, I a Lutheran, was that a factor? Perhaps to some degree. I had some of that idiocy engraved in me, but I don't think that was decisive. What was decisive was my lack of self. It never occurred to me that she might give him up for me, that she might want that as much as I. Not once, not ever. It was totally inevitable, when the time came, she would go and I would be left alone again. I knew it, I never, questioned it, I never said to her, "Fran, you must not go".



BASIC TRAINING 1943





FRAN

Would she have not gone had I asked her to stay? We have discussed it, we'll never know, perhaps she was as locked in to inevitability as was I. We gave one another no help. On September 15 she left to be with him in Omaha. It was cold and raining that day in St Paul. I remember, walking across the field with some guys; I was thankful it was raining. They couldn't tell how hard that I was crying. The grief followed me around the world. For four years it never left me, neither day or night. It was like Mother's death all over again, in spades. I told no one, there was no one to tell. I kept it to myself. I don't know if it made it better or worse to know that she was hurting too. We wrote to each other through the war, even after she was married. I hoped I would receive a letter from her, before the last one became illegible from reading. I saw her twice more before I went overseas, joyful, awful times.

After the war we met again, as we had agreed to do. She had a family then, no turning back. Now fifty years later we are friends, no present grief, but in writing of that time, I find, that I am crying. Hard.

## THE ARMY

Summer ended, we left our jobs at Holman field. We were in a semi-active reserve, going to electronics school in Minneapolis. After Christmas we went to The Missouri School of Mines in Rolla, Missouri for schooling. Warren and I roomed together there too. We didn't talk about Fran. We returned in April to go on active duty.

"Line up in raincoats and helmet liners, skin it back, strip it forward, next man on the scale!" I was 132 pounds of fighting bone and muscle. We got four shots, two pair of shoes, pants, underwear, socks two blankets and a barracks bag to carry it in. It all smelled like moth balls. Warren was heartbroken, he was classified 4-F, his feet, and was left behind. You children of the sixties can not understand that, I will make no attempt to explain it. It is your loss, to not have known the feeling. The rest of us were on a train for California.

It was my first time out of Minnesota, every thing was new. The first sight of mountains is hard to forget and I loved the lushness of Oregon. We, for I knew quite a number of the guys, took our basic training at Camp Kohler, a few miles out of Sacramento. Except for not shooting well because of my injured eye, I found it not difficult. I rather enjoyed some of the stuff. I was small but wiry, could out-walk guys twice my weight, and beat most over an obstacle course.

We were given a battery of tests, aptitude and the Army General Classification Test, an IQ test. A score of 110 was required to qualify for OCS, Officers Candidate School. I scored 147, I didn't know what to make of it. It never occurred to me to try for OCS.

After four weeks of basic we were sent over to the University of California at Davis for more radio training. It was a nice campus, classes were relatively easy. On weekends we'd go to San Francisco, or to Woodland where there was a USO. On the Fourth we were in a big parade, and had the rest of the day off. It was "our" anniversary. Finally, thank God, the day was ended.



CAMP CROWDER MISSOURI, 1944



At Davis the Phy Ed department emphasized a lot of pool work and swimming. We were constantly simulating ship sinkings by jumping from the diving platforms feet first. I had always had terrible, chronic sinus infections and had never been able to swim or dive without driving water up into them. The pool work made them worse, I suffered terribly from sinus headaches and the constant blockage. I didn't, nor did the medics, realize the connection between that and the swimming. I could have been exempted from the pool. It was not until the discovery of antihistamines in the late fifties that my sinuses healed and I got relief.

In the fall, October, 1942 we left Davis and California. I remember that afternoon, standing on the balcony, waiting for the truck to take us to the depot. The leaves were falling and fall was in the air and we were splitting up, some to go here, some there. Some we knew would go together, others we would never see again, some we would bump into again in strange places around the world. The group I was in was scheduled to go to Chicago and study with Bell Labs. Radio Teletype it was, we stayed in a hotel and had civilians for instructors.

After the first of the year we moved again, to Hope College, in Holland, Michigan. It was a program called The Army Specialized Training Program. In truth it was just a holding tank, they must not have known what to do with us. We studied philosophy, literature and English. Nice enough but not much , help in repairing radios. Come spring we moved again, to Camp 'Crowder, Missouri. Here at last we were formed into, the 3198th Signal Service Battalion. It was the unit that I stayed with until my discharge. Our officers were a couple of Lieutenants named Criss and Cross, not much more than kids themselves. They were good enough guys, we called them "Crisscross". We laid around camp for most of the summer and didn't do much of anything of a technical nature. I made myself a really nice sheath knife from a file. I carried it around the world and lost track of it when I got discharged. Thirty years later I invited my old friend Warren Hall to come over for a visit. "Should I bring your knife?", he said. I got it back, only to have it stolen from my farm. We drank a lot of beer at the PX and suffered in the Missouri heat and humidity.

In October (1943) we were on the move again, to Miami. We

layed around awhile. Everything was all new again, palm trees, pelicans and coconuts. I addressed a coconut to Russel and Gordon. Years later when Russel was dying he brought it out, the address still legible in my scrawl.

One night the trucks picked us up, with all our gear. We rode out to the airfield and climbed into a converted B-24 bomber, just like one of those we worked on in St. Paul. I had never ridden in a plane before. Canvas seats, I had one by a window. Guys stood by each engine with a fire extinguisher. One at a time the engines ground over, coughed flame and smoke, caught and roared to life. They poured it on, the plane shook and shivered as if it would fly apart, we started down the runway, I watched the wheel struts extend longer and longer. I didn't think we would ever fly but finally we were off and headed out over the Atlantic in the dark. In Belem (Brazil?) we sweated for a few days in the tropic heat, then once more we climbed into a bomber and headed out over the Atlantic. Destination, Ascension Island, a flyspeck halfway to Africa, hardly more than a few hundred acres. How they found it I did not know, missing it would have been "fini". Morning found us landing among the Gooney birds. The next night we were off again for Accra in the Gold Coast, Africa.

We transferred then to smaller planes, C-47's, the famous old DC-3's. We hedge-hopped across Africa, always northeast toward the Red Sea. We landed one night in Khartum, it was cold. We headed for the mess hall, along the way was this huge old canvass laying in the dirt. It looked as if it was covering some flat, bulky freight. As we got closer we saw that it was moving, like waves on water; suddenly something raised one corner and we could see that it was covering a mass of people. They were laying in the dirt, huddling together for warmth beneath that tarp. It was my first exposure to the third world.

We went on, to Aden, in what is now Yemen, out over the Red Sea to the Island of Misarah, and finally to Karachi in India, now Pakistan. India, Pakistan, they seemed incredible to a kid from northern Minnesota. The masses of people, the crowding, the beggars , incredible, but also irresistible.

*Now I'm learnin 'ere in London  
What the ten year sojer sez  
When you've heard the East a callin  
You won't heed nuthin else  
No you won't heed nuthin else  
But them spicy garlic smells  
And the sunshine and the palm trees,  
And them tinkly temple bells.*

*Send me somewhere east of Suez  
Where the best is like the worst Where  
there ain't no ten commandments And a man  
can raise a thirst Where the temple bells  
are calling That is where I'd like to be  
By the old Moulmein Pagoda Lookin eastward  
to the sea.*

Kipling

We boarded trains, those little English carriages, with the steam engines with high-pitched whistles. We were to ride ten days without getting off except to buy fruit and to barter with the thousands of peddlers along the way. Baksheesh, Sahib, Baksheesh Sahib? Every where there were beggars of every description, peddlers selling everything on earth. There was no place to sleep except in the seats, they weren't comfortable. I was small and was able to squeeze myself into the luggage rack above the seats and thus could lie down.

We were playing "red-dog", a simple game. There was a pot, made up of antes or losses of previous players. You were dealt four cards and then you bet any part, or all, of the pot. You bet that you had a card in your hand, of the same suit that was higher than the next card in the deck. 'Four aces of course was a certain winner, four sevens a fifty-fifty chance and four deuces of course zero. The pot had been ten or fifteen dollars. Now inexplicably it had grown to seventy. It was my hand. I was dealt the ace of spades, the ace of hearts, the ace of diamonds and the king of clubs. I couldn't believe my eyes, there was only one card that could beat- me, the ace of clubs. The odds were 47 to 1 in my favor, I had no choice, I had to go for the seventy dollars. The dealer was a guy from Brooklyn. I lost, he turned over the ace of clubs. Seventy dollars was two months pay, four actually, because I was paying Simmermans \$17.50 a month out of my \$35 a month

**ARMY LIFE**

From YANK magazine, 1944

**"THE SAD SACK"**

**"DREAM"**

**"PRO STATION"**

**GEORGE BAKER**



pay, for Russel and Gordon. With my farm boy naivete, I never wondered, until years later, how that pot had suddenly got so large, how I had been dealt three aces and a king, how the ace of clubs had appeared as if by magic. I had not even asked to cut the cards. Ah, to be so trusting once again.

We camped outside Calcutta for six weeks, in a town called Kanchapara. To pass the time I got a job driving a six-by-six into Calcutta every morning for supplies. It was fun weaving in and out among the water buffalo, the cows, pedicabs, bicycles and people. By then I had two pretty good friends, Warren Hall from Duluth and Bobby Host from Michigan. We boozed it up a bit, got drunk one night and scandalized -some English officers by throwing up in the rubber plant in their club. Well I thought it better there than on the dance floor.

We lived in tents, it was Christmas Eve, we decided to have a party. Gin was cheap, very cheap. We got some limes, some ice from the messhall, we were in business. By midnight when we decided to go to Christmas service we were, to put it mildly, not exactly in pain. We three were in the front row, the congregation singing hymns. I joined in, Warren and Bobby thought my singing was so funny they burst out laughing, I joined in. We got the giggles, like high school girls, or drunk GI's. We broke up the service. The Chaplain took it all with good humor, he suggested that we go to bed and sleep it off.



3. T/Sgt Raymond Skoe, 17111161, SSN 792, Co "B", 3198th Sig Sv Bn, APO 907 is pla on TDY with Det "B", Co "B", 3198th Sig Sv Bn, Nanking, China for approx 30 days in connection with Sig activities and WP w/o delay from APO 907 to Nanking China. Upon compl of such TDY EM will ret to his pr sta. (Auth: CG SOS USF CT dtd 11 Feb 45.)



#### CHINA

TR      Bobbie Host  
C      Shanghai party  
BL      Warren P. Hall

## CHINA

*On the road to Mandalay Where the flying  
fishes play Where the dawn comes up like  
thunder Outta China crosst the bay.*

Kipling

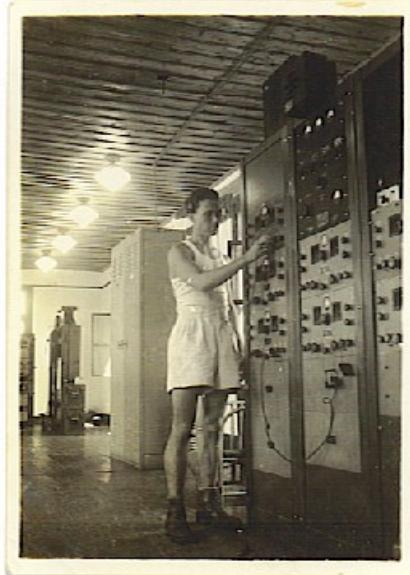
We boarded trains again and headed for Burma and Assam, we were on our way to China. We got off one train, waded across the Brahmaputra river and got on another. The Burma Road had been closed by the Japanese so we would fly. We boarded a plane again one night and flew up over the Himalayas. They were snow white in the moonlight, peak after peak for hundreds of miles. They were beautiful but deadly, there is a lot of aluminum beneath that snow. We landed in Kunming, General Chenault's Flying Tiger base. We were in China.

"Hubba hao, Joe, ding hao!" Good, good, very good! The Chinese kids ran along side the truck laughing and smiling. I had thought the Indians somewhat sullen and resentful, the Chinese seemed friendly and helpful by comparison. I was separated from my best friends then. I went on to Chungking, they went back up the Burma Road.

Chungking was cold, damp and gray. Ever since that swimming at Davis I had had a terrible chronic sinus infection. It gave me splitting headaches and I could hardly breathe. That 'cold damp air made it even worse. Chungking was the wartime capital of China. Generalissimo Chang Kai Chek of course was the ruler then. The Americans all called him "Chancre Jack" but perhaps not to his face. Truth is the Americans were pretty contemptuous of the Chinese, we called them "slopies" and were generally not very nice. The American commander was "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell, a sharp tongued old bastard. He and Chancre Jack hated each other mutually and publicly. -(See 'The American Experience in China', by ) .

When the quarrel became too raucous FOR replaced him with General Wedemeyer. I remember the day.

Some of us got to know the guys up at the OSS. They were the CIA of that time and they had their own compound. Stan, (Petzel) had mailed me a bottle of whiskey, carefully wrapped in a piece of tin. He had mailed it months earlier, to who



CHUNGKING Receiver Station

- TR Jim Guidry  
CL My bunk & bunk  
BL Swimming with the water buffalos

knows what APO. It finally caught up with me and was considered pretty special. Rotgut gin was cheap but good American whiskey was rare. Someone else had some also, so, we volunteered the booze and the OSS volunteered the dinner at their compound. It was quite a successful party but I don't think I had yet learned the meaning of moderation. The last I remember was being put to bed by the house boys. That was after I had thrown an empty bottle into the works of their old fashioned GE refrigerator and wrecked the motor. I don't recall being invited for another party. Maybe it was because I moved out of town.

I moved out of Chungking to our receiver station about forty miles out in the mountains. It was a big station, with a lot of big rhombic antennas that needed a lot of room. There were a half dozen or more radio-teletype channels coming in from New Delhi and Honolulu with "patch-thrus" directly from Washington. Even then old FDR could have sat down and typed out a letter right into Chancre Jacks office had he been so inclined. A not so small a technical achievement I thought then, and still do. Of course it was all transmitted in code and we saw it as only as an endless series of meaningless five letter "words"

There were six or eight of us there, some had been there for a year or two and were hard-bitten "old China hands". I wouldn't say they treated me badly but they sort of dismissed me as rookie. All except for a French Acadian (Read Longfellow's poem "Evangeline") from Louisiana. A great guy, we would go down to the river and go swimming with the water buffalos. The rest tolerated me, perhaps they were a little resentful because, I think, that I outranked them. Lt. Criss, apparently, had taken a liking to me, and had given me some stripes. I think at that time I was T-3, a technical grade equivalent to a Staff Sgt. It didn't mean much as to authority, no one wore their stripes anyhow (in my case three up and one down), but it meant a lot more pay. I could hardly blame them for being a little pissed-off. They knew more than I did and had been there for a long time but I was being paid more.

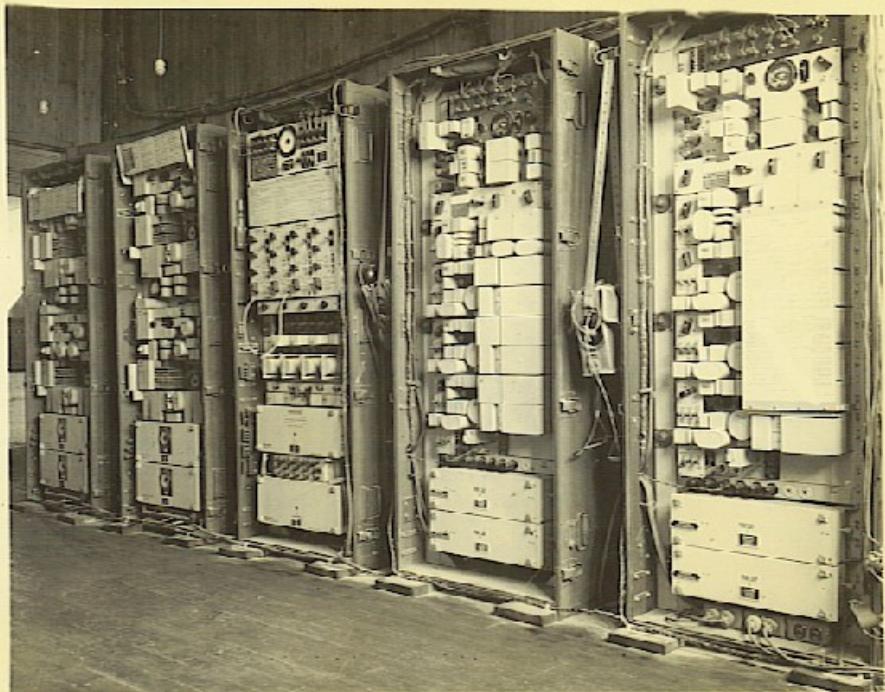
We had our own compound with a wall around it. In addition to the radio building we had connected sleeping quarters, living room with a fireplace, dining room and kitchen. To care for us we had two houseboys, a yardboy, two cooks and a laundry

boy. We were "on per diem", ie, we got a food allowance. Whatever food we couldn't get at the commissary in Chungking we bought locally in the village. Well, we didn't, the cooks did it for us. They would cook us anything we wanted, anytime. We always kept a jug of rice wine to warm by the fire which they lit each afternoon. From time to time the police chief from the little village would come up and do a banquet for us. It consisted of tiny portions of course after course after course of exquisite tidbits. Between each course they served a bit of wine. There was duck and pork and beef and chicken, sauces without number, pastries and stir fry vegetables and of course rice. There was plain rice, fried rice, my God it was something. The dinner would start about four in the afternoon and go on and on until ten at night. So much for the physical hardships of warfare.

"Lubber, lubber, you got lubber". What in hell does she mean? Of course, of course, a rubber, more politely known now as a condom. All GI's had condoms, pro kits. The MP's passed them out at the gate.

Every couple of weeks the "old China hands" would go into Chungking and come back with three or four women. I don't know if they got them from some "house" or off the street, it didn't really matter. First they'd put them in the shower and give them a good scrub down. Then you were on your own. So I finally lost my virginity, in an upper bunk outside Chungking. They were ordinary people, some had a good sense of humor. I sometimes wonder what happened to them. I hope life was kind to them, it wasn't often for a woman in China.

I was transferred again, this time to the main transmitter station which was on the edge of town. Living quarters were similar but not so pleasant. Again a whole new set of faces, guys I'd never seen before. It was total emersion with strangers, twenty-four hours a day. There was no life but in that little building, no place to go, no entertainment, no transportation. I had no experience nor training on big transmitters and these were big, fifty and a hundred thousand watts. One misstep and they would blow sky high. I didn't feel comfortable about asking for help. On the long night shift, all alone, I was nervous and on edge. The long separation from any close friends was getting to me. I think that my obsession with Fran was beginning to border on the unhealthy. I didn't know it but I was skating on the edge.



T      Chunking Receiver Station  
B      Chunking Message Center



The famous regiments of Britain are known for their fierce loyalty to each other, their esprit de corp, their morale and toughness. They have traditions that go back centuries. An assignment to one is permanent, it is a man's regiment, his home. They know each other, the men are his "mates", they live or die together, they draw support from one another. It is well accepted now that in combat men do not do the things they do for noble theories, they do it for each other. During the Viet Nam war the US forgot this fact, or never knew it. They rotated faceless, nameless men into and out of faceless, nameless units, lonely, frightened men. How would anyone like to face that with people with whom they had never shared a drink, nor even seen before. The US army paid dearly for this policy.

But I was not in a combat unit, I never saw or heard a shot fired after I left basic training. I was in a service battalion fixing radios and sleeping between clean sheets and eating better than I ever had before. But there are perils of war other than that of getting shot and I was skating on the edge.

I woke up one day and I did not know what had happened to me. I had terrible foreboding, an anxiety beyond belief. I felt weak and faint, I trembled, my eye pupils were dilated to three times their normal size. My eyes themselves burned like cigarette burns in a GI blanket. I could not rest, sit still nor concentrate. I was scared. I remember my mother's illness and I feared the worst. What to do? I did not know. Where was there any help. There was a monkey on my back. I was to know Him well in the years to follow.

I came up with some excuse, got some time off from work and went into Chungking. I went on sick call. I remember him yet, that young medic, staring out the window, bored. He asked me what was the matter. I tried to explain to him, the explanation sounded lame, even to me. The war had ended by then, everybody wanted to go home, would do anything they could to get there, including malingering. Rotation was based on points, the more you had the sooner you went home. You got them for time in service, time overseas, age, dependents etc. He asked me how many I had. Thirty-two, not enough. He shrugged, turned back to the window. I knew there was no help for me there. I really didn't want a Section 8. (A discharge for mental reasons)

What to do? I did what I always did when I was hurting, I hid it, I told no one, I kept it to myself, I survived. I had this craving, this need for physical exhaustion. I thought that if I was totally worn out that I could sleep. Even the lath mill would have been welcome. But I could think of no way to get exercise, jogging had not been invented, there would have been no place anyhow. In desperation I went out to where the coolies were building a road, by hand, with pick and shovel. I took a pick from one of them and started work. I feared that I was going crazy- they thought I already had. For an American soldier to do that he must be wacky. I gave it up.

The war had ended when I was still at the receiver station. We heard first about the atom bomb, then about the surrender. It was exciting, there was no doubt of that. One of the guys was gushing more about the fact that Russia was over-running Manchuria than he was about the fact that the war was ending. It was my first experience with an American Communist. I wonder if he is still celebrating.

I left the transmitter station and returned to town. Every thing was slowing down, the urgency had gone out of it. It was there that I got the belated telegram about Pa's death. It had no effect, good or bad on my mental state. The monkey was still on my back. Chungking was getting cold and grey again. It was hard to find enough to do to occupy my time. Then our orders were cut; back on a plane again, we're ,starting home; first stop Shanghai. I stepped off the plane 'in Shanghai in the dark. There was Warren and Bobby standing on the tarmac waiting for me. God! They looked good to me, I hadn't seen them in ten months.

### **Shanghai**

No one who was not there that first week or two after the armistice will understand. The town went wild. Drinks in night clubs were about ten cents, "gold". Not really gold, American currency was called gold. Rickshaws were a quarter. The town was full of refugees from everywhere in the world and half of them were women.

Then one day the American fleet appeared, battleships, cruisers and flattops in the Bund. Tens of thousands of crazy sailors, the pockets crammed with back pay hit the streets in one mad rush. Prices doubled, and tripled, and doubled again

in a matter of hours. Incredible! No one can say that the Chinese aren't entrepreneurs.

We lived in the German School, a modern building. We had no duties but to amuse ourselves. We cruised the town, ate and drank and sometimes patronized the various facilities. There was considerable choices, any nationality you wished. There were dances every weekend. I looked on. I couldn't dance. I had gotten another stripe, three up, two down now, and so had no more money problems. Lt. Criss was looking after me, although, we hardly ever saw him. I think he had found semipermanent sleeping arrangements elsewhere. I was feeling somewhat better, friends and activities helped some. The monkey was still on my back but I wasn't incapacitated by him. I was able to hide it, even from Warren and Bobby.

I got orders to go up to Nankin and I spent two uneventful months there, The town was still full of Japanese soldiers. If we met them on the street, or sidewalk they would invariably stop and bow. I used to marvel, Americans had commandeered a big old hotel for the troops. Sometimes when on the night shift, in the morning, as it was getting light, I could watch the girls streaming out and going home. There was a rather nice and buxom Russian girl working in the office. She seemed to like me but I was pretty dumb. Finally she asked me if she had to "draw a picture". Only one. Soon I was ordered back to Shanghai, my military career was about to end.

On Easter Sunday, 1946, we boarded the USS Blanchard, waved goodbye to Shanghai and started home. It took seventeen days. It was my first time at sea. The huge, blue-green waves rolling endlessly by were fascinating. I like them still. Half way home we suddenly changed course and headed for Guam, someone was ill. The next day we changed our course back again; the man had died, on his way home. There was a burial at sea. A solemn affair. Taps was sounded and the weighted canvass shroud slid beneath the waves. I wonder who he was and if anyone was waiting for him.

One day, through the mist, we could make out the outline of the coast. We stared. Lucky it was straight ahead or we would have capsized that old tub by rushing to the rail. In through the Golden Gate and underneath the bridge, with the boats coming out to welcome us, it was a picture to behold.

*Breathes there a man with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself has said,  
This is my own, my native land,  
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,  
As home his footsteps he hath turned,  
From wandering on a foreign strand?*

We sailed past Alcatraz, there was a riot going on. We could hear gunfire. I think it was the only riot in the history of the prison. On up the bay to the port of debarkation, Stanley and his then wife, June, met me at the gangplank. I had been gone eighteen months and had been once around the world.

I stayed one day with Stanley, then back to camp and processing. Next day we were on a train heading for Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. The three of us, Warren, Bobby and I had agreed to have a party on the day we got discharged. Bobby and I got our papers late in the afternoon, time to catch the Zephyr to Minneapolis, Warren didn't make it. We didn't wait for him, we caught the train without him; and we partied. He caught up next day but we were spent. Warren didn't mind but I have always wished that we had waited for him. What would one day more be after four years? A breech of friendship, I still wish that we had waited.

I was free, with a hundred dollar separation bonus in my pocket. I went to Northome.

I spent the summer of 1946 in Northome, loading out pulpwood for Earl mostly. The summer was uneventful except for the letter from Fran, " as we planned, meet me at . . . you must not write". I went to Minneapolis, borrowed Stan and Bena's car. We spent three hours together, then it was over I did not see her again for thirty years.

## THE UNIVERSITY

Russel and Gordon were settled at Simmermans. Gladys had graduated from high school and was attending Bemidji State. I planned to go there also and even reserved a room. At the last moment, for some reason, I changed my mind and decided to go to the U instead. I started classes at the Institute of Technology in September, 1946.

At a freshman orientation session I met two girls.

*The Scriver twins are but two, Their names  
of course, are Sally and Sue.*

Anon

I thought no more of it.

I got a room, and a job washing dishes in a boarding house. Would I never be free of washing dishes in boarding houses? Later I moved into Pioneer Hall, a men's dormitory and got a job in a laundry. With the GI Bill and what I made I got along ok financially. I had an old car that I had bought, it ran albeit barely. Engineering math, chemistry and physics, without having had any in high school, was hard at first. I made it and ended the first quarter with a 3.5 GPA, equivalent to a B+. I was satisfied, with that, satisfied? Hell I was astounded. Me? At the University? I decided then to make the four years with a 3.0 if possible.

I was not free of the anxiety and fatigue that first struck me in Chungking, my eyes felt always tired and dilated. It was better but I wasn't free of it. I had gone to a shrink in Minneapolis, thinking that maybe he could help me get the monkey off my back. He couldn't. The monkey was still there although I had learned to live with Him. I concealed Him well.

It was the first week of summer school. I had gone to a mixer at the Union, what for I don't know, I couldn't dance. There was this freckled redhead, kind of skinny, nice legs. She must of asked me to dance, I doubt I would have had the courage to ask her. "What's your name?" "The same as one of your lakes" "Nokomis?". She laughed, "No Harriet". I told her that I couldn't dance, she shrugged. She wasn't looking

for a dance partner. She was from California and she was at the dance to find a summer playmate. I qualified presumably, besides I had a car. It was the beginning of one of the better summers of my life.

There was no pretense of commitment or undying love; we were friends, the summer was ours and we enjoyed it. We swam, we played, we went on weekend trips, she taught me things those Chinese girls didn't know. It was good, and she was good for me. The monkey on my back got quieter. I kept my grades up but don't know when I did my studying.

When summer sessions ended she went back to California. I missed her, I missed her a lot, but there was no pain involved in it. No love, no pain, is that the rule? We wrote for a while, and considered a reprise for the next summer. But events intervened and nothing came of that. Fact is, I think that she had gotten pregnant and I was thankful it wasn't me. Twenty-five years later I got a call, she was passing through Chicago, would I like to meet her? Why not? I flew down and met her. Life had not treated her kindly, and our fire had gone out. We had a drink, reminisced and parted. Nevertheless, in my life she was a plus. I hope she can say the same.

That fall I encountered the Scriver twins again and started dating one of them. They were so much alike that at first I couldn't tell which one was which but, finally it settled down to Sue. They were four years younger than I, but seemingly much younger. Happy, gay, innocent and laughing, they seemed to me as if they had come from a different world. And so they had. Their family was unlike anything that I had known. Their father Gene sold real estate on his own. Always joking, always teasing, always complimenting, he would make us play bridge with him at every chance. Their mother presided over it all with wry good humor. They accepted me for what they saw, they took me in as if I was a son. They took me with them every where, to their cabin on Minnetonka, they taught me how to sail. I had found a home.

I had decided to not go to summer school in 1948. I would take the summer off and work. I tried to find a job in Minneapolis and failed. I would go back and run Stanton's bulldozer for the summer. Learning to run it was easy, I had a knack for it. Early in the summer I was making a logging



Sally & Sue

Russel and RCS



Sally and Sue



road. It would be unthinkable now, but then people worked dozers in the woods with no cab nor canopy to protect the operator. I had had no experience with dead trees. I bumped a big one with the blade, shifted gears and started to reverse. I felt the wind from it as it passed my head and crashed on the cowling not three inches from me. The top of the tree had broken off and fallen across the machine. It smashed the cast-iron air cleaner into a mangled mess. I counted that as No 3 of my nine lives.

During the summer I had been down to visit Sue several times and I looked forward to it each time. Then the outcome of it all seemed clear ahead although we never talked about it. I had five quarters left to graduate, I was struggling a bit to hold my grade average, electrical engineering is tough. But I still had a 3.3 GPA and was determined to get through with a 3.0.

The year passed quickly enough. I spent more and more time at Scrivers, summer came and we were at the lake on weekends. We sailed and swam. It was almost idyllic, too good almost to be true. Could this be me?

The fall quarter was starting, the fall of 1949. I would be graduating in December. I was elected to Eta Kappa Nu, an honorary society. Everyone was sending out resumes, trying to line up a job.

As graduation neared, so also did decision time, I became more apprehensive, the monkey on my back began to stir. I became more and more fearful, more and more confused. No one put any pressure on me, no one even hinted at it, but after all, Sue and I had dated for two years, she was young and pretty, what would be more natural. But from the time I first started visiting their home I had felt an unease, what was I doing there, did I really belong, could I ever be fit into that family? They were not an especially wealthy family, but they were an old Minneapolis family, they seemed pretty special to me. I had never told them anything about my life, I never told anyone ever. How could I tell them, but how could I be a part of them and hide it all. I couldn't bear the thought of being unmasked.

I didn't know what to do, I needed help. I know that if I had asked them please, to help me, they would have done so. They

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SYMBOLS

DL	Day Letter
NL	Night Letter
LC	Deferred Cable
NLT	Cable Night Letter
SL	Ship Radiogram

ng time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.

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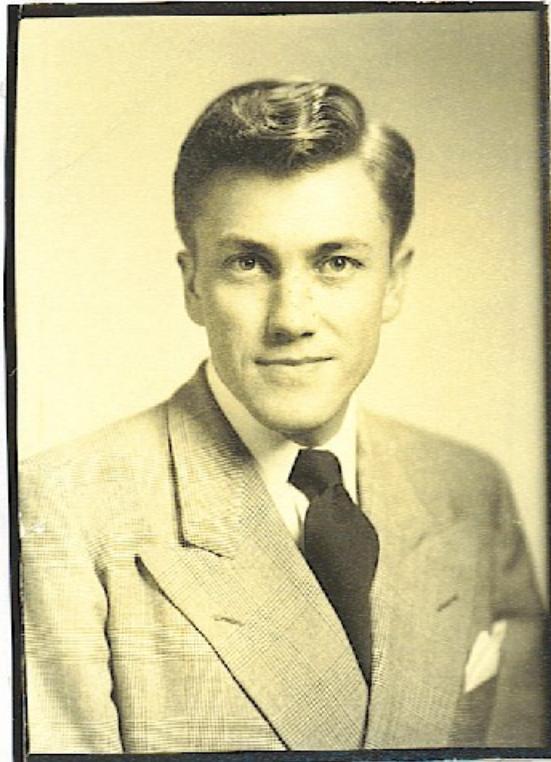
1949

Raymond C. Skoe,  
Northome, Minn.

We are please to offer you a position as technical engineer in our developement labortory Endicott New York at a starting salary of \$85.00 per week this offer is contingent on physical examination and referaance review. May we have your reply return wire so that further instructions can be issued.

W R Latourette, Personnel Dept,  
Ibm Corp.

P 1056A



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
Graduation - December, 1949



were kind and understanding people. I couldn't do it. I began to equivocate, to back away, to be evasive. Sue was confused, she didn't know what was going on, I couldn't tell her. I didn't know myself. I would drive her away, and couldn't bear to be apart, and win her back again. It was pitiful. God. Why did she bear it as long as she did? The monkey on my back was fierce again.

I graduated from the University in December 1949 with a Bachelors degree in Electrical Engineering. I graduated "with distinction", I had maintained my 3.0 grade point average. Most of the top of our class that had found jobs, had been hired by RCA in Camden, NJ. Me too, the starting pay was \$61.00 a week. Out of the blue I got a wire from IBM, I had sent them a resume. "Come to Endicott for an interview". They sent me plane tickets, made hotel reservations in New York, (The Lexington, room 1822, I still remember) and so I went. This was pretty heady stuff, IBM was, well, IBM was IBM. I flew up to Endicott on Allegheny, in a DC-3, just like the one in which I had flown in to China. A car picked me up and-took me to the hotel and I had dinner. Hey, this wasn't milking cows no more! I wasn't nervous during the interview, that surprised me. It must have gone okay, they offered me a job, starting at \$85.00 a week. I was, by far, the highest paid in my class.

I went out and bought a car, a year old Studebaker, a Starlight coupe. Stanton had had a new one after the war, it had imprinted me. I couldn't get credit unless Stan co-signed the note, which he did. I told you he was a good brother-in-law. I spent a stressful Christmas with the Scrivers.



UL NEW YORK  
UR Phi Chi Delta Dance  
ML Roy Fay  
MR RCS  
Bottom Pioneer Hall



## New York

Going to New York gave me an out. Sue had a year of school left, I could avoid a decision, even make it look plausible. I left, she still had faith. I think.

I drove to Endicott, two days through the hills of Indiana and Ohio, it was before the freeways were built. I rented a room and reported to work. IBM was a very structured, a very organized place to work, even for an engineer. It was white shirts and ties and immaculate labs. Not only was it then, and would be for years, the most successful company in the world, it was also the cleanest, most spotless place I'd ever seen. Even in the foundry and the machine shops it was spotless and in order. One could sit any place on any floor and not get a smudge. It may be one of the best things I got from them. I have, for business, forever after, associated success with cleanliness and order.

I was not in the computer division. At that time IBM still had a time clock division, it was what the company had started with originally. All over the country, in nearly every factory, they had these massive systems of time clocks all wired to a master clock. We were developing a system to tie them to the master clock by a radio signal superimposed on the power lines. This would eliminate the need for costly troublesome wiring. Time clocks, it turned out, would later be passe, but this technology is still widely used, commonly to control the timing of water heaters. I went about the country, designing and installing these. The UN building in New York had just been built. I spent weeks in it, it was a difficult installation. In spite of my emotional turmoil it apparently did not affect my work too badly. In six months I got a raise, to \$100 a week, in six more another, to \$115, and shortly after that a bigger one, to \$135.00 a week. Financially I was in fat city. When I left IBM and returned to Minnesota, without a job, it took me more than five years to get back up to the salary level I had left.

Sue wrote to me several times a week, long letters filled with folksy things about school and family. I wrote but don't remember what I said, nor if my letters reflected my confusion.

I wrote and asked if she would come and visit me in NY. -Yes, of course she would. She came, we drove through the Catskills, went to NYC, ate at fancy restaurants and went to shows. Soon it was time for her to go, my anxiety increased, my apprehension grew. I told her nothing, I sent her home with nothing. She continued to write, happy cheerful letters as if nothing was amiss.

I looked forward to vacation, I would go back to spend the time with her. I could hardly wait. I sneaked out early, people didn't do those things at IBM, and drove all night and the next day. I took the ferry across at Ludington and got to Scrivers exhausted on Sunday morning.

It was great, we went to the Aqua Follies, a water show at Theodore Wirth Park. She was lovely; slim and fresh in a linen suit with a flower in her hair. We left then for a swing up north, to visit all my family. Isn't that what normal couples do? I was going through all the motions. We visited every one, Marie and Tony, Emelie and Wes, Northome, everywhere. She seemed to find my family normal, she liked them and they liked her. What was the problem? It should have been my chance to tell her all about myself, to open up and ask her help and understanding. There is no doubt she would have offered it. I didn't do it.

As the time neared to go back to NY I became increasingly Apprehensive. Sue would be finished soon with school, I had a good job, we were in love, what was the problem? The problem was that the night before I was to leave I was "sick". She sat with me and fed me soup, and stole away empty handed. I "escaped" next morning, leaving her again with nothing. I was "sick" alright, sick with indecision, confusion and fear. The monkey on my back was fierce.

I think it was after that that she began to doubt, and who could blame her? She was besides, a bright and cheerful, lovely girl. I was not the only one who had knocked on her door. Even so, she kept it open for me. On Valentines Day I got a Valentine from her. "Okay, so you love me and I love you, now what?" It was the only time she ever chided me. By now she must have been totally baffled. I couldn't bear to let her go, I didn't have the courage to claim her. I was paralyzed. I knew that the situation would soon pass out of my control, I knew that I would stand by helpless.

## NEUROSIS

I also knew now that I was in deep trouble. I was ill. I could not go on like this for long. I couldn't sleep, couldn't concentrate. I don't know how I continued working, somehow I concealed it as I had learned to do. It was pure hell. The monkey on my back was destroying me. It could not go on. I was smart enough, and not too proud, to look for help, but where to find it? I finally contacted some psychiatrist, I don't remember his name. He worked for the state, up at the asylum in Binghamton. He took private patients on the side. I met with him a couple of times. He suggested electro-shock therapy. It was at that time being used experimentally, later it was discredited, now I understand it is being tried again in a more benign and humane form. It is a measure of my desperation that I, an electrical engineer, agreed to submit myself to that.

I remember driving up that long, snowy driveway on dark winter nights, up to those ugly red brick buildings of the asylum, the grim iron bars on all the windows. God, they looked just like those ugly red brick buildings in Moose Lake where Mother had been confined. Inside he had a little room with a sturdy bed. There were two big burley guys standing there, in white orderly's uniforms, their bellies hanging over their belts. He didn't tell me what they were there for but after the first time I knew. They were there to keep me from injuring myself 'while in convulsions. I layed down, he smeared some grease on my temples, strapped on some electrodes- I remember nothing more.

I awoke, limp and flaccid, with bruises on my arms and legs. The guy I hired to drive me home did just that. I went to work the next day. I was subdued and passive. I told no one, not even nice Mrs. Hubbard where I lived. I put myself through that chamber of horrors three times I think, or was it four. How could I tell Scrivers about that? Eventually, I realized there was no salvation for me there. Fortunately, I think, no lasting harm was done.

I hung on until early summer. By then I knew that my relationship with Sue was probably destroyed. I had to do something, I didn't know what else to do. I gave notice at IBM; they couldn't understand it, I couldn't explain. It

wouldn't be the last time I gave up a job because of the monkey on my back.

I cried when I said goodbye to Mrs. Hubbard and her daughter. They were nice people. Gladys came out and rode home with me, we went up to Niagara Falls and stopped in Illinois to visit an old army friend. It was all so "normal", I told Gladys nothing, kept it to myself as I always did.

I saw Sue a few times after that, it was painful. By a bizarre turn of events I watched her get married. I thought I was going to Sally's wedding, she was, after all, my friend. At the last moment Sue decided to make it a double ceremony. There was no escape for me I had to sit and watch. It was surreal, I watched the girl I loved get married. When I could, I escaped into the night. Is there any pain like self inflicted pain?

Why do I dwell on this at such great length? I am not the first guy to destroy the thing he wanted most. Sue wasn't even the first girl that I'd loved and lost, nor certainly the last. I do because this scenario would be the dominant factor of my life, a scenario that I would reprise again and again. One that I would repeat as compulsively, and futilely, as an animal pacing back and forth before it's bars. If I don't deal with it this narrative is meaningless.

Neurosis: "A derangement of the nervous system, usually unaccompanied by any physical change" So says my dictionary. 'A pretty weighty definition. I have a simpler one.

"It is that which causes one to compulsively and repeatedly act in a manner contrary to his or her own well-being"

I didn't get that from a book. I got that from my life.

I never fell in to the trap of blaming other people for my failures. I knew full well where the trouble lay.

I never was too stubborn or to proud to seek help. The trouble was I couldn't find it. I spent a lot of time with therapists, we parsed and analyzed every stanza of my life.

*Myslef when young did eagerly frequent Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument. About it and about, but evermore, Came out by the same door as in I went.*

Khayyam

I came away from them convinced of two things. That, however well-meaning they may be, most therapists have as many or more, problems than the ones they claim to help. If they didn't they probably wouldn't be in the trade. Physician heal thyself.

Secondly, knowing what happened, and even why, does not constitute a cure. Going back and learning the name of the girl in the whorehouse will not cure your gonorrhea.

So I have spent a lot of time, I've gained a lot of understanding, I have a lot of answers, but I have never solved the problem. I have learned to live with it, to carve out a life in spite of it, to do the best I can.

I have long since realized that I am at amo risk of illness like my mother's, I have never been suicidal or even close to it, I have never lost my optimism, nor my sense of humor. I have made more money than I can hope to spend, I have never lacked for friends. With the exception of one person I don't think my failings have caused anybody lasting harm. I hope that that is so. But yet, this neurosis has kept from me that which I wanted above all else. I have owned many houses, but, since Mother died, I have never really had a home. Since I ran over Nigs I have never had a dog. Sometimes people compliment me on my success, my interesting life, even on my humor and my wit. I smile, and thank them, but, there has never been a day that I would not have traded it for a dog and a bunch of kids. With one exception I have never been able to sustain an intimate emotional relationship with a woman for more than one or two years. Inevitably the relationship has either evolved into friendship or has terminated. The only exception has been with my friend Nina, and that is probably due not to any improvement on my part but rather to my age and the special qualities that she has.

So what is one to make of it all? What constitutes a successful life?

There was a door in which I found no key: There was a  
veil past which I could not see: Some little talk  
awhile of Me and Thee  
There seem'd -and then there was no more of Thee and Me.

Khayyam

## COMPUTERS

I was back in the Twin Cities. For the first time in my life I had no job. Life doesn't have to go on, but I wanted it to do so, so I started looking.

I interviewed Honeywell, 3M and others. Finally I took a job with a little start-up called Engineering Research, on 1902 Minnehaha in St Paul. It had been started by Bill Norris and some of his Navy cohorts after the war. They had been doing research for the Navy and wanted to keep the group together. I started, if I recall correctly, at about \$70.00 per week, hardly more than half of what I had been making at IBM. The first project that I worked on was one called The Flight Plan Storage System, a primitive, hard-wired, computer to do just what the name implies. It was the end of the era of vacuum tubes, the beginning of the age of semi-conductors. At that time to store, electronically, a single letter of the alphabet required twelve vacuum tubes, ten times that many resistors and capacitors, twenty feet of wire and a board the size of a big bread board to mount them on. Incredible, to know that the equivalent of a million of these can now be put on a piece of plastic the size of a postage stamp.

For the next seven years I would work at computer design of one form or another. My work I think was acceptable, adequate. At times I enjoyed it, it was after all a time of incredible advances, the threshold of the information age. Yet I never thought of myself as a typical engineer, many times I was bored with "engineers talk". Somehow I always had the feeling that I was marking time, that there was something else "out there" but what I didn't know. Even so, a lot of friends from that period are still my friends, are dear to me.

One day I was at work. The guard house called, there was an officer to see me. Me? I went out. "We have a warrant for your arrest, come with us". "You must be kidding", I said. They weren't kidding. "I'll get my coat". "We'll go with you". And so we paraded the full length of the building, and back. I'll follow you down". "No you won't, get in back", and they unlocked the Paddy Wagon door. By the time we got down to the precinct station I had got it out of them. It was a parking ticket from two years ago, but I knew of no parking ticket. I finally learned that Gordon's old car which was

registered in my name, had been ticketed. He had gone into the Navy and had left it to be picked up by the junk yard. They'd hauled it away, ticket and all. I asked the judge why they didn't just write me a letter, or telephone, I was in the book. He didn't know. He dismissed all the late penalties, I paid the ten dollar fine.

I got acquainted with some guys around the U, guys out of school, around my age, or somewhat younger. We rented a house together, several houses, from time to time. Mostly they were around St. Paul and the University. I joined a ski club, got serious about that and started an annual trip to ski in Colorado. I bought a sailboat and rented a slip on Minnetonka. Life was on hold but not too bad.

In the summer of '52 or '53 a friend, Norm Holt and I bought a piece of land and we began to build a house for him on his half. At that time I naively thought I would be next, but that's another story. Each night after work I would drive out Rice Street, and go down the service road on the south side of Hwy 36. It was a long downgrade, by the time I got to the RR crossing at the bottom I'd be moving and would zip across the tracks without a thought. There were no lights, no gate. Every time, it seemed, when I parked at the building site a few blocks further I'd hear this train go by nearby. I never associated it with those tracks, I guess I thought they were abandoned.

One afternoon I zipped down that hill and across those tracks as before. As I crossed, the front end of a locomotive, whistle screaming, filled the entire frame of the window at my side. I expected it to tear off my rear bumper but I cleared. Ouch! I was shaken.

I was in the computer business and used to dealing with thousandths and millionths of a second. It was easy for me to calculate. If the train was traveling at fifty MPH, and was twenty feet away when I crossed I had one-third of a second to spare, three hundred and thirty milliseconds. A bit close I'd say. I counted it as no four of my nine lives.

There were always women about, we did the current "singles scene". I can't remember half their names. Many were' very nice and fun people but I formed no lasting relationship with most of them. "A bachelor is a guy that comes to work from a

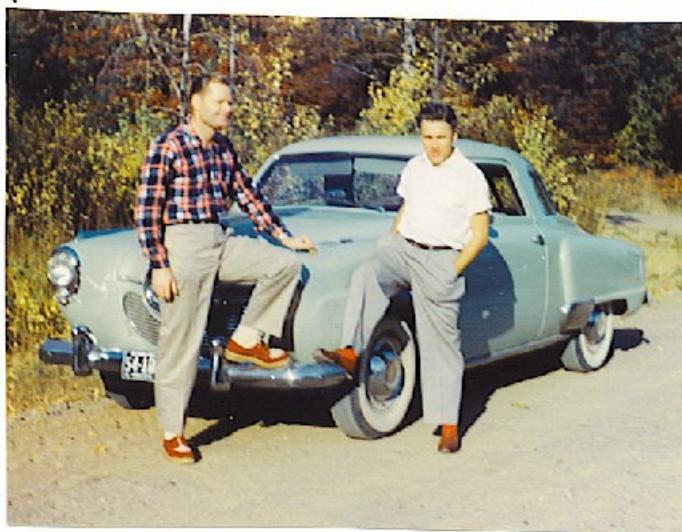


1953

Minnetonka



Connie Wulcon, Ted Brandon,



Ted Brandon, RCS

different direction at least four times a week" AIDS had not yet been invented.

I thought often of Sue and of what my life might have been compared to what it was, the regret was still with me, but the pain was easing. I could still feel the monkey on my back, but He was quieter. Yet one by one the group succumbed to marriage, I must have been an usher or best man a dozen times. I always thought that one day I would go that way, but I could not visualize it. It didn't happen. It was 1956, I was thirty-three.

I was down to my last roommate, Al. He was a good solid, conservative guy, dependable and honest. He was wooing a most attractive girl, and nice to boot. He was also getting nowhere. The trouble is, I told him, was that he had no pizazz. He looked drab, he dressed drab and worst of all his car was hopeless. It was an old '49 Plymouth, grey, a four door. It wheezed and smoked and the clutch slipped so badly he could hardly make it up the driveway. I said, "Al, what you need is some class and I am going to find you some" One Sunday I saw the ad: "56 Chevy Bel Air convertible, like new" . This was in 1956. I hauled him over there. The car was gorgeous, aquamarine and white, 2,000 miles, almost new. It is the handsomest auto Chevrolet ever made, that car today, restored is worth \$60,000 or more. The woman was wiping it with her silk handkerchief, and crying. I asked why she was selling it. Her husband had bought himself a new Corvette and, they couldn't afford three cars. Wow, the good old days.' She named a price, two or three thousand, a steal. Al stalled.

I got him back in my car, drove out of sight and said, "Al, if you don't buy that goddamn car you are a goddamn fool. Get the hell out of my car, and either buy that car or walk home." He bought it. Soon after he gave her a ring and six months -later I had another ushering job. He was the last of the group, I was living alone.

Al played another role in my life. He dabbled, perhaps more than dabbled, in the stock market and he got me started too. It was the beginning of the great post-war bull market, the twenty year era of "start-ups", of companies whose name ended in "onics". My first purchase, however, was of a little fly-by-night uranium mining company, Verdi Development. I paid twenty-five cents a share for a couple thousand shares. I

doubt that they ever put a spade in the ground, it didn't matter, the stock went up to seventy-five cents, a triple. (This phenomenon is based on the 'Greater Fool Theory') . I was hooked. It was better than milking cows by hand, better even than driving truck. Since that time I have never been completely "out of the market". I made a few bucks on those early ventures, it was hard to lose in those days, but more important it primed me for the main event which was to come in 1957. Without that early experience I would have passed up the opportunity that was to come my way.

When that opportunity came I cut Al in on it. Unfortunately he was never able to return the favor and get me married.

It was in the summer of 1957, I was at Stan & Bena's for supper in south Minneapolis. We finished eating and shortly I prepared to leave. As I was leaving, my sister asked me where I was going. "I'm going out to change my life", I said. And so I did, just that.

Engineering Research had been bought by Remington Rand. They had also bought a pioneer computer company called Eckert & Mauchley which had built a computer they called Univac. It was a three way clash of cultures and technology between Remington Rand and the two acquisitions, a "take no prisoners battle". It couldn't be resolved apparently and in 1957 Bill Norris and a dozen or so of his senior men decided to break away and start a new company. They needed money and decided to raise it by selling stock, much of it to Remington Rand employees. We gathered quietly, almost secretly in a fellow's basement. They would sell 600,000 shares at \$1.00 per share. I opted for 12,000 shares. I didn't have that much money but fortunately we needn't pay it all at once. I am, in looking back, a little curious about where I got the courage to risk that much. That was a lot of money in 1957, but then I never had much trouble making business decisions. It is the personal ones that kill me.

The company, Control Data, faltered once, early on, caught it's breath and never looked back. If I had held on to all my stock, which of course I did not, and if I had sold it all at it's peak, which of course I did not, it would have returned me just under ten million dollars. This for an investment of \$12,000.

I want to correct a misconception held by some of my family, a product of someone's imagination, I think. I was a charter, and one of the larger, early stock holders, but, I was not one of the "founders" of CDC. I knew them all of course, but other than as an investor, I played no role in it, not even a minor one. I did not begin work at Control Data until three years after it's founding.

### **1958**

Al had gotten married, I was renting an apartment by myself. I met a girl at the ski club. We went out a few times and then one night we stopped by my apartment for a drink. A couple of weeks later she told me the news. I froze, I panicked. The monkey on my back was tearing me apart, I twisted and I turned and vacillated. I couldn't bring myself to marry someone that I had loved for two years, how could I marry someone I hardly knew? I looked for help, advice, but no one can make a decision for someone else. In the end I failed her. I failed her. She deserved better, she was no tramp, she was a nice person. I violated every ethic that I believed in. I failed her.

Our daughter was adopted by a family whose name or whereabouts I do not know. Perhaps now I have grandchildren I will never see. Her mother, God, I hope it didn't wreak havoc with her life. A friend has sometimes urged me to seek and find the girl. But in this open age she could find me if she wished. I've often hoped that she would. But if she doesn't want to, what right have I to intrude? I haven't done it.

### **1958**

I was thirty-five, my friends had all gotten married, I had put myself and another person through a painful trauma and I was going stale at Remington Rand. I quit. I took a job with a guy who was a sales rep for a number of electronic companies. I tried my hand at selling electronic components. A friend Jerry Williams was working there and he had designed a little transistor driven indicator light. They had formed a little company, Transistor Electronics Company, TEC, to make and sell them nationally. Jerry was vice-president of engineering, in fact he was at first the whole department. I was vice-president of sales. It was a struggle, I remember one early month when sales totaled \$14,000.

The products we were building were "indicator lights" They

LIS STAR

ets

Mon., Dec. 1, 1958

## Skoe Named as Electronic Firm Vice President



Raymond C. Skoe, formerly sales promotion manager, was appointed vice president in charge of sales for Transistor Electronics Corp., Don V. Hamilton, president, announced.

Before joining the Minneapolis firm three months ago, Skoe headed the logical design group in medium digital machines at Remington Rand Univac.

Hamilton also announced appointment of Charles E. Pain as production manager. He was formerly a production engineer at Remington Rand, production manager for Microtone and a methods engineer for Minneapolis-Honeywell Regulator Co.

Transistor Electronics is engaged in designing and manufacturing transistorized electronic equipment and components.

## ELECTRONIC NEWS

New York MAR 13 1961

### Data Firm Names Digital Manager

MINNEAPOLIS. — Raymond C. Skoe has been named product manager for digital products of Control Data Corp.'s Cedar Engineering division. It is a new post.

Mr. Skoe was formerly vice-president of sales for Transistor Electronics Corp., here.

Also last week, Control Data announced it has hired its 1000th employee, thus removing itself from the small-business classification set up by the Federal Government. Over 400 of the firm's employees fall into professional classification, the company said.

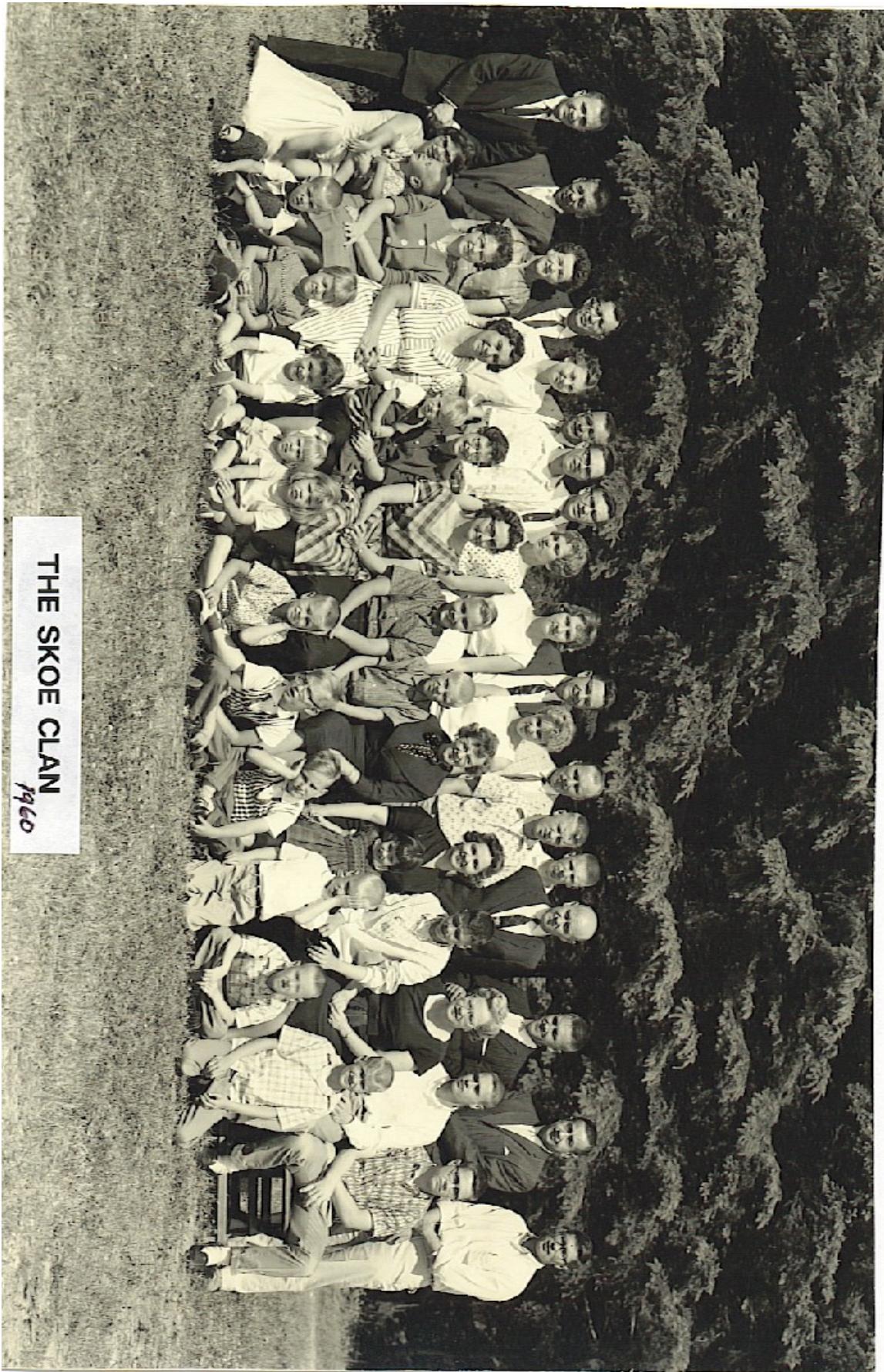
are no longer used in computers except for show in movies and such. Remember that, the next time you see a computer winking and blinking in a film or on TV. Those lights are there for you to look at, they have nothing to do with the computer itself. At that time, however they were important, they told the programmer what the machine was doing. The lights used on the now obsolete high voltage vacuum tube circuits would not operate on the low voltage transistor circuits. Jerry had designed one that would and that was the basis for the company.

Eventually we got it going, sold some stock to the public, worked our butts off and made a decent little company out of it. I had left by that time, but it did get as large as twenty million a year in sales. Later the company moved to Tucson and eventually succumbed to changing technology and mismanagement.

The president and major owner of the company was a guy named Don Hamilton. One day he called me into his office and told me to sit down. Apparently I had been grousing around about something. He said, "Skoe, I've got some advice for you. Get happy or get out". The meeting was over. I never had been overly fond of that little bastard, but by George, I had to hand it to him. He had hit the nail right on the head. I couldn't have said it better myself. It was some of the best advice I ever got. I pass it on, free of charge: "Where ever you are, get happy or get out."

He was full of advice, not all of which I welcomed, but he had one more which he liked to quote, and which I have found useful, namely: "You'll catch more flies with honey than you will with vinegar." Not exactly original with him, but I remember it because he used it.

Hamilton and TEC also introduced me to the sales-life way of spending money, mine or a company's, but mostly the company's, on myself for the pure fun of it. Being a child of the depression it had, until then, never occurred to me to go out to a restaurant after work and spend a lot of money on food when I could just go home and eat. I learn quickly however, and I liked it. I remember the first time we did. We'd gotten "an order". Hamilton said, "Let's Go!". We went to McCarhy's, then on Wayzata Boulevard, red leather seats/ long mahogany bar, good looking waitresses. We had a couple of



THE SKOE CLAN  
1960

drinks, ordered the best steaks in the house, wine, desert, cognac, coffee, the works. Charged it all to "sales expense" This was a new talent, I caught on, and it served me well during my three years in Europe. There is much less of that now, taxes and austerity has dampened it considerably'. At that time it was common to have a drink at lunch, sometimes, perhaps, two for a special occasion, although the "three martini lunch" was mostly a myth. Now of course even one drink at a business lunch is "bad form" . A glass of wine perhaps or a split of beer, but more than one, or cocktails are passe.

After two years with Hamilton I was no longer happy and I did get out. He had persuaded me to sell a lot of CDC stock to help finance this little company. I owned stock in TEC, of course, but basically it was his company, I was just a minority holder. In the meantime the CDC stock that I had sold cheaply, mainly to Don's benefit, had doubled and redoubled. I had sacrificed an immense amount of money, to his benefit, to get that little company going. I didn't think that he appreciated it, which didn't help my attitude. I was growing tired of him and he of me. I got out.

## EUROPE

That summer, 1960, I had bought a summer cabin on Lake Independence and had spent the summer waterskiing. I used to claim that I had taught half the girls in Minneapolis to water ski. Late that summer, I wasn't working, a friend, Lenny Johnson and I decided to go to Europe. Neither of us had ever been there.

We sailed on one of the Queens to Liverpool. He had bought a tiny car and we toured north to Scotland. One night we were looking for a country dance we'd heard about, we stopped at this big old house to ask directions. We got them but as we started to drive away this young guy, in kilts, came running out. "Come on in and have a wee dram" Why not? We had a couple- three "wee drams". He was chairman of the committee to pick a local queen to represent the area in the annual Ben Nevis festival. Ben Nevis is the highest mountain in Scotland, they have a foot race up it, a queen and all that. He needed two judges, we were it.

Off we all went to the dance, scotch whiskey is awful good whiskey, and we got up on the stage while the candidates danced by. The judges had a difference of opinion, I prevailed. I think I made a mistake, I think she was too thin, too old, (21), and too intelligent to please the crowd.

We left by train for France and arrived in Paris shortly after dark. We checked into our hotel, got our key, to room No. 3 and went up the stairs. The hall was dark, we couldn't see the numbers on the doors. Here it was, No. 3, it looked like, the key fit so in we went. We hadn't reserved a room with bath, but there one was. I had a date that night with a girl I'd met on the boat so I quick got in the tub. All of a sudden I heard the damndest commotion I had ever heard, the manager was there and he was in a rage. We couldn't understand a word he was saying but finally figured out that we were in room, eight, not three.

We tried to tell him it was a mistake, the hall was 'dark, we'll pay extra or move. No way, I thought he'd have a stroke. He took all our stuff, including what I had been wearing and threw it out on to the sidewalk. I had to go down the stairs bare naked and dress on the sidewalk. Such was my

first impression of the French in France. I have since spent a lot of time in Paris and my opinion has mellowed some since then, but not an awful lot.

We did Paris, including Place Pigalle. Place Pigalle? Yes, Place Pigalle. You don't know it? Your father or your uncle who served in France can explain it to you. I visited Normandy and the invasion beaches. The American cemeteries in France are beautiful beyond belief, but the white grave markers go on in endless rows. Born 1925, Died 1944. So young, so young. The German cemeteries, different markers, different names, but otherwise the same.

To Deutschland, I found the Germans easier to deal with. At the Hofbrau Haus, pig hocks and beer. We sat at a big table with a German family. I drank four liters of brown beer. What was I trying to prove? Stupid, it cost me a hundred marks, \$25, to clean up the Mercedes taxi.

I had bought a car, a Peugot 403, great car, I drove to Denmark and ferried over to Norway, drove to Telemark. Through Skien and then to Bo. I had no difficulty in finding the Skoe farm. Twenty-five acres nestled in the mountains, it was beautiful but small. The old house in which Pa had been born had been torn down just one year earlier. They had saved, and gave to me, some of the old, square, hand-made nails. The family was serene and welcoming, I felt at-home. I tried to imagine Pa running, bare footed, about the yard. (The image wouldn't come. A grand daughter of that family, Merete Erikstein is now attending Augsburg College here in Minneapolis.

Somewhere along the way a wire caught up with me, from my friend Dick Clarke, "Come home, we've got a job for you" So I went home, I was weary, anyhow, of travel.

Control Data had set up a peripheral equipment division (PED) to build input-output units, tape storage units and the like, for their own use. They offered me the job as Sales Manager, to sell the units to the industry as well. It sounded good to me I took it. Eventually PED grew to be the biggest and most profitable division of the company. I worked at that, in Minneapolis, until the fall of 1962. Then the word went out, CDC is going to Europe. I accompanied Bill Norris and some others on an exploratory trip. We visited Paris, London,

Stockholm, Frankfort, Rome and Zurich. I wasn't asked, I was told, I would be responsible for FED sales in Europe. When we got back I started packing.

For almost two years I had been dating a girl named Dixie. She was a nurse, tall, with a smile as wide as the heavens. I had been often to her family's home but, as always, was evasive. Now it was decision time again. I was wrong, a decision had already been made, but not by me. I called her, she agreed to meet. She told me then, she had met a man who wanted her, and knew it. She was sorry, she wished me love. I had reprised the sad tune again. I went to Europe hurting.

"A neurosis is that which causes one compulsively, and repeatedly, to act or not to act, in a manner contrary to his or her own well being."

## EUROPE

I sold my furniture, bought a new Olds convertible and moved to Lucerne in January, 1963. In addition to me there were four others of us that went. I rented an apartment overlooking Lake Lucerne, Lutzelmattweg Drei (3) . I looked across the lake at Audrey Hepburn's chalet. I was hoping she would take advantage of my proximity, but she passed up her opportunity.

I didn't pay much attention to what the others were doing, opening other offices I guess, but I was selling peripheral equipment. I traveled, almost constantly, to all the major cities of Europe. I'd leave on Monday morning, or Sunday night, and not return until Friday or Saturday. I got to know the porters at the airports by name.

It was in some respects an interesting life but it was conducive to isolation and loneliness. It didn't do much for my social life. There were women, here and there, mostly stewardesses, sometimes friends from the States visiting or skiing, but my constant travel made it difficult to develop much more than the life of a nomad. I worked some at learning German but that was difficult in Switzerland where nearly everyone speaks English. "Ich frage auf Deutch, Mann antwortet auf English"

### **November 23, 1963**

I was sitting in Bill Norris's office about eleven o'clock. I had brought back to the States some Dutch customers, they wanted to meet Bill. We were having coffee. His secretary came and handed him a note.

In the beginning, in Europe, CDC was an unknown. "Guten Tag, this is Mr. Skoe of Control Data..." "Kontrol wer? "Was wunchen Sie?" It got better, the computer industry then was small and news traveled fast. When I started selling there, CDC didn't have a lot of peripheral products ready, actually only one, a very good tape storage unit. My first major sale was to Machine des Bull in Paris, for tape units. That sale got us up and running and more products were coming. But I was selling the future as well as the present. Before I left the peripheral business I made a five year projection of peripheral sales in Europe. Much later I was told by Bob

Price, then president of CDC, that my projection was off by less than ten percent.

We had a lot of fun as well. For an American, Europe was cheap. A dollar was worth four Deutchmarks, almost three times what it is now. Prices were low, CDC stock was going up every day. Money simply was not a consideration, if we wanted to do something or go some place we just did it. We would gather in Koniegsburg's old castle, just outside Frankfurt, coming from all over Europe, just to have a poker game. The stakes that we played for then seem incredible now. It was not uncommon to win or lose five hundred or more on a single hand, that in 1964 dollars. If I tried to get together a game like that today no one would show, including me.

I knew how to ski, passably well, and Europe was the place for that. For an American, it was cheap as well. Often times when you rounded a corner on a slope there would be a little chalet serving beer and wine and wurst. The bread was always super good. To sit in the sun in the Alps, drink good beer and eat good bread and cheese, does it get any better than that?

*"Nothin could be finer, and it weren't in Caroliner.*

I ate in restaurants when traveling, which was most of the time and even when in town, Lucerne, I mostly ate out. The food was just super and the bread was something else, just great, even in the cheapest places. I concluded then that -the reason Americans ate so much toast was because their bread wasn't fit to eat unless they disguised it by burning it. I used to say, "The poorer the country, the better the bread". That was thirty years ago, we must be getting poorer, our bread has gotten a lot better.

My old friend Larry Motl was traveling to Europe then for 3M and we'd often take a week to ski. One nice thing about my job, before I went to Stockholm, was that I never had office hours or for that matter, a boss in Europe who knew what I was doing. I was on my own, set my own schedule, went when and where I pleased, and showed up at the office now and then. There was nothing for me to do there except to get my-mail. My work was on the road, so arranging ski time was not a problem. I skied them all, from the snobbish St Moritz to the little villages in Austria, from Mont Blanc in France to the



View from my apartment  
Lucerne, Switzerland



Above, Paris

Elsa, Austria

chaos of an Italian lift-line. You don't know what chaos is until you have seen a lift-line in Italy.

Once I asked one of the engineers in Minneapolis to come over and bring me, and our customers, up to-date on what was new. He came, Jim Bauch, a fun guy. We toured the continent and Britain together. One night in Paris we were walking back to our hotel from dinner. We passed a little bistro, the door was wide open, juke box playing. It was full of girls,-not a man there. Curious we decided to go in and have a cognac. At first we didn't get it, two of the girls were always by the door or on the sidewalk in front, the rest were entertaining each other in back. If one of those in front disappeared another would take her place and shortly the first would reappear. They seemed to have an agreed upon rotation. Of course we soon caught on. And, for whatever reason, having decided we weren't potential clients, we decided to join the fun. We ordered wine for all of them. They viewed this with skepticism at first, but seeing we had no hidden agenda, they invited us to join with them. We drank, bought more wine, they laughed and teased us. We couldn't understand a word they said, it didn't seem to matter. Some sang, some danced, one was an acrobat. There was no way to buy a ticket to a show like that.

Suddenly a police car pulled up in front, quietly, no noise no sirens. Two gendarmes jumped out. Those girls simply disappeared; to where I have no idea. They scattered like sparrows when a cat appears; all except one, they took her with them. She went quietly, without protest. Immediately, one by one, the girls drifted back, the music and laughter resumed, we bought more wine, all was as before. "Merci!, Merci beaucoup!", they thanked us. We walked back to our hotel. Unequivocally, that was the most fun evening I ever spent in Paris or in France.

This is for every salesperson in the field who has dreaded having brass come out to "help". We had a guy in Minneapolis who was not too busy, and besides he liked the food and booze in Europe. He'd wire ahead for us to arrange a swing to call on our customers and prospects, France, Britain, Germany, Italy, the whole lot. We dreaded having him come, but what could we do? And so he would arrive and we'd make the swing around, eating and drinking well in every city. He would



Diana



Elsa - Austria

Ruth - Zurich

Dorie Benson - Austria



promise the moon to every customer at every stop. We'd try to pass him notes and kick him under the table to try to tell him, no, no, we can't do that, but he would be caught up in the glory of the moment. After he had gone home we'd heave a big sigh, and then go back and explain to all these thrilled customers why we couldn't do the things he promised. He shall remain nameless, if you weren't there the name is unimportant, if you were there you will remember.

For you international travelers, do you remember? You've had dinner, two guys, you're walking back to your hotel. It's early, too early to go to bed. You'll just stop in here and have a nightcap. You get a table. Two Lovelies join you, "May we sit down?" Why not? "Buy us a drink?" Why not.? Two hours later, the bar is closing, the Lovelies have disappeared, the bill comes. Five hundred dollars for two bottles of champagne and four beers. You pay. London, Paris, New York, Munich, Tokyo, it doesn't matter. Show me an international traveler who hasn't done it and I'll show you "a second lieutenant that didn't win the war."

On my periodic trips back to the plant I had been dazzled, as had every other guy, and for good reason, by a woman there. She had been married, but was not then; she had two young sons. I asked if she'd like to travel Europe for a couple of weeks with me. She would. Diane met me in London and we stayed there for a couple of days, in a hotel up on Bayswater Road. It was near an Underground station and I can still »remember the sound of the recorded voice on the elevator saying, "Stand back from the gates please".

We flew to Lucerne, got my car and drove down to the Mediterranean coast of France, through Italy and, down Yugoslavia to Split. The coast there was beautiful, the hotels not so great, so we went back to Italy. I had bought a half a dozen bottles of Yugo wine just to try it out. They were in the trunk, the road was rough, the sun was hot. Suddenly explosions. I thought first it was gunfire or tire blowouts. It was neither. Two of the corks had blown simultaneously. Our clothes were a mess. But it was great, a memorable two weeks. Then I put her on a plane in Nice for her to return. Later I visited her again in Los Angeles, we drove down to Mexico in her new Mustang and picnicked at Ensenada. It was decision time again. I couldn't make one but she could. She soon remarried.

In the fall of 1964 I was asked, or told, to move to Stockholm and take over the office that we were opening there. It would be the office for all of Scandinavia; Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. We would be selling computers. Someone else would sell peripheral gear.

I loaded up my stuff and moved, drove up to Denmark, took the ferry across to Sweden and drove to Stockholm. I got sleepy somewhere along the way and pulled into a little grassy spot to sleep. I took my billfold and my passport out of my pocket to be more comfortable and laid them in the grass. A few miles out of Stockholm I realized I'd left them there. I turned around and went back, doubting I would recognize the spot, especially from the opposite direction. It was getting dark as well. I found them.

The move to Stockholm was a mistake for me and the company. I liked the people in the office fine, one, Nick Kirkenge, and his wife Karie now live in Minnetonka. They are long time friends.

But in truth I was out of my element. I didn't really know what we were selling. I had been away from central computers too long, I was out of touch. I hardly knew a word of any Scandinavian language. True, every one knew English, but often used their own language. I felt uncomfortable sitting there listening to people talk about a product I didn't, know, in a language I didn't understand. Unlike peripheral sales, I never felt that I was making any contribution.

I enjoyed traveling to Norway and Denmark but I found Stockholm forbidding. They are very formal people, they, the Swedes, and the weather was depressing. Stockholm is at the same latitude as the middle of Hudson Bay. In the winter it hardly got daylight at all and in the summer never really dark. I found it hard to sleep. My social life was barren, I had never been forward, was never one to walk into a bar and get acquainted. Life was lonely and I didn't have the distraction of constant travel. Again, as at IBM, I knew I had to make a change. I asked to be relieved. Granted. It took a long time to find a replacement but finally it was done.



T Rose & Stanley

M Linda, Ron, Emelie, Wes

BL Brad, Doug, Kathy, Steve,  
Russel, Margaret

BR Marie and Tony



The European main office had been moved to Frankfort. During my frequent visits there I had come to know, slightly, a girl named Gisela.

"... and she was wondrous fair".

In transferring home I came to spend a few weeks there. Was it love, fascination, desperation or obsession? It was something on my part. Eventually, four years later, we would be married but then it was a stressful time, a time of confusion. Now we are friends, she lives nearby. So all that happened is our private matter. I will not write of it except to say that I went home, came back and did it once again. I went back yet again to Frankfort and returned stricken and defeated. I didn't handle it well.

The monkey on my back had been transmuted, He was a tiger now. Eventually I went home to stay and Gisela was married. It was then in 1966 that I went back to the old house and pondered my situation- to no avail.

Of minor interest perhaps. During that time in limbo that I spent in Frankfort I was staying with a friend, the manager of the German office. His name was Peter J. B. Stevens, a hyphenated English-American. He looked exactly like Jeff Chandler and claimed to have been an RAF fighter pilot during the war. For all I know, perhaps he was. He was renting the house in Bad Homburg that Elvis had owned, or rented, while in the army and stationed in Germany. So I have that much in common with Elvis, we lived in the same house.

Back in Minneapolis I was bored, and suffering from the "reentry syndrome". No one knew what to do with me. In some ways I had outgrown Minneapolis. After Europe, the bread didn't seem fit to eat, red wine was served with ice, television was worse. I asked for a leave of absence, three months. Three months led to six, and in the end I never did go back to CDC. It was the last salaried job that I would hold, I would never again work for anyone but myself.

I had been home only a few weeks when I got a letter from the state tax commissioner. He said I owed the State \$36,000.00. While in Europe I had sold quite a bit of CDC stock. They claimed I was still a resident of Minnesota. I told the two

**1970**

**TEN SIBLINGS-TEN SPOUSES**



Back: Gisela & RCS, Russel, Earl, Stanley, Stanton, Tony Rozycki,  
Wesley Karkela, Stan Petzel, Gordon & Connie.

Front: Margaret, Vera, Rose, Beatrice, Marie, Emclie, Gladys,  
& Bena.

"shoe clerks" who working on my case to go to hell. They attached my bank account. I hired a lawyer, Ken Anderson of Cant, Taylor, Haversack, Birdseye and Grey. I figured that with a name like that they should be able to do something.

When I had moved to Europe in '63 I had sold all my furniture and given up my apartment. In Switzerland I had signed a three year lease, got a Swiss drivers license, Swiss insurance, paid Swiss payroll taxes, got my mail there and my check. I said, if that isn't being a resident of Switzerland what the hell is? The shoe clerks argued that I always planned to return to Minnesota. I told them that I planned to move wherever Bill Norris sent me but we weren't discussing that. We were discussing where I had lived the last three years. I won the case handily enough, if you call a \$6,000.00 attorney's bill winning. My winning set a precedence and put an end to half dozen other cases they were preparing against CDC people. I wrote a letter to Bill suggesting that since I had carried the burden of defence for the whole company maybe it would be appropriate for CDC to share these costs with me. He wrote back saying he appreciated my service, thought it couldn't have happened to a nicer guy; if he thought there were any kiddies going hungry because of it he would surely help but since there weren't he was going to pass up the opportunity to help. Since he was holding all the cards, as well as the money, I decided there wasn't much to be gained by pressing the issue, and I didn't.

My three years in Europe did something for me, something very good. It gave me a poise in social situations, or any situation, that I had never had, a poise bordering on arrogance. Nor was it a false sense of security, I really felt as if I had done more, seen more and knew more than most people that I met. I was confident in any crowd. Hey man, don't knock it. That's money in the ban

**FRIENDS**



**Roberta**



**Dick and Dorie Thomas**



**Paul & Shirley Tolletson**



**Dixie**

## **STATESIDE**

*It was 1966 I resumed the stateside single life. One day I was driving up 35W in Richfield approaching the overpass over the Crosstown. I was in the left lane, driving about sixty. Just before the crest, for no reason at all I switched into the right lane. Swish, there went a car going the wrong way in the lane that I had just left, another case of milliseconds. I had used the fifth of my nine "lives-".*

*Now that I no longer worked there, I became acquainted, and reacquainted, with a group of CDC fellows. We went on hunting and fishing trips to Canada and elsewhere, and played a lot of high-stakes poker. I joined the Decathlon Club. It was a fortuitous thing for me, because from that group came, lifelong friends.*

My former secretary had a friend, Roberta.

Does this broken record that I play, Grow  
wearisome?

*Perhaps for me, she was the most compatible of all. "Do you love me, Ray, or not?" I reprised my old refrain. Soon after that she married. I was back with a shrink again, to no avail.*

*... and came out by the same door that in I went.*

Khayyam

## **N3453-Fox**

One day, in 1968, with time on my hands I made a list of things to do before I died. High on the list was to learn to fly. What better time? I did, and bought a plane, a 1966 Cessna 182 Skylane. In twenty-four marvelous years of flying I never had an "incident". Until, that is, until my very last flight and I will come to that.



STUCK!

## WILD RICE.

It was late summer of 1968. "Some people are attempting to grow Wild Rice commercially, why don't we pick up some land and try it too?" I always thought that it was my brother Stanton and my brother-in law Don Barren that had said that to me. Don tells me now, that it was I that said it to them. I've always "blamed" them for it. It was true, Jeno Palucci had tried, and failed, but now some people, more practical than he, were experimenting with it. But I had left a "farm" up there when I was eighteen, I had no intentions ever to be a farmer again. But I said, I think I said, "Okay, I'll put up some money if you guys do the work". So I did, \$100,000.00 and we did, we bought some swamp land. Thus it began, and it was to dominate the rest of my working life. I am not at all certain, that, had we known where it would take us and what it would entail, that we would have gone on with it. That has been the subject of endless conjecture.

We began looking for suitable land. It had to be flat and level, accessible, clearable and near a source of lots of water. We scoured Northern Minnesota. I flew my plane back and forth for days, looking, looking. Don, who worked for the Soil Conservation Service knew the area and located a piece. Too late it was taken; we settled for some nearby. We didn't realize it at the time but we got, what we believe, is the finest wild rice location in the state. We would trade-for no other.

We had, originally, about three hundred acres and in September of that year we unloaded a bulldozer and began to clear it. It was a tamarack swamp, covered mostly with willows, old stumps and standing timber. There were no roads, no buildings, no power. We have been told since that the locals thought we were out of our minds, that we would soon disappear without a trace. At times I wished we had. We got a road, a trail, in that fall, and the stumps partly off from forty acres. It was something, wallowing in the mud and mire up to our waist, cold and wet, stuck all the time- maybe we were so close we couldn't see the insanity of it all. All through the winter when the swamp was frozen solid we worked with bulldozers to clear more land.

In the spring we planted those forty acres that we had readied in the fall. Immediately in the spring, when the ground thawed



EARLY DAYS - 1968



Nice Rice!



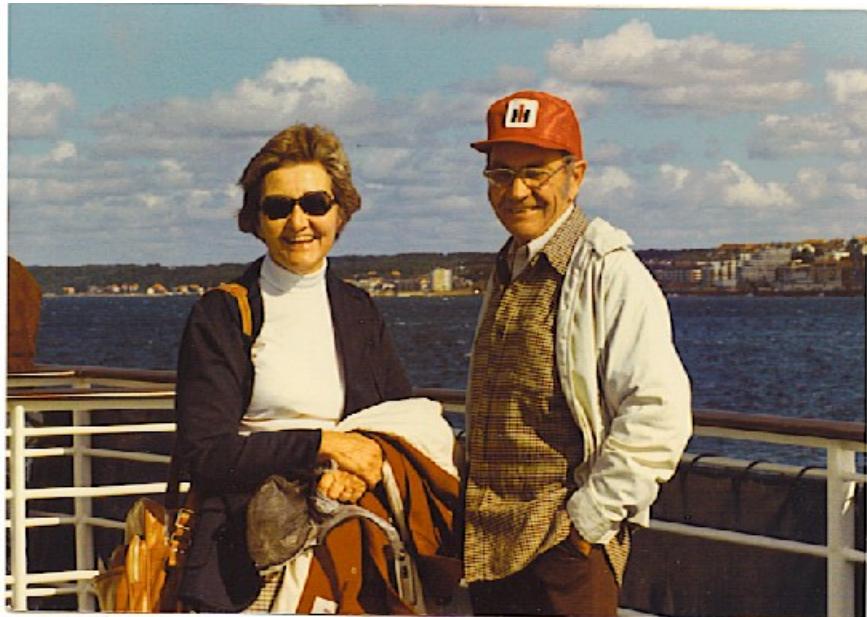
The combine fleet

we started building, roads and dikes and bridges. We had no excavator of our own so we hired a fellow named Oscar Nerhus who had an old dragline. "How much do you charge an hour?" "Twelve dollars, but if you will guarantee me three weeks work I'll do it for eleven." "Okay, it's a deal." Oscar's machine never left that farm for seven years. For seven years, every day, every summer he worked that old machine. He would start at seven, you could set your watch, and quit at five, you could set your watch. He must have built fifty miles of roads and dikes and three times that many miles of ditches. Now of course, we have modern hydraulic excavators of our own, and there have been many changes made, but most of the millions of yards of dirt he moved remains, there, where he put it.

Oscar did another thing, he taught me to chew Copenhagen. I had smoked cigars but an irritated throat had forced me to quit. I would drive out twice a day to where he was working to see how he was doing. He'd idle down his old machine and while we talked he'd pull out his box of snuff. After giving it the ritual tap on the cover with his fingernail, he'd take off the cover and offer me a chew. Well, courtesy is courtesy, what could I do? I'd take a pinch and spit it out when he wasn't looking. This went on for a few weeks and then I found myself not spitting it out. It wasn't long before I was finding an excuse to go talk to him more often. Soon after that I was offering him a chew from my box. "I was hooked. I have since given it up but I still miss it.

In the fall we attempted to harvest our forty acres with a "homemade" machine that was supposed to simulate someone in a canoe. It was almost hopeless, we knew we would have to find something more modern. We stored enough seed to plant, the next spring, the three hundred more acres we had readied that summer.

The major problem with wild rice then, and still is, is that the grain is prone to "shattering", ie, it ripens unevenly and the ripe kernels fall on the ground while many of the rest are still immature. Hand pickers try to overcome this by making multiple passes in canoes, at three or four day intervals. That is impractical with machines and large acreages. We had to be able to use combines and to harvest it in a single pass. I had heard about some guy in Grand Rapids who claimed he had some "improved" seed, a strain that was less shattering. I went to see him.



Beatrice and Stanton



Gladys and Don

I found him in his "office". He was a fur buyer, wild rice broker and speculator. His office was in an old building, second floor, dark and dirty. He was laying on his back behind his desk, squeezing his pimples, his back hurt, a big heavy man. Yes, he had some of this "great" new seed, yes, he would sell me some but first he wanted to "talk some business". I made a deal to swap the rice we'd stored for seed in exchange for some of his seed. We also "talked some business".

I headed for home, Minneapolis, it was four a.m., I was driving a Buick Riviera. Officer: "My good man, do you know how fast you were going? Me: "I don't have the slightest idea". "Would you believe eighty-five?". Me: "Officer, I would. I have just loaned \$50,000.00 to a guy that needs a shower, who is laying on the floor squeezing pimples, who I have never seen in my life before. Not only that I wrote out the check, gave it to him and left and I don't have a 'single piece of paper to show for it. If you told me I was going a hundred and five, I wouldn't doubt your word, if this thing will do that". He laughed and said he hated to ticket idiots and he let me off easy. It was the beginning of a relationship of fifteen turbulent years, involving lawsuits and about every thing else that is possible. Out of this relationship there did evolve a Wild Rice Cooperative, of which we are as yet a member, and a marketing company, Gourmet House, which we eventually sold to Anhauser-Busch. I got the fifty thousand dollars back.

I had a little job to do. We had stored our seed by putting it in perforated steel barrels and submerging them in Oscar's stock pond. Wild rice seed must be stored in water. A stock pond is a big hole that has been dug out and let fill up with water. The cattle wade out in it to drink, that isn't all they do in it. It's green and slimy, full of dead frogs and mice and it stinks. It was late November, cold. When we had put the barrels in the pit we hadn't considered how to get them out, well how? There was only one way. Someone had to wade out into that slime, grope around deep in the water, (water?) and attach a cable to them, one at a time, so they could be winched out. The cable was too short, each barrel had to be hooked and then rehooked, all fifty of them. I held my nose and waded into the cold, slimy muck about nine in the morning. There was ice along the edges. I wore only ordinary clothes, no waders, no boots, they would have been too clumsy, too



Ocsar Nerhus, RCS, Bob Parker,  
Al Kneable

Clearwater Lake Cabin



heavy. At nine that evening I was still sloshing around in that slime, blue with cold. I couldn't stop until done because I knew that once out I could never force myself back into that pit. I got them all, I didn't die, but I'm glad none of the neighbors saw that. They would have known for sure we were crazy. It was to be the worst experience of those early years but there were others almost as bad. I went back one cold November day and looked at that pit. I shuddered, I could barely believe, myself, that I had spent twelve hours in it.

Next spring we planted this "new" seed on the three hundred acres and ordered two new International combines. It was no longer a hobby farm.



Wedding Day May 20, 1970  
Hyde Park, London

Katrin



## **GISELA**

It was late fall, 1969, I got a letter from Deutschland, from Gisela. Her husband had died, she had a two year old daughter. I went to Frankfort and spent Christmas with them. I came back home.

In April Oscar and I were setting a culvert by a pump station, I was sitting on a pile of dirt watching him swing that old dragline bucket. There, on that mound of dirt, I decided I would go to Frankfort and marry Gisela if she would have me. I felt good about having finally made a decision. I went, she would and we did. We went to London, where my old friend Larry Motl was living. We were married in Caxton Hall on May 20, 1970. I returned to the states and she followed shortly. We rented a lake cabin on Clearwater lake near the rice farm.



Sarah, Rodney, Patrick and Mary Skoe

Dick Oberle, Ivar Slettemoen



### **Clearwater Rice, Continued**

I was in the shop one day. I still had four "lives" left. I was using the acetylene torch to cut some metal, steel. The white hot molten metal was falling in cascades on to the floor behind the welding table. I looked down, there was a stream of liquid running between my legs. "Where could that water be coming from?" Then I smelled it, it was gasoline. I shut off the torch and bolted for the door, nothing happened. Someone had put a plastic Hi-lex bottle, full of gasoline, behind the table. The white hot molten metal had burned a hole through the plastic but somehow had not ignited the gasoline. Is that possible? I would never have believed it possible but it happened. Had it ignited, I would have been engulfed in burning gasoline, the river was a sixty yards away, I would never have made it. Somebody must have had Their hand on my shoulder. I had three "lives" left.

For our first real harvest, in 1970, the crop was good. The problem was that we had no real experience with operating heavy combines on soft, mucky, peat. The combines were mounted on tracks, similar to a bulldozer, and we had drained the water from the fields, paddies, even so it was a desperate situation. In 1970 we had two machines, they were mired all the time, and it would take hours, even days to free them.

After 1970 we expanded rapidly, we went on a land buying binge, we bought more machinery, bulldozers, backhoes, tractors, and combines. We cleared land winter and summer, Oscar built dikes and ditches from spring to fall. We were on 'a roll. I had found that I rather enjoyed the outdoor life, I enjoyed bulldozing and heavy machinery and working with the men. I never went back to the computer industry, I would have been "out of date" anyhow. The farm, Clearwater Rice had taken over. I was a farmer.

Even in the seventies when we were running eight combines on 1500 acres operating heavy machines on soft peat was a desperate matter. One day seven of the eight combines were mired at the same time. It took many years of leveling of the fields, installing of more than a million feet of drain tile, and of improving the machines before the situation was reasonably under control. Even yet in some fields, under some conditions, we may "bury" a machine, but our retrieval technique, has been perfected. Now it usually takes minutes to recover them, perhaps an hour, but never days.



Roger & Ruby  
Bratvold



Leone & Ordean  
Swanson



Donna & Gordon  
Olson

### **A good man is hard to find?**

It has been said that, "A good man is hard to find". Not true of men, nor women either, not at least around Clearbrook. I don't know how many men have worked on that farm, a hundred, all told perhaps, but there has been hardly a poor one in the lot. I can think of only one in all that time that I don't still think of as a friend, and very few that we'd not be happy to have back if we needed them. Some have worked for us for years, ten or fifteen or more. I consider it to have been a privilege and a pleasure to have known these people and to have worked with them. I also consider it a matter for pride that these people have stayed with us. Not only that, we have also been blessed with good neighbors. Robert Frost said, "Good fences make good neighbors". We have good neighbors. We haven't needed any fences.

### **Change**

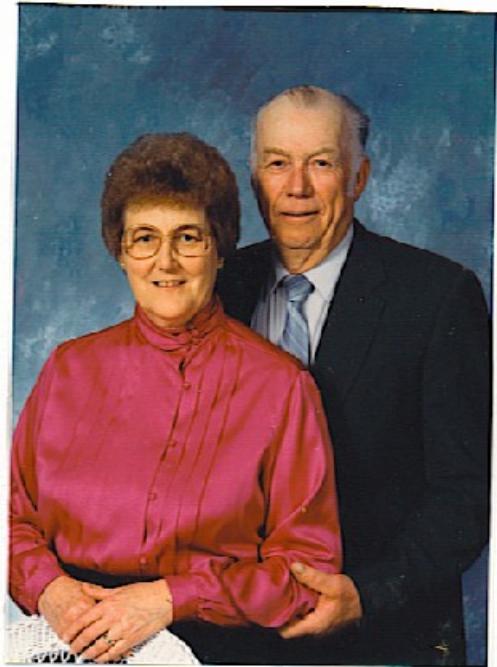
In 1973 the honeymoon with rice ended. During harvest we had a disastrous fourteen inches of rainfall, our yields collapsed. The next year was worse. We had joined up with the guy to whom I had loaned the \$50,000.00 and formed a marketing co-op named Continental; this CO-OP would evolve into one named United, from which would spring a marketing company named Gourmet House. But that was in the future, in the meantime we had committed our crops, such as they, were to this new CO-OP. It was a disaster. Money was squandered, rice was mismarketed, customers alienated. For that, I had no one to blame but myself, it was my idea to join up with this guy, it was I that got us in to it. Thinking that growing rice was easy we had also expanded too quickly.

Stanton, who had a logging business, as well as an implement dealership, was busy with his own affairs. Don had a full time job with the Soil Conservation Service. I being retired, or unemployed, depending on one's definition, found my self with a full time job. "Full time" meant sixty or seventy hours a week. It was not that I didn't enjoy the work, it was satisfying, but I found I was getting home to Minneapolis less and less, and being more and more isolated from my life there.

That was not all. We had been borrowing money from a bank and I was personally guaranteeing every dollar of it. I was on the line for three-quarters of a million dollars. (\$750,000.00). If the farm went down I would have to write a check for that amount. I had to make it work.



Betty & Dennis Sundbom



Truman & Avis  
Sandland

Jim, Bryan,  
Donna Rae Jacobson



Friend to guy fighting with a tiger, "Should I help you hold 'em?" Friend, "Hell no!. Help me let go!"

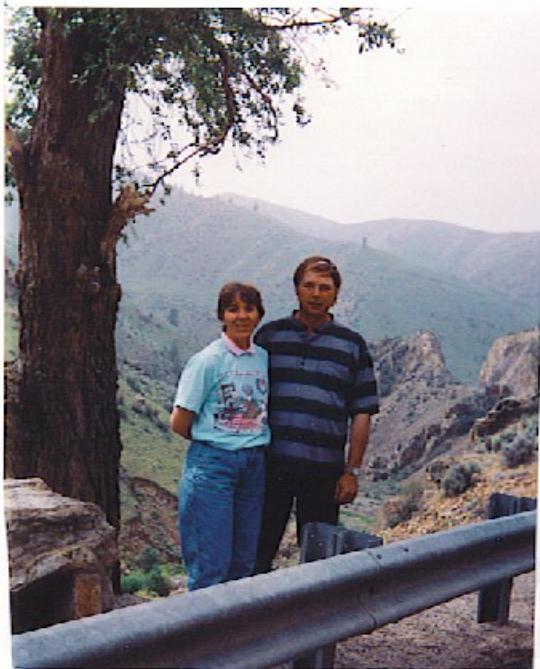
I decided that if I was going to be that committed, have that much at risk, that I wanted to do it on my own. And, I didn't really want to work for anyone, I had left a good job at CDC, but least of all did I want to work for family, no matter how well we got along. I chafed at having board meetings on Sunday around someone's kitchen table. I decided to buy them out, but at what price?

There was no economic way to determine a price. I would have given them my share if they could and would assume the debt. That was not possible. Had they been merely business partners I would have told them that I would relieve them from any debt obligation if they give me their share; the farm had a substantial negative net worth at the time. That was not possible either, Stanton was more than a brother, he was in many ways a surrogate father. Gladys and Don were "family" as well. It was a stressful time for me, for all of us, but we never quarreled. I go to such length about this matter because I think few people in the family really knew nor understood what was happening nor why. I bought Stanton out for what I thought, think, was a more than fair price. Stanton accepted it with good grace, although he was somewhat hurt; he didn't really understand why I needed, to do that. It did not, thank God, impair our relationship. Ironically the farm will revert, upon my death, to a member of his family, (more surely perhaps then if he had kept his interest in it.

Don loves farming. He and Gladys wanted to keep an interest in Clearwater Rice. I agreed, so I bought part of their interest, they kept part. It was a good decision for both of us.

The change of the ownership was stressful. As if that-wasn't stress enough, our marriage, Gisela's and mine, was in trouble. Perhaps we two were an accident looking for a place to happen, perhaps there was a cultural gulf, perhaps we never ever knew each other. I know we didn't know how to help one another. Perhaps, I'm sure that it was so, that I was able to give her no more than I have been able to give to other women. It was not enough.

We were divorced. Gisela lives in Mound in a modest house but



Lucy & Ron Gunning



Darrel & Nancy Engebretson

Aboard the Chapter XI



Katrin, RCS & Gisela



on one of the most gorgeous lakeshore frontages on Lake Minnetonka. Katrin has graduated from arts college and is working. We are friends.

### **Survival**

The wild rice CO-OP has gone through turbulent times and somehow survived. The marketing company, Gourmet House, which the group of us founded, is the major independent marketer in the industry. In 1986 we sold it to Anheuser Busch, paid off it's debts and distributed the rest to the CO\_OP members. Busch still owns it. It is headquartered in Clearbrook and is a major industry of the town. It is through that company that we market our crop, although we have been disappointed with Anheuser-Busch and their management of it.

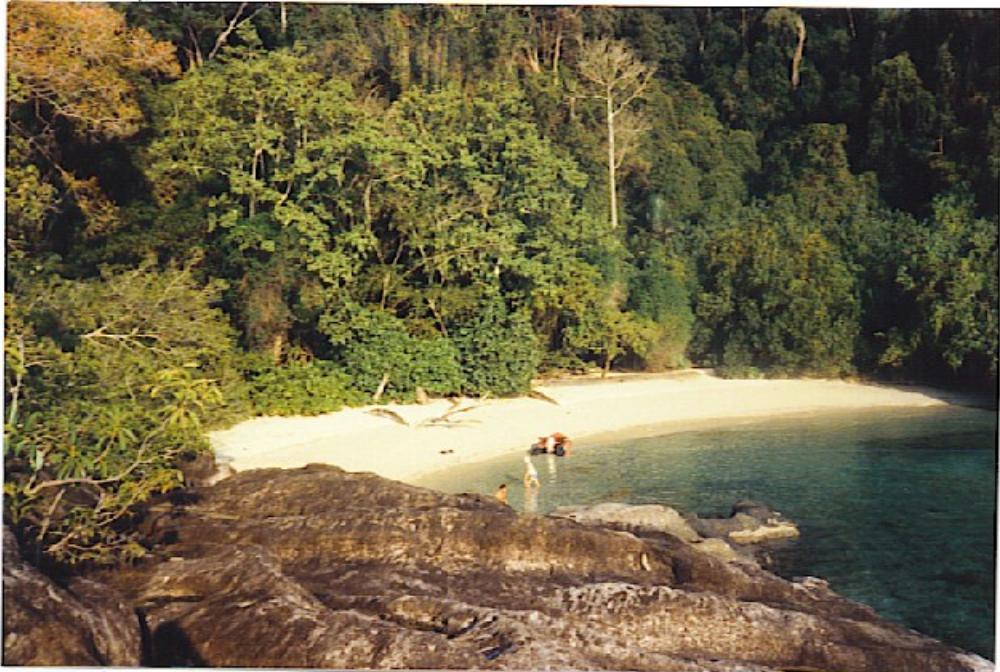
The farm, Clearwater Rice, survived the disastrous last half of the seventies and has generally prospered since, although deteriorating prices demand greater and greater efficiencies. It has about 2,500 acres of developed paddies and about 800 acres of trees and wild life habitat. The farm is beautiful, the fields are groomed, the buildings modern, a show place we think. For a number of years it was listed in the Guiness Book of Records as "The largest wild rice farm in the world". When talking of that I always added that the listing plus \$2.50 would get you a beer at Eddy Webster's. I haven't looked recently but I think that category has been discontinued. A half serious goal of our farm has been to produce a million pounds of wild rice in one year. We haven't done it yet, perhaps never will, but we have easily topped three-fourths of that.

## BOATS AND SAILING

We kids had grown up on the lake, it was our playground. My brothers always had boats of some sort, and loved to fish. So being on the water is second nature to me. Then Sue and her family had taught me how to sail. I have loved it since.

One time after I had returned from Europe, a friend from Sweden was visiting. My friend Larry and I took him water skiing on Minnetonka, Priests Bay. His name was Bengt, he was skiing, Larry at the helm. As we rounded a little curve in the bay, Bengt fell. As people will, we both looked back, when we looked up we were about to crash full speed into a steel hulled cruiser coming full speed toward us. It towered over us. Larry to his credit, did the only thing that could save us. He swerved hard to the left until our bow cleared the cruiser, now we were broadside dead in front of the cruiser. Then he swung it hard to the right, much as a square dancer sashays around a partner, so our stern would clear. We were wearing nothing but bathing suits, no preservers. Had we hit we would have smashed our heads into that steel hull. The people on the cruiser stared in white-faced horror. I had used up the seventh of my "nine".

In the sixties Larry Motl, Paul Miller and some other friends had chartered a boat in Florida, we were going to sail to the Bahamas. We arrived one by one at the marina on Friday night, each arrival called for a toast, there were seven of us. I was drinking martinis. I awoke next morning and I will say 'that I didn't care "if school kept that day" or not. At noon we sailed out into the Gulfstream and into a squall, a real squall, and the seas were running high. I have been sick before, and since, but not ever like that. If a helicopter had come along and offered to take me ashore for a price I would have said, "Name it", and handed him a blank signed check. By evening I had voided everything there was to void, from all directions, had eaten a box of dry crackers and decided I would live. I took the helm and was instantly well and hungry, the rain stopped, the moon came out and we were running with the wind. The sea, the sky, every thing was gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous. I was hooked on saltwater sailing.



SOUTH CHINA SEAS PARADISE

Roger Swanson

Paul Miller



*I must go down to the sea again, To  
the lonely sea and the sky; And all  
I ask is a tall ship, And a star to  
steer her by.*

*And the wheels kick, and the winds song,  
And the white sails shaking,  
And a grey mist on the seas face'  
And a grey dawn breaking.*

*And all I ask is a merry tale, From a  
laughing fellow rover; And a quiet sleep,  
and a sweet dream, When the long tricks  
over.*

Masefield

After that we chartered boats throughout the Bahamas and the Virgin Islands and in 1971, the year after Gisela and I were married we, a group of eleven, bought one of our own. Paul Miller, who reads "Yachting World" like Jimmy Swaggert reads the Bible, saw the ad. A Swan 43, for sale in Lymington, England. Designed by world famous Palmer Johnsons, built in Finland, it had a racing hull. It was in fact the very boat that, skippered by former Prime Minister Edmond Heath, had won the Admiral's Race in 1969, a race around the British Isles. We went over and bought it, and prepared to sail her home to the Virgin Islands. The guys in the marina there doubted we would ever make it. Later we learned that they were probably hoping we wouldn't make it.

We sailed out from Lymington, six of us, and headed for the Azores. The traffic in the English Channel was worse than a LA freeway but we got through. Everybody was a little sick coming across the Bay of Biscay but with Roger Swanson navigating we hit the Azores right on the button. Restocked and "rewatered" we sailed down the coast of Africa and picked up the easterly trade winds, headed for the Virgin Islands. We were becalmed once for two days so we just wallowed-in the swell. We weren't carrying enough fuel to motor.

One afternoon we were all below sleeping except an accountant from St. Cloud who was at the helm. We had a Genoa up for a foresail. That's a very light, oversize jib, sometimes a little tricky if you don't pay attention. All of a sudden over we went, it was pandemonium. We scrambled topside, now

"side-side", he'd let her get broadside to the wind, that big sail was too much. The boat was on her side, the mast horizontal, the sail dragging in the water. If the mast had caught and gone under she would have turned turtle and never righted herself. We would have had nothing, no life raft, no preservers, no water. I had a knife, I cut the jib sheet and the main sheet both. (A sheet is not a sheet, it is the line, rope, that tightens the sail) . The boat slowly righted herself, water pouring out of the sail. No serious damage done except below. The cabin was a jumble of food, clothing, sleeping bag and charts, all saturated with dirty, oily bilge water that had run up the side.

The guy was so shook he wouldn't stand watch anymore, he had no "feel" for a boat. We were only five on board so that left only four of us to stand night watches as well as do all the daytime work. We were getting pretty tired. At night, in order not to disturb anyone and to let everybody sleep as long as they could, the guy next up would tie a string on his toe. He'd thread that up through the hatch to the guy at the helm, who'd give it a jerk about ten minutes before it was time for the guy to come topside. Effective.

One morning I tried to start the diesel to charge batteries. No go, it wouldn't turn over, it was as if it was frozen. I was the only one on board that knew an engine from an anchor. I looked for wrenches and found a crescent wrench, a pair of pliers and some little wrench that looked like a sparkplug .wrench. What it was doing on board beats me, diesels don't have sparkplugs. (Get that Karnowski?) There were no sockets no open end or flat wrenches. I managed to get an injector out, the cylinders were full of water. It could only be a bad headgasket. "I knew we had a new headgasket, I'd seen it, but how could I get the head off a diesel with those wrenches. The spark plug wrench fit the head bolt nuts, I managed the lines with the crescent wrench. The old gasket didn't look bad to me but I put the new one on and buttoned it up. It started right up and purred like a kitten. I got an extra ration of rum that night.

Next day, the same story, the engine was "froze" tight. I took the head off again, remember, the engine is under the cabin deck, I was doing this while standing on my head. - There simply wasn't anything wrong with the gasket. I finally discovered that the salt water had eaten a hole in the wall of

the cooling heat exchanger, there was no way I could fix that. Sea water was getting in as soon as the engine was shut down. The only thing to do was to disassemble the exhaust system after every use and put it back together the next day before every use. And so I did for the rest of the trip.

We were nearing land-fall. We had lost our professional navigator at the Azores and were depending on Paul, who it turned out did a pretty good job. We expected to sail to the north of Aruba in the night and make landfall at St Barts about ten in the morning. Paul was at the helm, the rest of us asleep below. Around midnight, or shortly, after a pretty bad squall had blown up which might have shoved us a bit south. About four in the morning, wham! I thought a shotgun had gone off under my pillow. My bunk was right by the hatch so I was on deck in an instant. Wham again! We had run onto a coral reef. Some body started dropping sails. The night before, being the forward thinking genius that I am, I had taken two anchors out of the hold where they had been stored. I had laid them on the foredeck, but had not bent(tied) on an anchor line. When we hit the second time I ran forward, I knew that with the sails down and a pretty good on-shore wind that we'd be hopelessly on the reef in a minute.

I bent on a line and threw the anchor over. I came to heading for the bottom with the rope snarled around my ankle. I don't know if it came off or if I took it off, but it was off and I bobbed to the surface. The boat was still going on and ,the Atlantic seemed awful big. Somebody heard me hollering and threw me a line and pulled me back on board. I had a big bump on my forehead but was otherwise unhurt.

I made up the second anchor and CAREFULLY lowered it, the boat came into the wind and we were riding free. Fortunately we had still a third anchor because there had been no time to bend on the chain lead and the coral was sure to cut the nylon rope, which it did in about an hour. By then we had the third one ready. When daylight came we took some radio bearings, we were on Goat Reef, honest that was it's name, on the north end of Aruba. Had we been a mile further north we would have sailed right by it like Henry the Navigator. The natives were running back and forth on shore, readying there canoes, to claim salvage rights I suppose. I put the engine back together and with a guy up the mast to guide us through the coral heads we motored out of there. We couldn't get the third anchor

free of the coral so cut the line and left it there too, all three of them. I'd still be there with them, digging-clams, if I hadn't got that line off my ankle order but I figured I used up another of my "lives". That makes the total eight.

We kept the boat at Avery's boat yard in St Thomas for a few years. It got a lot of use. I took most of my siblings sailing on it. It was a beautiful boat and fast, unfortunately the mechanical and electrical systems were disasters, like the Jaguars being built by the British then, nothing ever worked for long. It was hopeless to try to keep it maintained, we gave it up. Besides, we got a letter. Barclays Bank of London wanted "their" boat or their money. We being trusting farm boys had not checked to see if there was a mortgage on it, there was. The marina had taken our money but they had not paid the bank. We finally reached a settlement but we partners never got any money back. It doesn't matter, I know I got my \$5,000 worth of enjoyment out of it and more. Since then my friend Roger Swanson has bought a boat and spent the nine years since, sailing the world. I've sailed with him whenever I wanted, including one trip in the South China Seas from Hong Kong to Singapore. I have long concluded that it is a lot better, and cheaper, to have a friend that owns a boat than to own one oneself. Besides that, Roger is the best seaman I have ever known, Sail with him in total confidence.

*A boat is a hole in the water, surrounded by wood, Into  
which one pours money*

FRIENDS



TL Dick & Betty Thorvig  
TR Lois Haag  
BL Marion & Larry Motl, RCS  
Westminster Hall, London



## THE SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES

In the early seventies I was back in the States but I had a lot of friends in Brussels to where CDC headquarters had been moved. I would stop in and visit if I was in Europe. One time I was there and stayed overnight with Karnowski who was renting a house in town. He was still single then. The house had marble floors, that's all I remember of it but I remember that we played blackjack, \$100 dollar a hand blackjack. By one in the morning I was about \$4,000 dollars down. Karnowski was acting awful "sleepy" about then and I couldn't keep him up any longer. My plane left at eight in the morning, I had to be at the airport by seven-thirty, the ride out took a half hour. I had it all figured. I got up at four-thirty, made some coffee and said, "We are going to play" . I got back \$2500 of it, was only down \$1,500. I got on that plane feeling like a "winner"

Later in 1973, I think, I went back to Brussels for his wedding. He was marrying a lovely person, Christina, that he had met there. I have often reminded him that, that reminds me of the saying, "Even a blind hog finds an acorn now and then" . She is great and has even made some progress in civilizing Jack. The wedding began at noon with a luncheon, progressed through the afternoon, to a dinner and a dance in the evening. At three in the morning some of us were at a Greek restaurant drinking metaxa and making like Zorba the Greek. I got three hours sleep, my plane left for New York at ,seven.

About this time I went back to Europe for another wedding, this time to London. My old friend Larry Motl, who had moved to Europe about the time that I had returned, had met a girl there. Her name was Marion, I called her Maid Marion. After he had moved back to the States they thought it over. Larry asked me to be his best man. For me it was the fifties all over again except the weddings were farther away. Marion's father was in Parliament, sort of a Welsh Hubert Humphrey, so the wedding was in a small chapel in Westminster Hall. In England it is customary for the best man to read the congratulatory telegrams and to make a little speech. I think Harold Wilson was Prime Minister then, I read his and a lot from others whose names I recognized. I waxed quite eloquent in my talk, quoted English nursery rhymes and thoroughly enjoyed it. A measure surely of my much improved



Doug & Teresa's Wedding



Judy Grey

FRIENDS

Nancy's Wedding



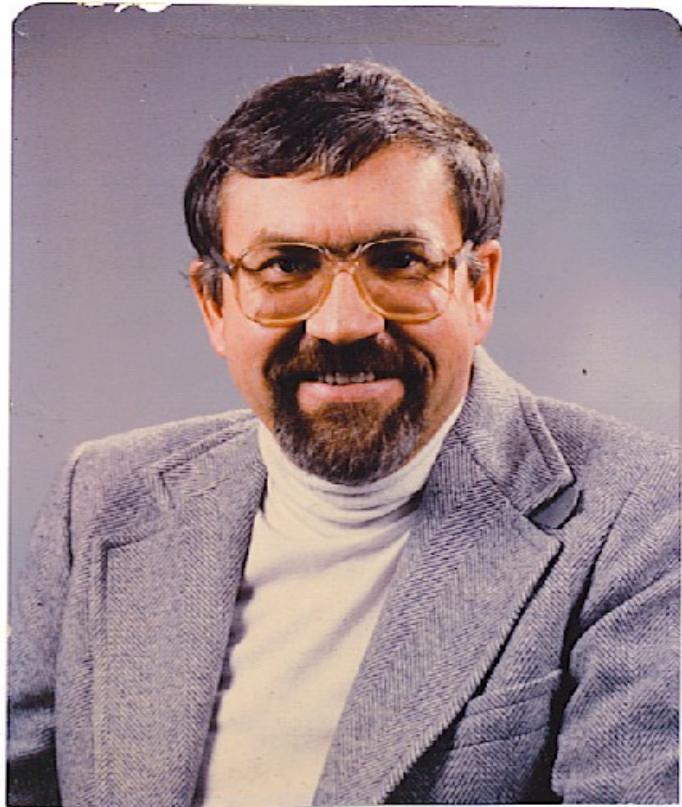
Elizabeth Morris



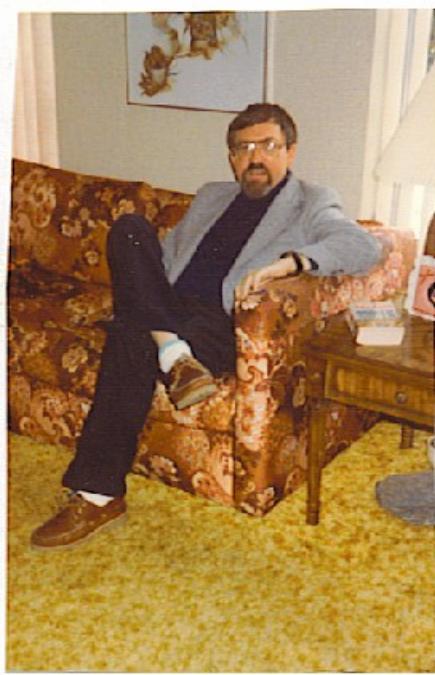
confidence. The reception was on a balcony overlooking the Thames, and the buildings name is actually Westminster Hall, so technically I lie, when I say I've made a speech in the House of Parliament. I've made a speech in Westminster Hall in which the Parliament sits. It's close enough, for a bit of one-upmanship.

In the second half of the seventies, I was in my fifties. The rice farm was taking most of my summers, but it had stabilized somewhat. The CO-OP was endless confusion, chaos and alcoholic managers, and I seemed to be marking time. Nevertheless life wasn't bad, in fact it was quite good. I was fishing, sailing, hunting, and flying and there were women everywhere-and yet I was marking time. In 1979 the apartment that I rented was deteriorating so I built a house in Bloomington. In the same year I built a new house on the farm.

I had agreed to captain a boat on a weekend sailing trip on Lake Superior, we were to assemble on Madeline Island Marina Saturday morning. I decided to fly up the night before, I got weathered in at Grand Rapids. The morning weather was improving but slowly, finally I was able to go. When I flew over the marina the other boats had left and my crew was sitting on the pier wondering where I was. I waggled my wings a couple of times to let them know I was coming and set down. It was a fun weekend and from that weekend came two friends, two very dear friends that I value. Both are married now, what else, but we're still friends. Elizabeth and Judy, you have enriched my life.



Russel



## RUSSEL

*Speak not in sorrow of my going, but close your eyes, And  
you shall see me among you, now, and forever more.*

Helen Steiner Rice

When Mother became ill Russel was eight and Gordon was only five. Did anyone talk to them or comfort them? I don't know, I doubt it. Many years later when I might have talked to Russel about it, it was too late and Gordon and I have not discussed it either. I am not sure, but I think Gordon was young enough to escape at least some of the trauma of it all. Russel must surely have been aware of it. In many respects Gladys and I became almost like their father and mother. We fed them, gave them Saturday night baths and washed their clothes, although Gladys herself was only eleven. Just as Earl and Stanton were surrogate fathers for me, so did I feel as much a father to Russel and Gordon as I did a brother. After Russel graduated and was married, he served as a second lieutenant in the army during the Korean War. When he came back he worked as a pharmacist at the Glass Block in Bemidji. Clerk pharmacists aren't paid much, he had a family, he was struggling. I learned that he wanted somehow to have his own drugstore and was looking at one in a dinky little town called Clearbrook. Fortunately, his brother-in-law and mine, Dr. Rozycki, Tony, kiboshed that idea. "A drugstore in Clearbrook", he said, "is a road to oblivion". I came to appreciate that later when we built our rice farm there. The town is just too small for a drug store. How right he was. Then Russel looked at one in International Falls, an intellectual wasteland, no place for Russel. Then, a store in Park Rapids became available, a lovely town, a county seat. Tony and I helped him finance it. The rest, as is said, is history. His son and daughters own it now, he would be proud of it.

The first I learned of his illness, in 1981, was when I overheard Tony talking to one of his colleagues about Russel. I heard him say, "perhaps it's MS". I had no idea what that was. But it was not that, it was ALS, Lou Gehrigs Disease, the same as that which later I was found to have.

It was a shock to all of us to learn that Russel was dying. Since Pa had died in 1945 we had come to believe we ten were immortal. True, Earl had lost a son in a gun accident, Emelie

her husband, Wes, to a brain tumor, and Stanton his wife to cancer, but we ten siblings went unscathed for nearly forty years. Besides that, Russel was next to the youngest, the only true athlete in the bunch. He was an avid bicyclist, he ran the marathons and skied the Birkebeiner (cross country ski race) . He was a civic leader and booster, successful in every way. How could it be him to be the first to die, he was more than twenty years younger than his oldest brother, Earl. But there it was. For some of us it was like losing a brother and a son all at once.

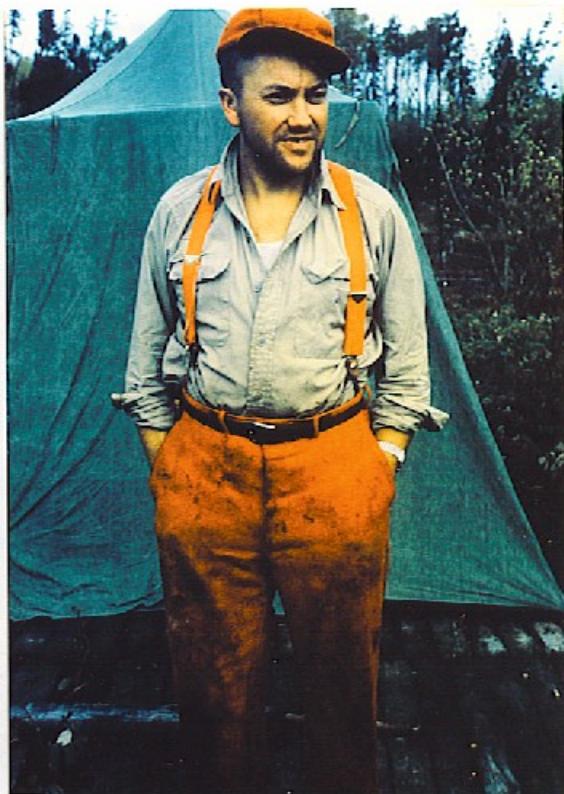
Russel never surrendered. When he couldn't run he walked, when he couldn't walk he drove, when he couldn't drive he rode. He never complained, he never demanded. At the end, he himself, set the time of his death. He died in 1985. The front page of the Park Rapids paper was devoted to his death, and his life.

I wish Russel had not died of ALS. His is a tough act to follow.

The fact that I am dying from ALS, as did he, raises the question of a family connection. It has been thought that only about six percent of the cases were "familial". Ours could be coincidental, there is no other known history of it in our family. But recent studies have at least partially identified a gene that is believed to be involved, although in what manner is not known. With gene therapy progressing as rapidly as it now is, it is likely that ALS will be treatable within a decade or less.

So, of the eleven of us, nine of us survive (December, 1993). Five of us are in various stages of disrepair, various parts are malfunctioning. When I think about it, however, I do think that the human body is a remarkable piece of engineering and remarkably durable. Not all, but most hearts pump away for fifty, sixty, and seventy years, some even for a hundred. I've owned many hundreds of hydraulic pumps in my lifetime but I have had very few that lasted more than twenty years, none for fifty, and one hundred years is unthinkable.

It would be nice though if He had designed us so the parts would all have the same longevity. There wouldn't be all this fixing and replacement, all this running on five cylinders. We could run along in good repair and then fold it up all at



RCS - Fishing

Moose Hunting

## CANADA

Novack, Rogers, Karnowski, RCS, Hawkins,  
Joy, Berg, Bender



once with dignity. Better to go with a bang than a whimper. Why couldn't the good Lord have taken a tip from the old Deacon and made "every part as strong as the rest".

The Wonderful One-Hoss Shay

*Have you heard of the wonderful one-hoss shay?  
That was built in such a logical way  
It ran a hundred years to a day,  
And then of a sudden it- ah, but stay.*

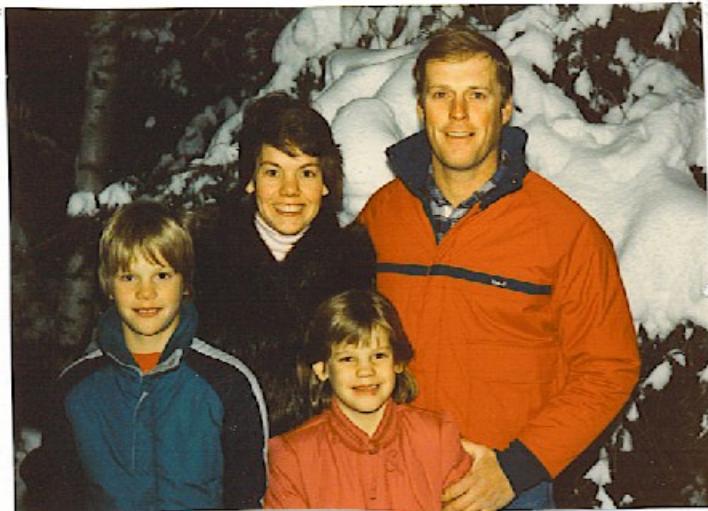
*There is always somewhere a weakest spot In  
hub,tire,felloe,in spring or thill In panel or  
crossbar, or floor, or sill. "Fur", said the  
Deacon, "tis mighty plain  
Thut the weakest places must stan' the strain: 'N the  
way to fix it, uz I maintain,  
Is only jest  
To make every place uz strong as the rest.*

*You see of course if you're not a dunce, How it  
went to pieces all at once-All at once and  
nothing first,-Just as bubbles do when they  
burst.*

*End of the wonderful one-horse shay, Logic  
is logic. That's all I say.*

Oliver Wendell Holmes

In that respect, I, for my part, always had two goals. The first was to see in the new century. That was a goal I thought I could make, I would be a mere seventy-seven. I'll fall a few short. The second goal was that when my time came that I might die in bed, but not from illness. I hoped "to be shot in the back by an enraged twenty-five year old husband". Still possible? Not likely, what could I do now to enrage him?

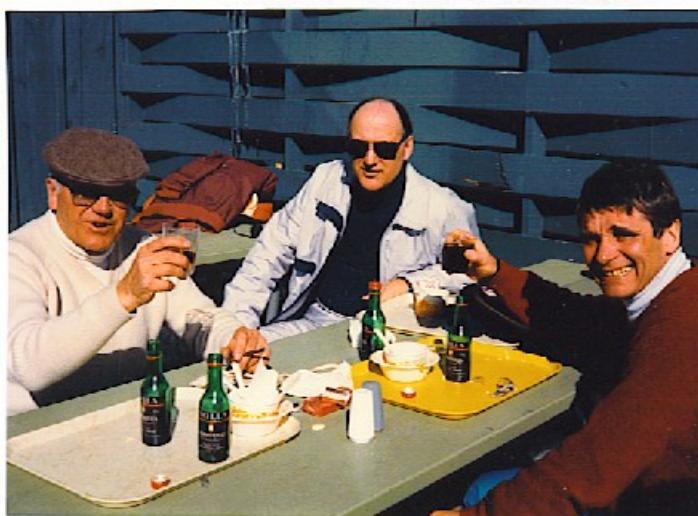


FRIENDS

Imles  
Peter, Kathy, Amy, Paul



N3453F



RCS, Bob Kozar,  
Nik Kirkeng - Aspen

## DIGRESSIONS

I must digress. Winston Churchill commented about writing a book. This is not a book but the problem is the same. I can no longer find this piece so cannot quote him precisely. I'll have to paraphrase it as best I can. He said in effect that writing a book was like having a mistress. First it is enticing, fascinating, intriguing; then absorbing, satisfying; then boring, finally demanding and in the end one wishes he'd never started it and would gladly strangle the project if he could. I am not there yet, but am confronted with two problems that I don't know how to handle.

The first is how to handle references to friends. I have many long time and dear friends whose names have not yet appeared in this tale. More that have not, than those that have. There are no made-up anecdotes in this narrative and I won't contrive one in order to include a name. Nor can I simply make a list and say, "these are my friends". That would be crude and some might even so be overlooked. The best that I can do, I think, is to say, "You know who you are, and I love you all."

I hope it's not a case of: Teddy Kennedy to Senator, ' "I'll check with my friends about that". Senator to Teddy, "Both of them?".

'The second problem that I have is that of "currency". As I, in writing this, approach the present time I can hardly write of myself without writing about other peoples lives, immediate facets of their life. Who has given me carte blanc to do that? To some degree it inhibits me.



Nina

Nina's family  
BR John, Dan  
FR Nina, Lisa,  
Anne Fleagle,  
David



113A

## **NINA**

In 1980 I signed up to go on a ski trip, by bus, to Telemark in Wisconsin. The bus was to leave from the Honeywell parking lot on Stinson Boulevard. I was at the Decathlon Club, I started home to get my stuff and go meet the bus. A switching engine pulled out from behind a pile of bricks at five miles an hour, I hit it broadside at five miles an hour. By the time I got the car hauled aside, got home and changed, I missed the bus. I drove into the parking lot with my pickup as the bus was leaving. Nothing left to do but drive myself. Because of that, I met Nina. She is not much like Jackie Kennedy otherwise, fortunately, but she does, like her, have wide set eyes and great eyebrows. The first words I said to her were that she wasn't cute nor pretty, she was handsome. And so she is. It must have been the right thing to say because she didn't go home on the bus. That was fourteen years ago. This is the first relationship with a woman that I have known, that after the second year, strengthened, rather than declined. It probably says more for her than for me. She "has been there" when I was in need. Perhaps I've found a home in spite of myself.



In 1979 I wearied of my apartment and I bought a lot in West Bloomington and built a new house. I have recently sold it to Nancy, Russel's daughter for "future delivery". It was the same year that I built a new house on the farm, the one in which Rodney now lives. Life went on, the seventies ended, and the early eighties, I was marking time. My old Friend, the monkey on my back was aging, at least he was less active than in the past. I was grateful.

**Clearwater Rice**, continued

It was the early eighties, by then I was sixty, I began thinking about what might come about, what to do with the farm. I didn't want to hang on beyond my time and leave it to some one unprepared to take over. That is an old story in families and history is replete with cases of men hanging on beyond their time, men who should have retired gracefully. Churchill, Adenaur, DeGaulle and Rhee to name a few. Besides that, I had never considered Clearbrook as the place I lived, I lived in Minneapolis, my longtime friends were there. I wanted to go back.

I considered putting Clearwater Rice up for sale as well, but realized that it would be almost impossible, the farm was too big, wild rice growing is too demanding. It is too specialized for the usual farmer. A lesser wild rice farm nearby has been for sale for ten years, the asking price dropping steadily. There have been no buyers. The man is old, if he dies before it sells, I think it will be broken up. The price of wild rice has dropped steadily for ten years, I feared that if I sold the farm on a Contract for Deed that I wouldn't get the money, instead I would get the farm back, in shambles. Furthermore, I had put a lot of my life in that farm, was proud of it and didn't want to see it broken up. I really wanted to see it kept in the family if possible.

When Russel died, his son Doug was in need of a friend. I took him on to the farm for a couple of years. We had a good time, I liked him a lot, we hunted, worked and played a lot of cribbage. He is the "luckiest" cribbage player I've seen. It couldn't be anything else could it? I think we both agreed that he wasn't ready to assume the management of the farm.

A year went by, I approached Stanton's sons Don and Rodney. Rodney was interested. He came and worked a summer, driving each day the sixty miles from Kelliher. He had taken over his

Dad's logging business when he got out of college. We seemed to be on the same wavelength, there was little doubt in my mind that he could run it but it would be a major decision for him. He would have to give up the logging business. We struck a deal, it relieved me of a burden. I was right, he can and has run it ever since, since 1986. I am around if he wants my opinion but I do not meddle nor second guess him. Upon my death my share of the farm will go to him.

### SKIING

In 1989 I went with a group on a ski trip to Russia. We flew in to Moscow from Copenhagen. We arrived at early evening, flying over the city in the dark was sobering. There was hardly a light to be seen. Hardly a street light, no highway lights, gloom as thick as mud. From the air it seemed as if there were fewer lights in Moscow than one would see flying over Bemidji. The terminal was worse, so dark one could hardly read a ticket. We stayed there that night, flew to Tibilisi, in Georgia, the next day and took a bus to the mountain. Georgia of course was part of the USSR but they hated the Russians with a passion. A few months earlier there had been a confrontation between Soviet troops and the Georgians, several had been slain; on the town hall steps. All day, every day, protesters sat there, with flowers. How different to see it first-hand than to see it on TV, or read about it in a paper.

The lodge was great, it had been built and was operated by the Austrians. The mountain was fair, nothing special, but it was nice sitting in the sun with a bottle of wine and a big tray of caviar. The chair-lifts and the whole thing must have been a great novelty for the people there. Whole families came and picnicked on the hill even if they had no skis nor money for a ticket. The lodge had two big Russian turbine helicopters. They were out of Afghanistan, you could still see the gun mounts. For about one tenth of what it would cost in Colorado we could go helicopter skiing. I was a little doubtful, I am not a good deep powder skier but I went a couple of times and had no problem. I don't expect a call from Warren Miller. Actually, what I was most skeptical of was the maintenance on those choppers. If they were cared for like every thing else I saw, I had reason to be nervous. They were big, and the pilots did seem to know what they were doing.

We got acquainted with some Georgians, nice people. They are very hospitable, love to party. They invited us into Tbilisi, had a great time. Now they are killing each other and I wonder what those hospitable people are doing. I corresponded with one for a while but the mail was impossibly slow and we've lost contact.

We flew back to Moscow on AeroFlot, at that time everything, telephone calls, mail, freight and people had to go through Moscow. We had seat reservations but they meant nothing. The plane was packed, as you have never seen, if you've not been there. I was the last one on and got the last seat, jammed in between a civilian and a young soldier. We hadn't even taxied yet when the guy reached in his bag and pulled out a bottle of wine. He had a cup, more like a saucer really. He filled it up and handed it to me. I'm not one to be discourteous, I drank it. Georgian wine is a little sweet and heavy, not my favorite, but not bad either. He and his buddy across the aisle had one each, my turn again. We started the take-off run, he pulled out another bottle. I thought that plane was going to run on the ground all the way to Moscow but it finally labored into the air, everybody cheered and clapped. I got the feeling that everyone was as surprised as I. By that time somebody across the aisle had produced a bottle of lime flavored vodka. They insisted. I'm no dummy, I've learned a few things in my life, I started faking it. But that was hard to do, drinking out of that saucer, everybody could see how much was in it when I got it and when I gave it back. The young soldier by the window unwrapped a scrawny chicken from an old newspaper and offered me a leg. Somebody across the aisle came up with some strange looking bread. It looked and had the consistency of rolled out bread dough that hadn't been baked, real floppy, kinda grey. He twisted off a piece sort of like you'd twist a dishrag and handed it to me. Hell, we were having a party. I kept hedging on the booze until finally a guy across the aisle stood up and said in fair English, "You must drink, it is our tradition." I already knew it was their tradition, I'd been in Russia for a week, but I wasn't about to be done in on that plane. Finally the guy beside me went to sleep, he had been in the bag when he got on, and things quieted down. When we touched down in Moscow everybody cheered again. As we were deplaning my new friend gave me a bottle of Georgian wine to take with me.

I've often thought of that little episode. I've been on

hundreds of flights, of a dozen nationalities, in every part of the world. I can't remember a single specific one except that one. Only that one. I wish those guys well. I can't think of anything I'd rather do tonight than to ask those guys in, hand them a bottle, and say, "Drink, it's our tradition too."

We spent two days in Moscow, most of which I used up in buying Nina a fur hat. First I bought one I thought she'd like. That night at dinner one of the girls tried it on, obviously it was too small. It had been mismarked. The next day that shop had none that would fit. It was only seventy dollars, I could have written it off and gone elsewhere but I thought I'd see what was involved in getting my money back. What was involved was a full day of paperwork, literally. And in the end, I swear, they had to get Gorbachev's okay and signature. Incredible. I hope Nina appreciates the one I finally got, I missed half of Moscow because of it.

Moscow was depressing, drab and dirty. "Glasnost" was working, that was obvious, people were free, even anxious to talk to foreigners. But "perestroika" just as obviously was not working. The shops were empty, people lined up for blocks to buy the simplest of things. The economics were absurd. If you changed your money on the street you could ride the subway, it was very nice, the only thing that seemed to work, you could ride it anywhere you wished for the equivalent of one fourth of a cent, American. That would mean that a person , could ride to work and back every day for one year for one dollar. What sense did that make? I didn't need the CIA to tell me that they were in trouble. It will get worse before it gets better. You can bet on it.

In 1966 Bob Price, I and another guy had bought a couple of condos in Aspen. That was before the "beautiful people" had overrun the town. Even after we had sold them I had continued to ski mostly in Colorado. In 1988 I went with some friends to Big Sky in Montana, liked it better and bought a condo there. The people out there are more like the guys on AeroFlot, I like them better. 'You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy.'

**Argentina, August, 1992.**

We were on the ski trip to Argentina. I had known before I

left that all was not well with me. When I found I couldn't ski I went back to Buenas Aires, the city of "beautiful air". I took a city tour, went out to a dude ranch to see the "tourist gauchos" and ate some of the best barbecue I have ever eaten. Back in town in a beef restaurant I ordered beef medallions. I envisioned two pieces a half inch thick and about as big around as a small cup, as one got in Europe. There were two pieces alright but they were both the size if a small roast, before it is sliced. They must have weighed three-quarters of a pound or more each At the next table I saw an order of steak, T-bone. It was three inches thick and hung over all sides of a huge platter. No place for a vegetarian. Buenas Aires looked run down and shabby but it was easy to see that at one time it had been a beautiful, gracious Spanish city.

The group came back from Los Lenas, we were going to meet for dinner together. George and I were walking back to the hotel, it was somewhat dark, a few street lights showing, a decent neighborhood. I had my billfold and my passport in my left hand, in my front pocket. Someone jumped on my back, shoved his hand in my pocket and tried to get my billfold from me. There were three of them. I and the first guy ended up in the gutter between two parked cars. I didn't know what George and the other two were doing but I was on my back, the guy was crouching over me, his legs spread wide. A very strategic error on his part. I gave him every thing I had, right where it would do the most good. He howled and tried to run. I no longer had my billfold, I thought he did, so I wasn't about to let him go. I grabbed the waist of his pants and ripped them wide open, by this time he had dragged me into the middle of the street. He got away, pulling up his pants on the run. I got up and went back, the other two were gone too. There lay my billfold and passport, under the bumper of the car. I suppose I was lucky that he had no knife or gun, but I had no time to think of that. It was a most satisfying experience, most satisfying.

### **September 1992**

After I returned, I flew up for the rice harvest, and ran a combine for a few days. It was difficult, even to get on and off the machine. Once, while making some minor repair, I fell. Luckily I fell on the soft ground and didn't hurt myself. I'm sure the young fellow, Josh, who was helping me wondered about it. After harvest I got ready to fly home. I

had no problems flying, that doesn't take great strength and my balance, while seated, had not yet been affected. It was a nice sunny afternoon, perfect flying weather. I gassed up and pre-flighted the plane. As soon as I was in the air I could see my friend Paul Imles shop and the new runway he had built beside it. I decide to stop in and say "hello". His strip was straight ahead, I was on a perfect approach. I lowered the flaps, throttled back, tanks on "both", prop right, perfect. A hundred feet from the end of the runway, about forty feet off the ground, something snatched me, the plane nosed over, I couldn't hold the nose up. I knew in an instant, a power line. I was heading straight for the ground at eight-five miles an hour, at rooftop height. People say "my life passed before my eyes", not mine I was trying to get the nose up.

Suddenly up it came and to my utter astonishment I made a perfect landing on the side of the strip, one wheel in the ditch. In a second I was up and taxiing to a stop as if nothing had happened. I could hardly believe it then and I hardly do now. There in the grass was a twenty foot length of twisted up high-line wire. The propeller had chewed it off and freed me. The wire had caught on the exhaust pipe which put it within range of the propeller. Had I been six inches higher when it caught it would have missed the exhaust pipe and hooked the wheels instead. If it had I would not be typing this. This was the first major mental error I had made in twenty-four years of flying, but, "Someone" was saying, , "Not yet, not quite yet."

Rule No 1: When landing at an unfamiliar field, check it out.

I had not done it or I would have, could have, seen the wire. I have no excuse but an explanation: The wires were unmarked, the poles backgrounded by trees, I was flying into the sun. I do not wonder that I didn't see them. An explanation, no excuse. Very bad judgement on my part, but, I think, pretty good plane handling to land it safely after that. I had used the ninth of my "lives". I was running then on "empty".

By hunting season I knew, of course, that I had ALS, but I kept it to myself, why wreck the hunt? I could get into my stand but barely, even harder to get out. I had shot a deer from that stand every year since I had built it. Sure enough,

at twenty after seven there came three. A buck and two does. I took the buck.

I thought then that would be the last deer I would ever shoot, so I took my time and savored the experience. Now, a year later, I am still mobile, sort of. Barrel Engebretson has taken down the ladder and built a stairway for me. Beautiful. I told him he should come down, tear out the stairway- in my house and build me one like the one he built on my stand. I can barely lift my gun, but if some kind deer will be patient with me, maybe I will yet get another. Maybe I'll just have a look at him, wish him well and let him go.

Postscript: December, 1993. I did go again, deer hunting, this year. Sure enough, at seven-twenty, there a little buck came, moseying down the trail, just like last year. I didn't get him. In trying to lift my gun I banged it against the stand. It was too much noise, he lifted up his head, flicked his tail and stepped into the brush. I wished him well.

## CONTEMPLATION.

When one knows he will soon die it tends to make one contemplative. I think it was the good Doctor, Samuel Johnson, or his biographer, Boswell, or was it Dickens who said, "If you know you will be hung in the morning it concentrates your mind wonderfully". And so it does.

### **On Poetry.**

All the beauty and the wisdom of the world, I think, can be found in poetry. I don't know if it was our genes, the school or the tenor of the times, but I and most, if not, all of my siblings, like poetry. I doubt if we know where or when we learned it, it is just there. We share in common, verses, snatches, lines from this and that...

*How do you like to go up in a swing..... So  
live that when thy summons come.... Twas the  
schooner Hesperess.... . Between the dark and the  
daylight... Twilight and evening bell... The day  
is done and the darkness....*

*By the old Moulmein pagoda, lookin eastward toward the sea...  
I wandered lonely as a cloud...*

*Hat's off, along the street there comes....*

*In flanders field the poppies grow...*

*The moon was a ghostly galleon.....*

And dozens, perhaps hundreds, more. Someone can always give the second line or the first verse. There are, I think, many things to lament about our civilization today. I think one of the saddest is the demise of poetry. Children can quote the latest advertising jingle for sanitary napkins but they don't know a line of Robert Louis Stevenson; they've never heard of Longfellow. Sad, to deprive them of all that.

One of my favorites, by Robert Frost. You must know the setting. Picture if you will a dark snowy evening in December, somewhere in New England. A country doctor, driving alone with his little horse and sleigh, on his way to someone ill, perhaps a child. The flakes are big and soft, the wind easy, his fur coat warm. He clucks to his horse to stop;

*Whose woods these are I think I know, His  
house is in the village, though; He will  
not see me stopping here, To watch his  
woods fill up with snow.*

*My little horse must think it queer, To  
stop without a farmhouse near, Between  
the woods and frozen lake. The darkest  
evening of the year.*

*He gives his harness bells a shake, To  
ask, if there is some mistake. The only  
other sound's the sweep, Of easy wind and  
downy flake.*

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep, But  
I have promises to keep, And miles to go  
before I sleep, And miles to go before I  
sleep.*

As the old Indian, sending smoke signals with his blanket sighed, when he saw an atomic mushroom cloud, "I wish I could have said that".

I am not especially fond of "modern" poetry. Much, not all, but much of it, seems disjointed, unconnected and unpunctuated to me. It reminds me of some modern art, Andy Warhol's soup can, for example, or the two red rectangles sprayed on a piece » of black plywood. That "piece of art" was recently - listed for four million, and sold for a "discounted" price of one point six. Good luck, I hope the janitor doesn't mistake it for scrap and throw it out or burn it in the fireplace. Is the Emperor really wearing clothes?

Maybe I should try writing a bit of it myself, maybe I'd come to appreciate it more. But until now at least, I have preferred the old classics, poetry that has a cadence and a rhythm, something that rolls easily from your tongue.

I have never cared either to analyze and parse every letter, word and line. What's the use of trying to extract some obscure meaning that even the one who wrote it never knew was there. I read poetry for the pleasure of it's reading.

Read this, by Longfellow:

*The day is done and the darkness Falls from the  
wings of Night,  
As a feather is wafted downward From an eagle  
in his flight.*

*I see the lights of the village Gleam through the rain  
and the mist,  
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me That my soul  
cannot resist:*

*A feeling of sadness and longing,  
That is not akin to pain  
And resembles sorrow only  
As the mist resembles the rain.*

*Come read to me some poem, Some simple and  
heartfelt lay,  
That shall soothe this restless feeling, And banish  
the thoughts of day.*

*Not from the grand old masters  
Not from the bards sublime, Whose distant  
footsteps echo  
Through the corridors of Time.*

*For, like strains of martial music, Their mighty  
thoughts suggest  
Life's endless toils and endeavor; And tonight I  
long for rest.*

*Read from some humbler poet, Whose songs gush  
from his heart,  
As showers from the clouds of summer, Or tears from  
the eyelids start;*

*Who through the long days of labor,  
And nights devoid of ease, Still heard in his  
soul the music  
Of wonderful melodies.*

*Such songs have the power to quiet  
The restless pulse of care, And come like the  
benediction  
That follows after a prayer.*

*Then read from the treasured volume  
The poem of thy choice, And lend to the rhyme of  
the poet  
The beauty of thy voice.*

*And the night shall be filled with music And the cares  
that infest the day,  
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs, And as silently  
steal away.*

Who needs to analyze that?

### **On Religion, Life and Immortality.**

I was brought up in The Norwegian Lutheran Church. It was populated with good people, and taught much good. I believe, in fact, that if every one in the US had been raised in it, or some church that taught like values, our country would not be suffering the social ills we now see. That said, I still had, have, difficulties with the Church. I think I can attribute some of my problems of life to the guilt I was taught there. It was gloom and doom and guilt. Guilt it seemed about every thing. It could be a beautiful spring morning, trees budding, birds singing, the lake shining--

*And what is so rare as a day in June?  
Then, if ever, come perfect days;  
Then heaven tries the earth if it be in tune,  
And over it softly her warm ear lays.  
Whether you look or whether you listen  
You hear it murmur or see it glisten.*

I would have bet my last dollar that was from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, now I learn it was written by James Russell Lowell.

I'd get to church and the minister would tell me that I was "sinful and unclean" and I would surely fry in hell if I didn't shape up. But I was too young to have been mixed up in any real sin yet, and about all I'd maybe done so far that , morning was to take a potshot at a stray cat with my slingshot. Was that so bad, did I have to go home and feel guilty all day? Where was the joy and happiness and celebration? What about my friend Hamilton's theory? "You catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar." Can you imagine the guilt they could lay on me when I started thinking about girls and sex. And what about masturbation? Ouch!

Father: "Son, you mustn't do that, it will make you go blind"  
Son: "Gee, Dad, can't I just keep doing it until I need glasses".

There is no doubt in my mind that the equating of guilt with sex has been a factor in my life, hard to overcome if drilled in early enough. In any event I didn't like church, and the

mournful Bach being literally dragged out by it's hair from a wheezing organ didn't help. To this day I can stand neither Bach nor organs.

I don't want to be overly harsh, the church is much changed now, people come out smiling and seem to be happy. . Even then I have no doubt it meant well. Still, I wish they hadn't laid it on me when I was a kid, I was having trouble enough with my self esteem.

It has nothing to do with the past but I still have problems with religious dogma, and organized religion. I've wrestled with it. I no longer doubt that I, and most everyone else is sinful. One needs to read the paper for only one day to know that.

But if God is our Creator--hey wait a minute, that makes no sense. Nowadays one gets sued for defective products that injure people. If he is our Creator, if He is omnipotent, all-powerful, then why this screw up in our nature? Why produce a product that does the things that mankind does? If he is all-powerful why doesn't he do a recall. My engineering mind can not find an answer to that dilemma.

*What then, did the potter's hand not shake?*

The other dogma, Lutheran, I believe, that I stumble on is the one to the effect that, "Man cannot be saved by works alone, »but only if God reaches out and gives you Grace". Does that mean that nothing I do or do not do will matter? If so why worry, it's out of your hands?

The best answer is one I heard this last Easter when Nina and I went to Mass in Seattle. The priest argued, eloquently, that God created man and woman to be free, to be either good or evil, otherwise they would be mere robots, their "goodness" would be a hollow nothingness. There would be no victory of the Cross, no value, no Triumph.

I pondered that half way across Idaho before I concluded there was no comfort there. Being free to be evil toward oneself, to harm yourself or whatever you want to do to yourself, is one thing. But did God mean I could go out, slaughter people and torture little babies to test myself? It makes no sense to me. I can't reconcile the concept of an all-loving,

all-powerful God with the world as it exists. Maybe I don't know what "all-loving" means but the contradiction is too great for me, something doesn't work.

Maybe the last Tzarina's mad monk, Rasputin, had it right. He said, "In order to be saved one must be forgiven, in order to be forgiven one must have sinned, ergo, what choice does one have but to sin, so let's get on with it?"

Does that mean I don't believe in "anything", that I believe in "nothing". Not necessarily. I've got just as big a problem in not believing. I believe in evolution, the gradual changing of life's species. To me that is '*a priori*'. But who or what, if anything, is guiding the changes. The universe, the earth, life, the human body is so incredibly complex that I find it impossible to believe that it happened all by chance or trial and error. I think we have barely scratched the surface in understanding what goes on in nature and the human body, notwithstanding science. How did the human brain, that was capable of developing this computer, come in to being hundreds of years ago. Surely not out of need, no one "needed" a computer then. From chance? I can't believe that either. It would be as if you took a million jig-saw puzzles, with a million pieces each, mixed all the pieces together and threw them off the Empire State Building. How many times would you have to do it before all million puzzles, with their million pieces each, landed in perfect order? I doubt there have been enough "chances", nor "trials", to have resulted in what exists today without some guidance.

So, where did it begin, what brought it to this point? It is, in Churchill's words, he was speaking of the Russians, "an enigma wrapped in a riddle". I have as much difficulty in not believing as I do in believing.

Is there an afterlife, a heaven and a hell? In high stakes poker, or low for that matter, one sometimes may hold a hand that is a "lock". A hand that, you can tell by the cards exposed, cannot be beaten, cannot lose. In a moment of inattention one time I went up against a hand like that. The guy who held it knew, I did not. It cost me many thousands, more than I care to admit. And so with heaven and hell. If you bet, ie, "believe", you cannot lose, for if there is no heaven you have lost nothing. You cannot lose what does not exist; but if there is a heaven you're in. You had a "lock"

on it. If you bet against it, ie, don't "believe" you can not win. There may not be a hell but if there is a heaven you won't be in it. So if you are a betting man you should "believe", you have every thing to gain and nothing to lose. Does that help? Not really, how can one force oneself to believe?

Why not believe for the peace and serenity it brings? Does any one doubt, not I, that those who truly "believe" find solace in their belief? And I would too if I could believe that I would be joined with Russel and my mother, with Nigs and Lady. But I view with skepticism eleventh hour conversions. It happens too often; "Lord if you will get me out of this mess I'll never miss a day of church again". Of course you won't!

*Into this Universe, and why not knowing, Nor  
whence, like Water, willy-nilly flowing;  
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste, I  
know not whither, willy-nilly blowing.*

Khayyam

Am I a betting man? Perhaps the answer lies here:

*Abou Ben Adam (may his tribe increase)  
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,  
Making it rich like a lily in bloom.  
An Angel writing in a book of gold:  
And to the Presence in the room he said  
"What writest thou?" The Vision raised it's head,  
And with a look made of all sweet accord  
Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord".  
"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay not so"  
Replied the Angel. Abou spoke more low,  
But cheerily still: and said, "I pray thee, then,  
Write me as one who loves his fellow men."*

*The Angel wrote, and vanished. The next night It came  
again. With a great wakening light, And showed the names  
whom love of God had blessed, And lo! Ben Adams name led  
all the rest!*

JHL Hunt

### **On Dying of ALS**

I don't recommend it, it's a lousy way to die. Gradually but inexorably it takes every physical thing away from you. One watches his limbs turn into celery stalks. Arms that could swing an axe and play a bulldozer like a violin can now barely carry a cup of coffee to my mouth, and soon will not do that. Legs that took me through the woods and down mountains can barely carry me to the toilet, and soon will not do that.

A child's life is marked by "firsts". When dying of ALS it is marked by what one knows are "lasts". The last time to ever shoot a deer, the last time to "improve" stand with a dozer, the last time to sail a boat, to bomb a hill, to buy a new pickup, the last time to....

Slowly ones self-reliance and independence erodes into dependence and helplessness. Maybe that won't be all bad for me, finally, I will have to learn to accept help from other people. But no, I cannot recommend dying of ALS. Find another way.

I have a book called, "Sunshine and Shadows". It is a book containing the thoughts of dozens of people dying of ALS. It is meant to be a testimonial to people's fortitude and spirit

*Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as a pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever Gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.*

I understand what they are trying to say and why; they are trying to make the best of a bad situation, to put as good a face as possible on things they cannot change. I respect them for that. But somehow the book depresses me, the pollyanna tone of it all strikes me as contrived, and not realistic, like "whistling past the graveyard". I don't see any "triumph of the human spirit" that can come from of dying of ALS. I think it is a lousy way to die.

### **On Trusting People**

What does one do about trust in this mistrusting world? Whatever else I came away with from my childhood, I did come away with a basic trust of people. I am glad I did. I have been let down a few times but almost always over money. That's not very important, a person can live with that.

Seldom have I been betrayed over things important. I can think of hardly more than a couple of times. I feel sorry for those who go through life trusting no one. I think those who trust no one, are those who are least to be trusted.

### **Jokes and Humor**

A friend, Ed Grayden, who has helped me in this writing, upon seeing some of what I'd written, said " You're somewhat noted for your sense of humor and your jokes, why don't you include some of them?" Truth is I'd love to but like the heaven that doesn't exist if there are no dogs, there is no humor out of context. I don't want to contrive an anecdote just to include a joke. It's true, I know a zillion jokes, both clean and dirty, but if someone asked me, cold-turkey, to tell one I'd be hard pressed to think of a single one worth telling. And likely if I did it would go over like a lead balloon. But if the time, the atmosphere, the audience is right, they just pop in to my consciousness, from where I don't know. I have never purposely "memorized" one.

Guy to friend. "I'll bet you five bucks that in three seconds I can come up with a pun on any subject you can name." Friend. "You're on. A king." Guy. "A king is not a subject."

## MUSINGS

Infinity and the Largest Number Possible, Plus One.

*When I was a kid, I would lay, On my back, on the frozen lake, And watch the blue-green streamers streaking, flashing up and down, The Northern Lights would dance A psychedelic ballet in the sky.*

*If it was very cold, the shrinking ice Would crack, with a sharp edged boom. The crack would zig-zag up the lake, Like a drop of water sliding down a pane. Then the sound would come echoing back Like horizontal thunder underneath the snow*

*The moon reflecting from the snow Revealed a million diamonds, enough, To match, one for one, the crystals shining Through the blue-black up above. I wonder still, I wondered then, Where does it start? Where does it end?*

RCS

I wondered what was out there, what if I got to the very farthest star and peeked over the edge, what would I see? (Another star beyond? And if I got to that one and looked over again, and again, and again, where would it end? And if it "ended" what would be beyond the end? Some say that space curves back on itself like the surface of the earth. So, if it does, then what, what is out beyond the curve? Nothing? And where does nothing end?)

The light from some of the stars that we "see" left them, we are told, a thousand million years ago. At the speed of light, 186,000 miles/second, it took that long for it to travel the 4,000,000,000,000,000,000 miles. What does that mean? And beyond? Who can grasp that concept? Not me.

And, what's the biggest number possible? And if you knew it could you not add one more to it? So what's the biggest number then?

And if your clock was linear, was laid out like a yard stick, with numbers running forward and backward, from the past into the future, and now it is twelve; then an hour ago it was eleven. And before that ten, and there was last week, and last year, and a million years ago. When do you get back until there are no "yesterdays". When did time begin? At the "Big Bang"? Ah yes, but what was there before the big bang, and for how long?

I cannot grasp the concept of infinity; of infinite space, or infinite numbers or of infinite time. It's maddening, I wish I could. If I could join some Infinite Wisdom and understand these things, then I think dying would be time well spent. Maybe that's what's "out there", an Infinite Wisdom. Perhaps after death all will be clear. Perhaps not.\*

#### **Alcohol and Wine**

In editing this I gave some thought to deleting some of the references to some of the riotous parties I have enjoyed lest they give the impression that I might at some point have had a problem with alcohol. I have not, not even the slightest, nor with any other chemical addiction. Well, if on a bulldozer or in the woods, I would still miss tobacco, in some form, but have not used it for years. So, I have decided to delete nothing. One cannot write of Russia and leave out vodka, and what would a tale of Scotland be, if you left out their national drink? Impossible.

My three years in Europe introduced me to good bread and good wine, I'm in debt to Bill Norris for that. I am also cognizant of all the misery that alcohol causes in this world. But even so I think the good out weighs the bad. For me it surely has.

*I wonder what the Vintners buy One half so  
precious as the Goods they sell-.  
Khayyam*

If these concepts fascinate you then I urge you to read Gleick's book "Genius". It is about the life and science of Richard Feynman. Recently deceased, relatively unknown, he is nevertheless considered by many, if not most, of his colleagues to be the greatest intellect of this century, greater, even, than Einstein and a lot more fun.

If I could find a Genie in a Bottle.

*"Sahib, Master, what is thy Command?*

*I would find Mother in a kitchen,  
A gleaming, shining kitchen.  
There would be work space without measure,  
Hot water would gush at her command.*

*Cupboard shelves beyond a number, Refrigerator  
overflowing, • Washer-dryer gently  
purring.*

*No slop-pail that had overran.*

*That truly is my hearts desire, If to  
that I could aspire, That would be my  
one Demand.*

RCS

#### The Present

This narrative has reached the present. To go further would be a diary. My illness is progressing. I can hear somebody warming up that big bulldozer in the sky. I am surrounded by friends, loving, helping friends. I am rich in friends-. Nina is with me.

*Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend, Before we  
too into the dust descend; Dust into Dust, and under  
Dust to, lie, Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and-  
sans End.*

Omar Khayyam

As you may have noted- I am rather fond of Omar's work.

A second bottle, a second Genie? Well bless my heart!

I really want to know what happens, How  
will every thing turnout. Let me come back  
once each century, Just to have a look  
about. I won't bother anybody, I'll, Just  
have a look and then get out.

RCS

And if you're not weary of them, one more, by Tennyson.

*Sunset and evening star  
And one clear call for me, And may there be no  
moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea.*

*But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam When that which drew from  
out the boundless' deep  
Turns again home.*

*Twilight and evening bell, And  
after that the dark  
And may there be no sadness of farewell, When I  
embark.*

*For tho' from out our bourne of time and place  
The flood may bear me far, I hope to meet my  
Maker face to face  
When I have crossed the bar.*

*Goodbye.*

RCS