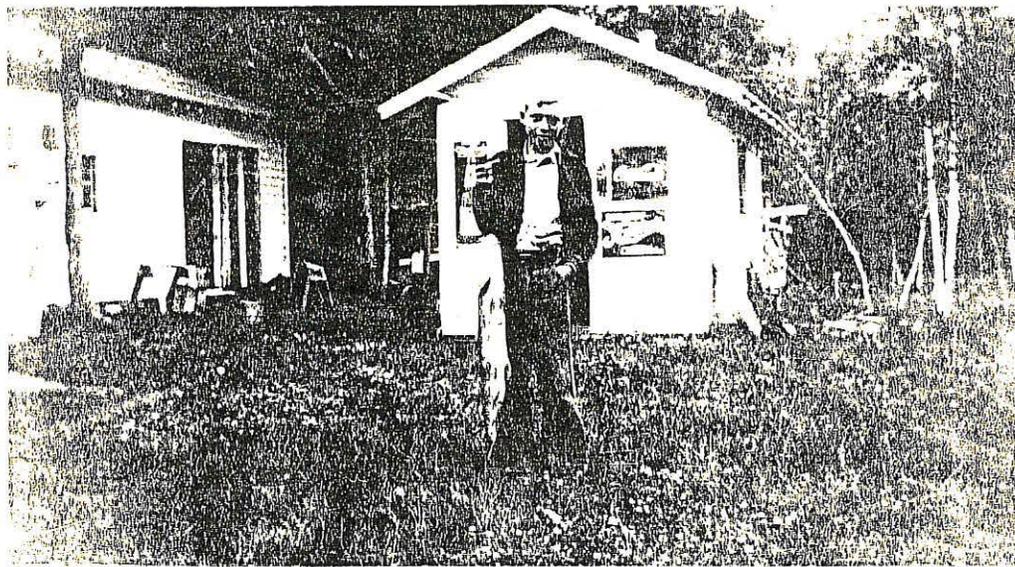


Railroads, Cornsilk, and Long-johns



by Don Fischer



RAILROADS, CORNSILK, AND LONG-JOHNS

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December, 1995

It wasn't much of a house, especially by today's standards. The house was small and boasted of only two utilities -- electricity and a telephone. But everyone knows that a house does not make a home, and I was blessed by being born and reared in such a dear home.

Taking a bath was a chore. Fortunately, it only occurred once weekly, usually on Saturday. I remember the winter season mostly because we would position the wash tub as close to the stove in the living room as possible. Water for bathing had to be pumped out of the cistern, heated for a couple of hours on the kitchen coal-burning stove, and then bucketed into the washtub. My mother and I used the same bath water. My dad was too big for the washtub, so he often used my grandparents' bathtub, equipped with hot and cold running water. Sometimes he paid the barber in the downtown shop for a shower.

Of course, a bath meant clean underwear, which became my companion day and night for the ensuing week. Any person ever subjected to those long-johns knows the embarrassment of the fold around the ankle. There was just no way to keep it unobtrusive. To exacerbate the matter, knickers were in style for young boys and I didn't get a pair of long pants until I was ten years old. As time passed, I too used my grandparents' luxurious tub.

This house that became such a wonderful home could not have consisted of more than 800 square feet. There was a kitchen, a dining room, a living room, and two bedrooms. There was a cistern, a well, and a shed in the rear of the lot. The shed was not really a garage, although that building did house our car. It also contained a tool bench, a compartment for corn cobs, and one for coal. In one corner, with a separate entrance, was a two-hole privy. Being permanently affixed within the larger structure, it was impossible to upset as often happened to other, more

vulnerable outhouses. Although it was a year-around necessity, its use was really only comfortable in September, October, April, and May. In the winter the drafts were ever so severe and summer brought on flies and excessive heat. It is also true that the Sears Roebuck catalogue had a utilitarian outreach.

The two bedrooms were simply rooms. One was reserved for guests. The furniture therein was a little more elegant and it had a closet. The room I shared with my mother and dad had no closet. My single bed was immediately against the only window. In the wintertime the frost would build up so thick on the inside that I could make ice sculptures with my fingernails. But as always, there was a bright side. The feathertick bedding was so delightful. A small boy needed a running start to make it into bed. Why we three shared a bedroom until my mother died when I was 13, I do not know. Perhaps because we owned only one "thunder mug."

"A woman's work is never done." For the woman, prior to the advent of today's conveniences, that was certainly true. The average kitchen when I ~~was~~^{was} a child had a kitchen cabinet, a table and chairs, a coal-burning cookstove, beside which were a basket of cobs and a bucket of coal. It was virtually impossible to keep fire going throughout the night. My dad always prepared the fuel the evening before retiring. He would put a layer of corn cobs in the fire chamber, then a few pieces of coal, and saturate the fuel with kerosene. Each morning he would hop out of bed, ignite the fuel, and jump back into bed. This was an everyday ordeal. My, how hot those kitchens were in the summer and how cold in the winter. On one occasion, Dad had three or four friends in to play poker. The temperature was extremely cold that night, and even though the cookstove was stoked to capacity, these men sat around the kitchen in hats, coat, and overshoes to keep warm. Oh yes, our drinking water was brought in a bucket from the well in our back yard. Probably the most disconcerting and inconvenient arrangement was the common sink in one corner. That

sink served as a place to wash kitchen utensils as well as our center for personal hygiene, except for bathing. On the edge of the sink was mounted a small pump which delivered water from the cistern. Each time it was necessary to wash ones hands or face, one had to pump water into a basin. Many times the pump required priming to activate. In referring to the cistern and well, there is a difference. Our well supplied us with drinking and cooking water which had filtered through the soil; whereas, cistern water is caught as runoff water from rooftops when it rains, and the downspouts deliver the water into a brick or tile-lined holding tank. When the cistern became full the water was diverted onto the ground surface by turning a flange in the downspout. There was no such thing as instant hot water. Even toast was prepared in the oven of that old cookstove.

The dining room was modest as well. It was mainly for entertaining friends or relatives who had come for dinner. My mother entertained the ladies of the ETC Club about once a year. This was a big event as there were something like 25 young women in the club. However, it had a special meaning to me. After the meeting was adjourned lunch was always served. More often than not, potato chips were on the menu. Now, potato chips were not the common item we find today. This special treat necessitated a special order with the local bakery several days in advance. Many times my grandparents, aunt, and uncles were dinner guests. Of course friends and relatives were served with our best silverware and linen. My personal use of the dining room was more self-serving. Neighbor kids came in to play ping pong on the table, or I would shoot baskets on the surface just above the outside door.

The living room was my favorite. It had three windows, a large leather chair, and a leather davenport. ("Davenport" must be a colloquialism, for several ^{Times}~~years~~ in the last few years I have asked to see a davenport and the clerks were mystified. It's a sofa, stupid.) There was also a tempermental radio, a few

miscellaneous tables and chairs and that pesky old pot belly stove in the winter months. During the Christmas time of the year we also had our tree. "Tree" is a bit of a stretch. It was folded and wrapped in newspaper most of the year. But come the middle of December the 6 cubic inch box for a base and the three feet of tree were once again unfolded and decorated. The main stem was green, but somehow always reminded me of a cigar because of the manner in which it was wrapped. For some reason trees were kept up longer then. I loved the room, especially when I was not too sick, but too sick to go to school. That old "davenport" made into a bed and I was allowed to be there a day or two. It was especially nice because I could watch the flames flicker through the glass door of that stove. Furthermore, when 4:30 came the room would be dark, except for the flickering. Little Orphan Annie, Jack Armstrong, and Hi-Ho Silver came on the radio for 15 minutes each. The ordeal I disliked most about being confined was the home remedy. The carbonated water like our 7-Up was fine, but the hot goose-grease rubdown was frightful. Try sleeping in long-johns saturated with goose grease. The large leather chair was special because that's where my mother consoled me when my feelings were hurt.

That little old house that became a home also had a front and back porch. The front porch was mostly to receive guests and keep them out of the weather. It had a railing around two sides which helped to keep stray dogs out, but didn't do much about the fly problem and that was important, because the swing suspended by chains was our place of rest on hot summer evenings. Almost everyone had a swing.

The back porch requires special attention because it was our utility space. Like most porches it had a roof. However, this porch had wooden walls about half-way up the side and was screened above that area. Outside,

shading the screened area, was a dense vine. And, of course, it had a door. It was a place to ~~s~~take off or put on overshoes when it snowed. It also housed our icebox. "Box" is an apt description. I judge the dimensions to be something like 16" x 30" x 5'. Walls were 3" thick, two compartments, two separate doors. All of them I ever saw were stained a brown color and were lined with galvanized tin. The block of ice was always in the upper compartment so the most perishable foods were stored with the ice. Now the unique thing about these units was that they all had a pan, something like a bed pan, resting on the floor under the box. As the ice melted, the water flowed through a tube into the pan. And yes, the pan had to be emptied frequently. Specialists were not required to keep such a sytem operational. The ice man made his rounds twice a week. He had a horse-drawn (really) wagon, and to receive ice you simply put the ice sign in the front window. (As a parenthetical thought, my grandparents had a system called a "cooler." Coolers were generally located on a porch. There was a handle attached to a pulley and by turning the handle the box was lowered or raised from a hole dug into the ground under the porch.). As kids, ~~were~~ always followed the ice wagon to get a chip as the delivery man cut out a small block from a larger block.

It would be remiss not to mention another use of that old porch. Can you imagine a laundry room with no running water? No, not even a drain in the floor. The washing machine itself was a classic. The tub, frame, and all components were made of oak. On a small platform to one side was a $\frac{1}{2}$ horsepower electric motor, unprotected from splashing water. The water had to be heated in a laundry tub in the kitchen and then hauled out to the machine. Emptying the machine required no special skill. By simply turning out a metal plug at the base of the tub, the water gushed out in bucketsfull

which were thrown out in the backyard. Often times the water had gotten quite gray. But the best part was yet to come. A narrow walk led out to the shed on the rear of the lot. On each side of the walk wire was stretched to accommodate the washed clothes. In the winter it was gruesome, and the union suits (a term for long-johns), the sheets, and all other items literally froze stiff as boards -- today it's known as freeze drying. Other times it may have taken several days to get everything dry. If drying weather was good, the finished product smelled so delightful. I enjoyed helping to hang the washing on the line and also ironing small things like handkerchiefs and dishtowels.

Our telephone was in the kitchen attached to the wall. The number was Green 141 (that's 65 years ago. Let's see, what was I going to say?) By picking up the earpiece, the response was "Number, please." Day or night, the operator knew you and you knew the operator. The operator could complete a call, give the time of day, sound the fire alarm, locate the doctor, or just visit for a moment or two. Absolutely no buttons to push. Now that's service.

It really is a miracle that many people were not electrocuted in their homes. The service was simple -- two wires, hot and ground. Mostly, wires were insulated but exposed, and secured to the walls with porcelain insulators. Often, overhead lighting consisted of a cord and socket with a pull string to engage the switch. The only safety precautions were fuses in the meter, and it was easy to fix a blown fuse by inserting a penny.

Incidentally, many farmers did not have electricity until 1938 or later. The first job I had that required a social security number was the summer of 1939, providing service to farmers around the village of Hancock. The government agency that made this possible was the REA __ Rural Electrification Agency. Although no longer needed, the agency still exists.

Neighbors also help to make a house a home. Actually, considering neighbors in a small town is considerably different from being in a large community. I knew everyone east of Main Street and the house they occupied; and probably 99% of those on the west side. Often I have wondered about what made Walnut such a special place in which to be young. Perhaps it was the freedom we enjoyed. Not only were we free to roam the alleys and neighborhoods, but we spend a good deal of time playing hide and seek and tag in the lumber yards and feed stores. Not once do I remember being scolded and told to get out.

Our home was located one block north of the bank, two blocks east, then north, the second house on the west side. By taking shortcuts and not taking time to smell the flowers, I could be at my Dad's grocery store in three minutes. I detail this purposefully to indicate just how casual things really were. Johnnie Fred Robinson and Mrs. Robinson were our neighbors on the south. Mr. Robinson had a pasture of several acres up the alley to the north about three blocks in which he grazed six or eight milk cows. Twice each day he would drive the cows down the alley behind our house for milking. The barn had the appropriate stalls and was a nice barn. As with all barns,

where livestock is present, manure accumulates. Between his barn and our shed was a space of open ground which was a natural for a manure pile. It was probably a good tradeoff because our outhouse was very nearby. I do remember, however, that the hollyhocks did magnificently in that location.

Other than Main Street, which was surfaced from the depot north to the end of the city limits, all other streets were dirt roads the same as in the country. Of course they became very muddy when it rained, and became quite rough when dried out. The streets were graded with a slight crown in the center for runoff to each side. These side ditches usually became full of water during a rainstorm and made great places to wade and squish mud between your toes. When the ditches were dry, they were perfect for building roads and tunnels in the side banks. Our toy cars and tractors were made of cast iron in those days and stood a lot of abuse.

I remember that while in high school two of my friends and I purchased a 1919 Model T Ford from old Doc Vaughn. Doc was our town marshall for as far back as I can remember. He served minus a billy club, a sidearm, or handcuffs. He was just there to make sure all business places had locked doors for the night. Several times through the years he called my dad to come down and lock up. Nonetheless, we three chipped in \$5.00 each, and for \$15.00 had this little beauty for ourselves. That Model T held up exactly three weeks under our supreme tests. It quit on us about a block north of the schoolhouse on the west side of Main Street, where we left it.

I do not know to this day whatever happened to the remains. I mention the car at this juncture because the streets were still unsurfaced in 1938, and the muddy conditions were partly responsible for the car's demise.

There are so many fond memories of those early childhood years that will remain untold. We had a garden given over mostly to potatoes; a cellar (not a basement) where we went during storms and where my dad made home brew; a cottonwood tree close by that belonged to Johnnie Fred Robinson, and I had a swing and a sandbox in its shade; two folding cots that my dad and I stretched out on the front yard when the nights were unbearably hot (That was during the years of the Depression and drought. Sometimes the lightning would become fierce and it seemed that the drought was ending, but only a few big drops would fall and the next day was as hot as ever.)

How my mother looked forward to spring housecleaning and moving the potbelly stove out to the shed. If you can imagine having a black monster with black pipe sitting on a 4' by 4' metal mat, and a bucket of coal and cobs in your living room for seven months, you understand what a relief it was to have it moved out. Housecleaning also meant hanging the rugs out and beating them, which was a monstrous job.

I also remember our car, which was a Dodge touring car: a huge thing with all-leather seats and open sides which were covered with curtains in the winter. In those years cars were almost always black. Each spring Dad would freshen up the car and stove with a quart of stove-black paint. A few years later

we got a used 1927 Dodge from Dr. Tierney, our local veterinarian, and it had roll-up windows. It did smell of animal medicines, but the windows made it worth it.

Another of the things that was so fascinating about being a child was having the time to dream. Whether reclining on the grass lawn and hearing the various sounds, smelling different fragrances, or just looking up at the blue sky and watching the clouds drift by, it was all worthwhile. Dreaming could be done anywhere. Many times I found being in the shed on the cob pile quite adequate. Our only closet, which was off of the guest bedroom, was for special occasions. Generally feather ticks or other such soft items were stacked to the rear on the floor. It was to that place I retired when in sorrow or when I was just plain sulking.

It would be virtually impossible for me to set down on paper the daily routines, fun times, hurts and bruises, as well as the joys and blessings. As kids we seemed to do things in cycles. Perhaps several days we would ride our bikes or get hung up with rubber-gun wars. Once we sat under my friend's porch and whittled for two days, just to see how large a pile of shavings we could make. However, there is one remaining period of those early days that requires special attention.

Solomon had this wisdom for all generations to follow: Eccl. 3:2a. "A time to be born, and a time to die." He also stated in Eccl. 7b, "The time of death is better than the day of one's birth." There is a certain comfort here in knowing that death is a natural event and even joy can be anticipated

in hoping for a better tomorrow, conditional, of course, upon one's relation to the Heavenly Father. But it is difficult, even traumatic, when it comes rather unexpectedly and to someone in their middle years. This happened to my mother.

She was born Ella Marie Krohn on May 6, 1900. It is my belief that she taught country school a year or two before marrying my dad. I was born February 19, 1921, in the house that became a home, and was greeted by Dr. Moore, who later became a three-term senator in the State of Iowa Legislature. My mother loved children, but was advised against any more pregnancies. During the next few years she managed her home, attended to her family, and helped my dad in the grocery store. She taught Sunday School.

In time, the decision was made to have a second child. At the end of the second trimester, Dr. Moore prescribed full-time bedrest in November of 1933. Dad hired a young girl from the country to serve as nurse and housemaid. Things looked good.

One Wednesday night I went to a movie. I walked home afterwards, and upon nearing our home, I noticed lights were on throughout the house, and several cars were parked in front. My mother, dad, and the doctor had already left for the Jennie Edmundson Hospital in Council Bluffs. My aunt and cousin stayed behind and would drive me in later that night.

Early Thursday morning the four of us were sitting in front of a window in a little cafe located on the corner out in front of the hospital. There are times when the image of some

momentous event seems to burn itself into your very soul. A long sidewalk extended from the hospital entrance to the street in front. Suddenly a man was hurrying our way. I knew instinctively that something had happened. We immediately went to my mother's room, but the door was closed. Someone asked if I could go in, and it was allowed. She had just died. I remember how peaceful and pretty and young she looked in the hospital bed.

Death was treated much differently in those days. Her body was brought home shortly thereafter. Furniture in the guest bedroom was removed and that became the viewing room. Two friends or relatives were in attendance in shifts 24 hours a day. The bereaved sat by to receive visitors and, of course, the continuous flow of friends and relatives prompted one to be in perpetual tears. Wreaths were customarily placed on the front door of a home of the bereaved; consequently my aversion to such a display.

The funeral was on Sunday, February 18. The baby was nestled in her arm, on her bosom. So far as I know, the boy was never named. At the foot of her grave is a stone which simply says "Ella Marie Fischer and Infant Son 5-6-1900: 2-14-1934"

Although I didn't have her to share in my later years with Sharlene and our family, I know she would have been a loving grandparent. The few years we did have were enough to make an impact. You of our immediate family have heard me tell of this before, but it bears repeating. She somehow knew that her time was short, and asked me to memorize this poem:

Your mother love enfolds me
In all of my affairs,
And this one thought enfolds me:
I know that Mother cares.

Many times those words appeared on the scope of my memory at just the right moment. I have this hope of seeing her again.

The following year and a half were difficult times. The first two months we lived with my grandfather and grandmother Fischer. My dad and I shared the upstairs room that he had shared with his brother Ed some years before. Nights were lonely. Many times I was awakened by his sobbing and would put my arm around him. After a short time of healing we moved back home. Mrs. Jurgensen, a next-door neighbor to my grandparents, a pioneer as were they, an elderly widow, came in to live with us. The arrangement was working, but my dad was still a young man, and I just a kid. We needed to make a family. This would soon happen.

Before considering that time in my life which was almost like a new paragraph, it seems reasonable to comment on things special.

The Lutheran Church in Walnut was a fellowship of those like-minded. The older generation of people, like my grandparents, had founded the group, and almost all of them were still living and were German-speaking. As a consequence,

a pastor was required to speak the language and preach from the pulpit a sermon in German at least once a month. The building looked so much like a church should. It had a steeple and a bell. I loved the tranquility of hearing church bells. To hear the ringing, to me, was like saying, "Everything is okay." Bells aren't heard anymore because they're considered offensive. There is a truism, however: what you give to one you take from someone else.

The custodian's name was Claus, straight from Germany. He also rang the bells and sometimes let us help. The building was beautiful, with stained glass throughout. The main window was large and on the north side. It was a scene of our Lord standing outside the door knocking to enter, a picture of Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Communion was observed annually on Easter Sunday. At Christmas our Sunday School classes would present a program on the stage of the German Community Hall. It was a large hall with a lot of people present and believe me, it was scary to say even a few words. There was always a large tree on the main floor. After the program, we exchanged gifts with our teacher and received a bag of hard candy from the church. During the Sunday School hour, while yet in assembly, birthdays were recognized. Such an event meant going forward and dropping pennies in the amount of one's age into a box held by the Superintendent. I always felt good about being a part of the church.

My first grade teacher's name was Miss (Roberta) Robinson -- no kin to Johnnie Fred. She was a Walnut girl and taught almost everyone I know. Her method was of the old school, using flash cards for sounds and numbers, drilling us over and over. Phonics aren't popular now, but the system served us well.

I was not part of the brain trust, although every minute was fun, being with my friends in town from grade 1 through grade 12. Our country friends joined us at the 9th grade level. No bus service, so some drove a car on a learner's permit, others took room and board during the week with a family, and a few rode ponies. When the weather was very bad, those who drove were forced to stay in town. I liked that, especially when I became aware of girls. Most of us were active in everything available, ie. plays, operettas, glee clubs, and sports. Mostly, I was a C+ or B- student. My best grade was an A in sports. My worst was a D in deportment.

GRANDPARENTS

Grandparents are essential. Aside from that, they are important. When I was, let's say, 20, it occurred to me that the Grim Reaper couldn't touch me because in the order of things there were first grandparents, and then after that, parents. It was long time to me. Of course that is not exactly true, and somewhat selfish.

Each of my grandparents was important to me and loved --although for different reasons. I never knew my Grandfather Krohn. He died when my mother was quite young. Her mother married a Mr. Johnson, who was widowed with a young family. Into that union he brought two daughters and two sons. Grandmother also had two of each. They had a little girl between them. While playing in the farm orchard she was stung by a bee and died before a doctor could be summoned.

Of course, in my lifetime, I always called my Grandma, "Grandma Johnson," whereas my two uncles and one aunt retained the name "Krohn." In my growing-up years they lived on a farm west of Avoca, and later moved into Avoca.

I spent a lot of time on the farm. Mr. Johnson had a large stable of really fine work horses. All of the equipment was horse-drawn in those days. Of special interest was harvest time. At that time they had "rings" comprised of six to eight farmers who worked together to bring in the crops. Between them they had one threshing machine, and they would move from one farm to the next until everyone within the "ring" was served.

As always in Iowa, the food at harvest was abundant and good. Sandwiches were served in the field around nine in the morning and again at three in the afternoon. The dinner hour was a gourmet's treat. It was served under a shade tree by the women of the "ring." These were hungry men, perhaps as many as twenty of them. A water boy circulated in the field at all times. Most often he rode a Shetland pony and carried a gallon jug of water slung over the saddle horn. A wet burlap bag was wrapped about the jug to help keep the water cool. I was water boy for Grandpa Johnson.

Other memories on that farm: the everlasting having to light lamps when going room to room; heading to the cave when the sky darkened in the northwest; how my two uncles (they were not yet married) tickled me mercilessly and slammed me around on the bed, and finally, how homesick I would get when the sun set. It was okay during the daytime. Several times my dad had to come after me about ten at night. The Krohn family thought very highly of my dad; but after he remarried, the relationship drifted apart somewhat because of a new family. However, I kept in touch and visited occasionally. My grandmother had come from Germany. Her maiden name was Hintz.

Perhaps it was proximity that drew me especially close to my paternal grandparents. They lived only a block away and I could visit at will. It was surely not that grandchildren were unique, for there were twenty-four of us -- fifteen boys and nine girls. Grandma came from Germany at an early age, and her maiden name was Sorenson. Grandpa's family migrated

from Germany just a year or two before he was born in Clinton County, Iowa, in the year 1856. They spoke the German language in their home, but also learned English so as to converse with others. Most of the people around Walnut came from the Schleswig-Holstein province of Prussia, which I believe was near Hamburg. There were some Danes and a few Irish, but the Germans were cliquish. They had their own Lutheran Church, bank, and a hall for dances, etc. Even as a small child after World War I, I recall special German days such as Maypole and Vereen being celebrated. After that war, things changed rather rapidly, for it was no longer popular to be too German.

There was something special about that group of people. I think part of the attraction for me was the link to the past. Rightly or wrongly, I think of them as pioners. After all, Grandpa was born before Lincoln became president; before the Civil War; before a railroad came to Walnut -- and for that matter, years prior to it becoming a town. (I am so sorry that I did not elicit that history from him.) My life overlapped his by twenty-four years. It was a silent kind of relationship, for he was rather quiet, but loving and kind. Grandma was also a loving person, and I must say they were very old-fashioned (that made them dear), or was it old-fashioned?

They were certainly never idle. Even when they retired and moved to town, around 1908, they had a large garden. But then, everyone did in those days. A large section was planted in potatoes; rows of carrots, beets, radishes, turnips, leaf lettuce, and the always-present array of summer flowers. He

also had a barn on the alley behind the house. It too had a section for cobs and coal, a privy, a stall for horses, chicken coups with adjoining fenced-in yard, and a loft for pigeons (they often ate pigeons or made soup). There was also a place for buggies. He never owned a car.

As you might surmise, these were special people in my life. I remember them most clearly in special situations: Grandpa, was always dressed in a Prince Albert coat, simply reprimanding me with, "I didn't see you in church today," and Grandma sitting in a rocker in the evening with her traditional ankle-length skirt and loads of darning. They and all my aunts, uncles, and cousins called me "Sonny." Grandpa had come to that area alone as a fifteen year-old boy. Somehow he acquired considerable land and became well off. But like so many thousands of others, the Depression claimed most of his wealth.

MY DAD

The way my dad's parents addressed him was amusing to me. His name was August, but they added several syllables, making it "Ouuhgust." He was the ninth of eleven children born on the Fischer farm northeast of Walnut. All but one survived the rigors of those days, and made it into adulthood. Actually, half of them graduated into their late eighties and middle nineties, while one made it into the hundreds (Clara^a).

Dad had a close call with the flu epidemic of 1918. Many did not survive. It is interesting to walk about in the Walnut cemetery and see family plots where two or three succumbed to the disease.

He had several interesting experiences about which I recall him speaking. My granddad had just built a new barn on the home farm, and since the structure offered cover from peering eyes, he decided to test out smoking. You guessed it! The straw in the mow caught fire and burned the building to the ground. Another was his sleep-walking adventure: he and my Uncle Ed shared an upstairs bedroom. One winter night when there was about a foot of snow on the ground, he decided to sleepwalk. He opened the window, jumped through the screen, and landed in the snow. Following his barefoot tracks, for he only had on a nightgown, he walked across a vacant lot into a neighbor's home (they thought it was their son in the house), back outside toward Main Street, where he saw a light in the

Hector home. When he knocked on the door, Amellia recognized him and when she called his name, he awakened. I was always fearful of duplicating this scene during my U.S. Navy days.

Although Dad didn't go beyond country school and didn't get to compete in high school sports, he loved competitive games and played town-team football and baseball well into my youth. For a time he was involved with tennis. Walnut didn't have a gymnasium until 1928, so basketball was limited to makeshift courts.

Thinking of the gym reminds me that I was in the third grade during its construction. The building was detached from the schoolhouse, but only about fifty feet away. The roof was coated with a thick layer of tar. During recess we would get into the unused tar barrels and put a big chunk in our mouths for chewing gum. After recess, we welcomed our teacher with smiles of blackened teeth. And inevitably, we ended up throwing it at one another.

My folks were set to move to one of Grandpa's farms in the spring after their marriage. Before this happened, Granddad decided (that is how things were then) that two of his sons should be merchants. So, very quickly, Dad and Uncle Ed were in the grocery business. The partnership lasted until 1928, when the Depression struck. Dad realized two families couldn't make it, so he gave his brother the ultimatum, "You go or I go." So Uncle Ed became a traveling salesman and did quite well. Dad remained until 1936, when he remarried and made a complete change. Using the same building, he and his brother-

in-law, Otto Christensen, went into the chicken hatchery business and did well. In 1946 he sold out and moved to California, eventually getting into the egg business, first in Van Nuys and later in Yucaipa.

Two events were meaningful to me: I was thirteen at the time, and knew he had taken Caroline to dinner or a movie a couple of times. After all, she was widowed also and none of us were strangers, being next door neighbors, having known each other all of our lives, and belonging to the same church. Nonetheless, on a May evening in 1936 he sat me down on our front porch and told me of plans to be married. However, he wanted my approval and blessing. His question was, "Do you think we can make it?"

That's consideration.

The other event was at his deathbed at the hospital in Redlands. He had been ill with cancer since the first of the year. We were living in Davis, and Caroline called and suggested that I come down to see him. On the Wednesday night before I was to return to Davis, Caroline, Ethelyn, and I made a hospital visit. As we were leaving at about 8:00 p.m., I asked them if they would mind visiting in the hall so I could have a final word. I took his hand in mine and said, "Dad, you know I love you. Do you mind if I say a prayer?" He agreed. At home that evening, upon retiring, I prayed that he might be taken. A little after midnight the telephone rang and the voice informed me that ^{he} had gone. Such a blessing to have had those last words together.

August Fischer : 11-29-¹⁸⁹⁷~~1987~~ -- 12-4-75.

Dad never complained.

That period of time when we were mostly involved with family events was confined to the 1920's and into the middle 30's. No doubt as aunts and uncles became older, and cousins were striking out on their own, the needs just changed. Although I never attempted to count the extended family around Walnut, it could well have numbered a hundred. The Krohns in Avoca numbered far less than the Fischers. When all of Grandma Johnson's (Krohn) kids and grandkids were present, there were sixteen of us, whereas at Grandpa Fischer's there were fifty of us. We did, however, visit the extended family in Avoca. Grandma Johnson had four siblings nearby and we often had dinner in their homes. It got rather complicated. Uncle Bill Krohn had an uncle who was also his brother-in-law.

The gatherings were pretty much the same no matter where we happened to be. If it were on a Sunday, company would begin arriving at about two o'clock. In the summer season the men always churned at least two five-gallon freezers of homemade ice cream. About five o'clock the men who were farmers would make a quick trip home to do the chores -- milk the cows and feed the animals. When they returned, serving supper would begin. Those were strictly meat and potato days. It was either roast pork, beef, or fried chicken, and for Thanksgiving, Christmas, or New Years, it was duck or goose. I really have no explanation as to why, but we almost always had canned white cherries for dessert. Delicious meals.

At Grandma Johnson's we could all squeeze in around the table. At Grandma Fischer's the table sat about sixteen and the men were served first; next came children and some women, and finally the remainder of the women. Sorry feminists.

In the wintertime the first chore upon arriving at the host home was for the driver to open the drain of his car radiator. When it came time to go home, water was heated in big pans and poured back in. I particularly remember how snugly it was between my parents on the ride home. The headlights shone so brightly on the snow and the sound of the side-curtains flapping away. We three had a big, heavy horsehide blanket over us, and our feet rested on bricks or flat irons we had heated. At the north end of Main Street was a big sign: "Turn off your cutout -- \$15.00 fine."

It was generally after midnight before the gathering broke up. The men played cards all evening. The women visited (gossiped?), but their work was not done. Just before going home, lunch was served. Large platters of cheese, dried beef, and roast beef or pork sandwiches ^{Were} served, along with cake and coffee.

I remember two occasions when they removed the furniture from the living room and danced. These were brothers, sisters, and their spouses. Some fun.

HOLIDAYS

I think it would be fair to say that holidays years ago had a significantly different connotation than today. Holidays were celebrated on a particular date, which in itself set them apart. Now dates are arranged for convenience to make a long weekend. Memorial Day, for example, was yesterday and the newspaper was full of special sales and camp sites available. By implication the emphasis is off the day and on personal entertainment. May I share with you some memories of former celebrations?

New Years Day was usually spent at home around the radio in the morning, listening to a commentary of the Rose Parade, and later, the bowl game. Perhaps another couple would come in later for dinner, but it was pretty much family. Dinner was the inevitable goose, which made for great "picking" before retiring and into the next day. For students it was a time to lament an empty Christmas tree and an end to vacation. Maybe it was the excitement of youth, but there was something special about radio. Sitting in a cozy living room with snow heavy on the ground outside, a good broadcaster could describe the floats and warm sunshine and steer one's mind into a very exotic place. In those days, California seemed as far away and mysterious as Japan. New Year's was a mellow day at home.

Lincoln's and Washington's birthday were celebrated on their respective dates, allowing kids a day's vacation. A few days prior to each event, schoolrooms were decorated with the appropriate memorabilia, and our teacher would expound on the

importance of each man -- something the revisionists of this day would dispute.

Easter was a day when people went to church. It was a day for Communion. For most, it was a day for family.

Mother's Day was also church and family. I don't recall the women participating, but it was traditional for men to wear a carnation on the lapel of their coat. A red carnation signified a living mother, a white one, a deceased mother.

Come to think of it, there were many of these legendary guides. These were a few: Men wore straw hats from May 1 to Labor Day. Green was the acceptable color with a brown suit, never blue, which would have been considered bad taste. In spite of all the idiosyncrasies and hypocrisy there was a certain classiness which I miss, and which may have even been beneficial.

The Fourth of July holiday was special. Our source of fireworks was Beth Burlingham's drugstore. She literally dumped all of the packaged firecrackers on the platform of the front window, and we were free to rummage through to make our purchase. "Atta Boys" were our favorites and could send a can twenty feet skyward. Torpedoes were also popular. They were good for downtown because of the surfaced street. The World War I veterans paraded on Main Street in the mornings. The Walnut Volunteer Firemen (my dad was one) sponsored a picnic at Meyer's Grove. That was great for kids. Games were conducted, but the best part was free soda and ice cream. A large horse tank was filled with ice and water and we were free to help ourselves. Coke and Pepsi were not the big item then. It was

mostly flavored soda in glass bottles. The "all-you-can-eat" ice cream was in the form of neapolitan bars. Meyer's Grove is no longer in existence. The grove comprised something like forty acres of mostly elm trees and a stream running through. Sometime during the 1960's an elm tree disease wiped out the entire forest. It looks so sad today, particularly since I had so many good times there. An interesting aside to Meyer's Grove: When the Hintz family came from Germany and settled in Avoca, Mr. Hintz (my great grandfather, Grandma Krohn/Johnson's dad) was a shoemaker and got material from that grove to make wooden shoes.

Labor Day was no big event. You think of it being established and set aside for factory workers and big city people. Walnut was rural, and cows had to be milked and animals fed, no matter what day it was. But the day did serve as a cue to a gentleman to lay aside his straw hat for a season.

Halloween is not a holiday, but it got our attention. After dark it was time to seek out and destroy. Walking the alleys, we found the outhouses that were vulnerable to upsetting, or the cars parked outside where we could soap the windows or let the air out of tires. October is also the time of year in Iowa when watermelon ripen. Most farmers planted them in the middle of corn fields, so they could not be seen. It always amazes me how hard it is to fool kids. We knew exactly where they were, and often made night visits. With quarry in hand we would sit on the curb by the schoolhouse and enjoy the fruit of our labor.

Thanksgiving was big. It meant some favorite relatives would be in for the day and we would be killing another fatted goose and opening another can of white cherries. It was fun too, because the Walnut Community Club hosted an event. On the Saturday prior to Thanksgiving we had a balloon-letting (my term). All the farmers and locals would position themselves in the center of the downtown street and a few merchants would be on top of one of the buildings releasing balloons, some of which had an entitlement to a duck or goose. This could only happen in a small town.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day were two different events. Christmas Eve was celebrated in Avoca at Grandma Johnson's. In addition to the grandparents, my Aunt Ednah, who at that time lived at home, my Uncle Bill and his wife and two boys, and the three of us were together. A large dinner was served (must I say it again -- goose), and all the dishes had to be washed before we could enter the forbidden room. The parlor was off the dining room, but a drape had been placed over the door to exclude entry ^{OR} ~~on~~ sight. Talk about emotion and mysticism for a kid! Finally the drape was removed and there, in all its beauty, was a lighted tree, loaded with gifts. Actually, it was a period of hard times for many people. Since my folks had the grocery store, they always gave Uncle Bill's family a bushel basket of grocery staples. My folks and I always stayed overnight on Christmas Eve.

The next day we went to Grandpa Fischer's. It was the biggest event of the year. All fifty of us were there. We

arrived early and stayed late. You will remember the routine of dinner, chores, etc. from an earlier account. What you don't know is how we trashed that house. It was a large home with a basement, first and second stories, and a full attic with stairs leading to it -- the kind you see in movie mysteries. The kids worked it over at every level. What patience my grandparents had. Our parents seemed oblivious. If there was a tree, it must have been rather insignificant, for I don't recall one. There was no gift exchange at the gathering. I guess there were too many of us. It was probably for this same reason I don't recall ever getting or giving a birthday gift.

BIKES

A set of wheels is important for boys, and although I didn't own a car until I was twenty-six, I had a bicycle the summer of my tenth year. Dad was still in the grocery business at that time, and, as a result, he had wholesale catalogs for a number of firms in Chicago. (He even had swatches of fabric for tailor-made suits. He measured the client, sent the results into Chicago, and in about ten days the finished product was in the mail. Prices ranged from \$12.00 to \$25.00, which was advertised as "the diamond quality." The deal always included a vest, and sometimes an extra pair of pants. That's how I came by my high school graduation suit.)

Money was a problem, so I went door-to-door selling subscriptions to Colliers, Liberty, and several women's magazines. Of course they had to be hand-delivered on a weekly basis, as all the magazines came to me and I was responsible. Business wasn't great, and it didn't last too long, but I managed to pick up a few bucks. Another source of income was nailing together shoo for 30-dozen egg crates. There was a shed behind the grocery store for such events. A jig was set up and I enjoyed putting the crates together at two cents each. I'm not sure how much the bike cost, but most likely fifteen to eighteen dollars wholesale. Dad probably kicked in something and the order was placed.

That was the longest three weeks of my life. Every day I met the west-bound freight train, and peered inside as the

station agent loaded local freight onto his cart. Finally the great day arrived. It was brought to the loading door of the store by the town drayman, Mr. League. Every day he brought things from the train. He smoked cigars, and every day he and Dad would roll dice to see if he paid double or nothing for a cigar.

The bike was a blue, twenty-six inch beauty with a basket. It was great fun, and took me everywhere I needed to go. By the time the high school years arrived, I don't remember riding the bicycle so much.

PETS

Every boy should have a dog sometime in his lifetime. I had two. Their names escape me.

All farmers had watchdogs years ago. Some barked their fool heads off and chased every vehicle, while others simply watched. Most were either collies or German shepherds. In addition to dogs, cats were relegated to the barn for rat and mice control. They, the cats, always made an appearance at milking time for their reward. Dogs ate table scraps and made a home under the porch or perhaps had a doghouse. Farmers also kept six or seven geese, a few ducks, and occasionally, guinea hens. These fowl were especially good at keeping things tidy around the homestead; and the geese, in addition, were good at warning off intruders.

Since there were so many collies and shepherds around, it was not difficult to find a pup. I had one of each at different times. But, alas, my luck was bad; or rather, their luck was bad. First, you will remember my mentioning our two-holes in the shed. As boys are wont to do, I invited my little dog (the shepherd) in for company. The inexplicable happened. He fell to the bottom of Hole # 2. What to do? Well, that's what dads are for. Fortunately, the little stinker had a collar on, and with a long hooked wire, he was extricated. Little collie had it worse. Only a few weeks old, somehow the pup got under our neighbor's house two doors north and fell into an abandoned but dry well. After the pup had been missing for

several days the neighbor heard faint whining sounds coming from under her house. Since there was no basement, a portion of the brick foundation had to be removed, and another rescue was successful.

As fate would have it, neither dog reached maturity. Both chased cars, and the inevitable happened. You will recall the closet in the guest bedroom as a haven for sulking or in sorrow. These were two such sorrowful occasions. But wait a moment before moving on. It gets more gruesome. My mom tried canaries for a time, but they were dirty, didn't sing, and apparently didn't like the environment. She also had a bowl of goldfish. One day while she was out, I decided we would have fish for supper. With great dexterity, I prepared them for the broiler.

SPORTS

My dad was an avid sports fan in what I suppose could be called the golden age of sports. That was the time of Rockney, the Four Horsemen, Notre Dame, Jack Dempsey, Jim Thorpe, Bill Tilden, Babe Dedrickson, and the mighty Babe Ruth. Dad and his brother played on the Walnut baseball team. Uncle Ed was a good hitting and fielding center fielder, and Dad was on first base.

The crowds were large in those days. The field had a covered grandstand behind home plate and a concession stand underneath, to the rear. I remember so vividly how, early on Sunday mornings, my dad or uncle would drive out to the park and position the car (they both had Dodge touring vehicles) directly on a line with first and second so my mom and Aunt Ruby were assured of a seat. We boys would shag foul balls and be rewarded with a cold drink at the end of the day. One of my friend's dad was team manager, and Walt and I were allowed to sit in the third base dugout, which was pretty exciting. The ballpark was northeast of town about three-quarters of a mile. Many times during the week the boys rode their bikes out for a pickup game.

One time Walt and I were alone at the field sitting in the shade of the home-team dugout. As often was the case, we were smoking. Unfortunately, the lime was stored under the roof of the dugout, and somehow we ignited the lime and set the structure on fire.

It seems to me that as a kid I always had a ball of some kind with me. When riding my bike, the glove and baseball were always in the basket, ready to play. So often eight or ten of us would come together and have a pickup game. So many times it was in a pasture and we used cow pies for bases -- dried of course. In Johnnie Fred Robinson's pasture the lady next door had a row of rhubarb just across the fence. Many times while playing ball we would pull off a stem and rub it on the salt blocks for the milk cows before eating it. During the football season it was much the same. Pickup games and just kicking the ball back and forth with great visions of stardom. A neighbor behind us had a hoop from a barrel nailed onto his cob shed, and I spent hours shooting baskets.

Eventually, high school afforded the opportunity to participate in organized sports. In a small school one can be involved without star qualities. Through most of the years I was privileged to be involved in varsity football, basketball, baseball, and track. Perhaps basketball was my best sport. At least I felt most natural and at ease playing the game. Critical acclaim would verify that, for I made All-Conference forward. As a freshman at Omaha U, I was given a football scholarship, but my heart wasn't in it. At least I found what it was like to live in a training-house atmosphere with other athletes. It's when a person is really young that those magnificent dreams are possible, and you can picture yourself as another Babe Ruth.

RAILROADS

What would life be like, to never have heard the lonely wail of an old steam engine as it labored its way through the cold of a winter's night? Who can imagine never having balanced on the rail to see how great a distance could be traveled without losing balance? How many rocks have I picked up as I walked along the railroad bed to throw at glass insulators on the telegraph lines, and scored a direct hit? The Rock Island Railroad was important for kids in Walnut.

Our range of territory along the tracks was two miles west of town, and three miles east. To the west were two attractions. There was a small pond that we occasionally used to cool off during the summer. Unfortunately, it was loaded with turtles and crawdads, and the mud was knee deep. The cliffs were the big thing. It's where we played cowboys and Indians. The "cliffs" were not really cliffs at all. The railroad had been cut through a hill and provided a general decline to the tracks, except in one area where a precipitous cut left a bank about ten feet high. Enough for ten-year-old imaginations to translate into the canyons of Geronimo territory.

East of town was Westphalen's Pond, the cemetery (yes, we often spent time just browsing around, checking out such things as where the "covered wagon baby" was buried), Walnut Creek, and some very good rabbit hunting. Westphalen's Pond was mostly for winter events, such as ice skating and hockey. Walnut Creek was the major attraction. It was there that we

spent time fishing and swimming. The bridge spanning the creek afforded us a place to test our true grit. When trains would approach, we would sit on an abutment about four feet below the tracks, as the train passed overhead. Further east was a cut through a rather large hill in which the fence lines were several hundred feet back from the tracks. Such areas were pure virgin prairieland, since it had never been farmed. The grasses and weeds were all native, and the cottontails abounded. The hunting was excellent.

The railroad in town was at the south end of Main Street, at the bottom of the hill. The main line ran east and west, and to the south was farmland, so it was really on the very edge of Walnut. The depot was typical of the day, a wooden structure painted a sort of mustard yellow. It consisted of an office, a waiting room, and a storage room. One agent did it all. Sometimes we helped him pull the large, iron-wheeled carts around to receive incoming freight. His hours were 8:00 to 5:00 (he was also the telegraphor). Fortunately for us, the waiting room area was never locked. The room had a pot-belly stove with a bucket of coal nearby. As the depot stood at the bottom of a hill excellent for sleigh-riding, we were blessed with a great place to go for warmth and to just chat. In front of the depot was a bricked walking area. About six feet back, parallel to the tracks, was a yellow-painted warning line to stay behind. When trains were slowed, preparing to stop, we would test our mettle by toeing the line. The engineers in jest would give us a big blast of steam. There were two

switching or spur tracks, one to the south and one to the north of the main line. The south spur accommodated the stockyard pens and were used for loading animals onto cattle cars. We played tag on the stockyard fencing rails. The north spur ran past the ice house, grainery, cement works, and storage barns. All of these places were part of our playground. Sand was unloaded from rail cars into open pits for the cement works. We spent hours playing in the large piles. Many times the engineers would allow us in the cab with them when switching box cars around.

Harry Nieman's ice house also kept us close to the tracks. Harry was our baseball coach, and we would often play catch across the tracks, using the ice house as a backstop. At one end of the building was a cement platform about six feet square with a drain. Built onto this platform was a tower about twelve feet high. Each side was of wooden louvered construction. Within this structure it rained day and night. It was condensate water from the manufacturing office. After becoming really hot from workout, we would crawl under the sides for a refreshing pause -- bare naked, of course. Sam Cade, one of the town clowns, worked for Harry. Usually, after freshening up, he would suggest we make a freezer of ice cream. He would assign us kids to bring an egg or milk or whatever, and since ice was free, that^{was} his contribution.

The railroad, the depot, and most other buildings are gone; but my memories are so very fond.

OUR CLUB

To the rear of Caddock's lot, on the alley, stood a building that had once served as a laundry room. It was amply sized, just right for a club house. Our club had a name, and to prove it we hand-painted a sign and nailed it above the door. Although this comes dangerously close to divulging hallowed information, I will share. It was the TGCR Club: Trap, Gun, Camera, and Rod Club. Within the building we had a work bench, several beds (we did stay overnight at times) an attic, and a wood-burning stove. On Friday nights we made plans and popcorn. The membership consisted of Earl, Bob, and Dick Caddock, and myself.

Trapping was our big endeavor. The season in Iowa began the first of November and lasted six weeks. The season was open on civet cats, skunks, opossum, fox, mink, weasel, and muskrat. Most of our bounty was limited to civet cats, skunks, and muskrats. They were easy catches, and others quite difficult. We paid the price when catching civet cats and skunks. For all the odor involved, a civet cat brought 15¢, and a skunk 25¢. We caught mostly muskrats. They were worth .25¢ to .35¢. We skinned each animal, stretched them on a shingle, fur side in, until it was dried and cured, at which time the pelts were mailed into Chicago for redemption.

Our club was ^{an} ~~in~~ independent organization, and we pretty much did as we wanted. The attic had a special function as a storage place. In the fall, when the field corn was mature,

we would go out with gunny sacks and collect ear corn and cornsilk. The ear corn we shelled and used for parching on the stove. The silk was our supply of smoking material through the winter. When times were rough we were even reduced to smoking the stuffing in mattresses, or roaming the streets for used butts. No matter what the the inner structure, we always used old newspaper for rolling. Eventually we got more sophisticated and sent away through a catalog for a device to roll one cigarette at a time. We then used Bull Durham, Velvet, or Prince Albert -- the good stuff. We even went so far as to have a stamp made up for a brand name. We stamped all the cigarett papers with the "C and F" designation before rolling. These were ten and twelve year-old brats. We were all sports-minded, and by the time high school came, smoking was not part of our environment.

We also had a dog named Rex. As we were accustomed to roaming the railroad tracks, so was Rex. One day we got bad news about Rex. We roamed the area and when we finally found our mascot, there was nothing left to do but provide a suitable burial. Rex was a good dog.

WALNUT

The time is near at hand to leave the small Iowa farm community where I was born and grew up. Through the years I have wondered just what made it so special. Of course, it would have been nothing without the eight hundred or so people and especially all the kids. But beyond that, I have concluded that the word "freedom" may be the answer. We were not under the jurisdiction of our parents every minute, and in turn, they really didn't have to worry about us. Everybody, including the farmers round about, knew us. We could leave home after breakfast and be alerted for lunch by the noon whistle (everybody lived by the sound of the whistle), and the same for supper when the six o'clock whistle sounded.

One day it might be playing ball, riding bikes, rubber-gun wars, fishing, swimming, or playing in the sand piles. Some days we watched the blacksmith at work, fanning his fire with the bellows. Or perhaps we might be playing-hide-and seek among the piles of lumber in the lumber yard or among the mountainous stacks of bagged cattle feed in Jacobsen's feed store. If we needed a piece of leather for our sling-shot, we could go into the harness-maker's shop and look under his work bench for a scrap. The aroma in that shop was delightful. Behind the feed store was a large pile of discarded iron and buggies and cars. We would dismantle the buggy and car tops to retrieve the oak supports for the tops. When cut, they made perfect sticks for hockey or "shinny." Shinny was a game like hockey played in

summer on a field. We used beaten-up tin cans for a puck.

There weren't many surprises for us in growing up. Being around farms and farm animals, we knew all about the birds and the bees. It was not a sensual exposure, as it would be in this day, but one of the verities of life. The same with death, for we all lived with that reality. I suppose part of our conditioning was once again related to farm animals that were slaughtered. As little kids ten years of age, we would go into the slaughter house behind Moritz's meat market, sit on the fence around the pen, watch Butch winch up a hog by its hind legs, and while the hog was suspended, cut its throat. This would ruin a child for life today. We were ornery kids, but not vicious or mean. The most dishonorable thing we were involved in was blowing the fire whistle one Wednesday night when all the farmers were in town. Although I didn't push the button, I was in the group of about six which was involved.

The next day we went before the mayor, Mr. John Lohman. It's kind of humorous now. John was also a butcher, and court was held in his shop. He stood behind the meat case in his apron, and we were lined up on the other side. We were not fined or jailed, just talked to. Only in a small town, thank goodness.

By now you see how privileged we were. In a few years high school would be completed and the ties rather quickly broken.

In the summer of 1938 I took on the adventure of bumming on the rails from California to Iowa. That fall I entered Omaha

U. In the fall of 1939 I attended the American Institute of Business in Des Moines. In 1940 I began working for J.C. Penney Co. in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Before leaving Walnut, one event stands out as fun. The winter of 1936 was severe, with a lot of snow. My grandfather had a one-horse sleigh in the mow of his barn. He got it down for me and let me use his floor-length, heavy fur coat and matching gauntlet gloves for a weekend. Mr. Moritz of the meat market let me use one of his horses. I got Wilma, my cousin, and we rode out in the country to visit a girlfriend. I have the sleigh bells hanging beside me at this moment.

As a salmon always returns to the place of its beginning, so this same urge stirs within me for Walnut.

THE NAVY

On December 7, 1941, I was in Lincoln, enjoying working at J.C. Penney, and living in a boarding house about ten blocks from work. Many widows of that time took on boarders to survive. This lady had a very large home and five young men in her care. There was a lawyer, an engineer, a student, and my roommate and I worked in the men's section at Penney's. We were provided breakfast and an evening meal, except on Sunday, when the big meal of the day was served after church. The five of us shared one bathroom. She did all the work. Our cost was \$30.00 a month each. \$30.00 wasn't too much since my monthly gratuity was \$90.00. Most months I picked up an extra \$15.00-\$20.00 as a bonus, which often made me high salesman in the district. We worked six days a week.

On Sunday the 7th it looked as though Penney's would be a life-time career. My roommate, Lee, had a key to the store, so we went in and he measured me for a new, tailor-made suit. After dropping the order in the mail, we went to a matinee movie. Coming out of the movie we heard the news: Pearl Harbor had been bombed. I was twenty and had not received my draft card. Under the circumstances I knew the navy was in my future.

Within a few weeks I went to the recruiting station in Lincoln, passed the physical, and a few weeks later was inducted in Omaha. March 4, 1942, I was in Boot Camp in San Diego. Upon completion in June, I was transferred to the Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi, Texas. After several months new

orders sent me back to San Diego for duty aboard the U.S.S. Farragut (DD348), a destroyer.

The next years were spent mostly at sea. During that period the Farragut was involved in task forces hopping island to island. My service ribbon boasted nine battle stars, starting with Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands, all the way to Okinawa. Surely, in one incident God had his hand upon me. The Farragut was a class ship, meaning she was the first of eight of that type built. One had been sunk in the Aleutians. It was 1944 and the rest of us were escorting tankers through the China Sea. A violent storm hit us and lasted three days. The Farragut moaned and groaned and shuddered through that ordeal. Everything was in shambles. When the storm cleared, two of her class had capsized, losing all aboard.

At the end of the war the Farragut was called to the Brooklyn Navy Yard for decommissioning. It was while in New York that I began seeing Shar again. She was in Washington, D.C. We had a wonderful two months commuting back and forth, seeing things we had only dreamed about. Shortly thereafter, I was sent to the Great Lakes Naval Station in Chicago for discharge. The navy was the biggest learning experience of my life. It was also one of the most proud, just knowing I could do it and for a just cause. March 4, 1942 -- February 4, 1946.

(Incidentally, I got the new suit and wore it several times before donating all my clothes to the Salvation Army upon induction.)

WILL IT WORK?

The question that my dad asked me years ago as we sat on our front porch, needs to be answered. "Can we make it work?" Yes! So beautifully. It's not so much that "it" worked -- we made it work. We laughed together, we went to church together, played together, worked together, and just plain respected one another. I don't downplay how important it is to laugh together.

August and Caroline were married by our minister in a private ceremony in June 1936. The only ones in attendance were a married couple, who were friends and witnesses. We moved into Caroline's house across the street, for it had a bathroom and running water. Dad sold our house for \$500.00. Caroline, as a widow, had made her living in her home as a hairdresser. On my arrival the business was moved downtown, and what had been the shop became my bedroom. Cooperation and selflessness are everything.

One example of this I have never forgotten. At the time, Ethelyn was in Des Moines training and working as a beautician. She agreed to give up her job and come back to live in Walnut and work with Caroline until I finished high school, so that we could have a complete family. She and I enjoyed each other, had mutual friends, and even double-dated together.

I recall that many times on Saturday evening I would have supper ready for everybody. It was customary for everyone in Walnut to have a freshly made ring of baloney on Saturday night.

Herman Moritz (a relative) had the local meat market and made the baloney. He brought the recipe with him from Germany. There were two big tubs, one for the 10¢ ring and the other, the 15¢ ring. I would pick out a ring, take it home, and fix American fried potatoes, to everyone's delight. My treat. So often it is just the simple little things that linger with us.

One occasion was when Caroline entertained three tables of her card club women friends. The dessert had already been prepared. At ten o'clock Ethelyn and I, wanting to be useful, whipped the cream for topping. As luck would have it, we poured in food coloring rather than vanilla. It came out a lovely raspberry color. We served it anyway, and it made a big hit. How ingenious! The good times went on.

After World War II, in Los Angeles, Shar and I, Hert and Frank (cousin more my dad's age, also living in Los Angeles) met at my folks' house every Wednesday for games. About midnight we had graham crackers and milk -- just dunking, talking and laughing. Yes, it worked.

TO BE BORN -- AGAIN

Where and when I do not know. Perhaps the gestation period occurs over months or even years. Consider the Apostles. They followed immediately, but did not appear to believe and/or understand until after seeing the risen Lord. Nicodemus was concerned about how such an event is possible. Jesus answered by saying: "Verily, verily, (now listen up), you must be born of water (cleansing) and of the Spirit (power)."

I was born a Lutheran and probably cried, as do all babies, when sprinkled. Going to church and Sunday School was always gratifying and comfortable. As a child in Sunday School I learned about Jesus, Sampson, Daniel, Saul, David, and many major events that occurred. At church the sermons seemed long and sometimes the minister got quite loud and seemed angry. Sitting between my parents I played with my dad's gold watch, which he removed from his vest pocket. The watch was a gift from his parents on his twenty-first birthday. The watch had front and back covers that sprang open upon pushing separate buttons. It was instilled in me that God was good and my friend. Perhaps I held the image of a kindly, bearded gentleman in a rocking chair. At any rate, I felt good about the relationship. In 1935, sixteen of my friends and I were confirmed. The test was being able to recite the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed.

The seed may have been planted in the summer of 1934. Five of us drove to a Christian camp outside of Gary, Indiana.

Almost six hundred miles from home in a Model A Ford. Our ages were: twelve (one), thirteen (two), fifteen (one), and a sixteen year-old with a learner's permit.

This was the period when Chicago was known for its Capones, Dillingers, Valentine's Day Massacre, and a host of others. There were a few boys from Chicago, one whose nickname was Hoot Gibson (the famous cowboy). At thirteen, boys were learning to spit, and often. Baseball was the favorite game at camp; and, as luck would have it, one day I was sitting on the end of the top bleacher waiting my turn to play. Hoot, two years ~~old~~^{older} and from tough Chicago -- and with credentials overwhelming to an Iowa farm boy -- was sitting below in the shade of the bleacher. Unbeknownst to me, I got Hoot on the crown of his head with the force and accuracy of a pigeon. We settled for a mean look. I guess the difference in our ages saved me.

At one of the fireside meetings I was moved to seek counsel and made a profession of faith. Bob Caddock sent his mother a penny postcard, stating that Don had received the Lord. About ten years ago Mrs. Caddock gave me the card.

When I left home after graduating from high school, church was still in my vocabulary and so was the "good" life. But God had not left me -- he was still speaking. In the Navy, those years at sea, He spoke to me often of His goodness and blessings. At times I was overwhelmed by His love. Not really knowing how to pray, I recited the Lord's Prayer each night in my bunk before sleeping. It was a comfort like "Okay, Lord, come what may, I'm at peace. But the "good" life still had

its place.

In Van Nuys, with the responsibility of family and with the tutoring of a good church, the Light began to shine more brightly. In those days airplanes were just approaching the sound barrier, and I likened my desire to believe to a plane battling the barrier. It was a struggle to penetrate, but once through, those aircraft floated so beautifully, leaving snow-white vapor trails. I think that's when I understood and believed. Sharlene and I were baptized by immersion shortly thereafter, attesting to our faith.

God's salvation is a free gift bought and paid for at great price. Paul says it is such a magnificent gift that it is indescribable. I am often ashamed at the depths to which God's Holy Spirit must go with me. Thankfully, He is a just and forgiving Father.

CONCLUSION

Solomon informs us in Ecclesiastes 1:2b that "all is vanity." He is not talking about foolish pride, but how empty, how foolish to spend a lifetime in toil, effort, and suffering outside of God, and miss the view of eternity. So, shouldn't our lives begin with the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom? Knowledge also allows us to know ourselves and to make allowance for, and have respect for others. Whenever I have a tendency to become judgmental, the message comes through that God loves the black, red, and yellow equally as much. He is the great Equalizer.

Love is important, too. I think it helps to keep our hearts tender. Some of my best years were having two little kids who really needed me; and night after night, checking their well-being as they slept, with a pat on the shoulder and a kiss on the forehead.

Work is good. Often we miss this until retirement. It keeps us busy, rewards us, can give us a sense of pride, and makes us tired so we can sleep at night. Be thankful for your labors, and all the better if it's something you really enjoy doing.

Thinking back through the years I have ~~been~~^{been} trying to identify the man for ~~which~~^{whom} I had great admiration. One name, Harry Nieman, is always present. Harry played ball with my dad. He was a catcher and a pretty good one, too. Harry wasn't grand of stature; as a matter of fact he was somewhat bowl-legged

and pigeon-toed. He was a World War I veteran, married with no children, a small businessman of just moderate success. He coached hundreds of boys through years of this life, teaching the game of baseball. He was also my Boy Scout leader. His favorite expression, and one I had never heard before or since, was "Don't get your daubber down." Now, I still don't know what a daubber is or even if that is the symbol he was using -- or if it just sounded like "daubber." My purpose here in introducing Harry is that he symbolized so many characteristics which make a man remembered. Service to others with a good demeanor may be our greatest gift to our friends and acquaintances.

One area in my life that I feel was never developed fully, and yet is so very important, is to have full command of the English language and grammar. Being able to adequately communicate is so fundamental and important. I miss the availability of a good word vocabulary.

Although I am no Solomon, these are some thoughts for consideration: Laugh often, don't be too serious; be kind; be a good listener; be committed; be honest; be able to say thank you and please; be giving; be yourself; be happy. So often old men, and women too, become grouchy. I just don't want that to happen. One last thought. Sometimes it's helpful to know when a decision is necessarily due a considerable amount of stress and effort. The phrase "this too will pass" can be applied as a test.

If you expect longevity in your life, then you face the rigors of old age. The senior years require financial planning

we are told, and they do, but I think it's also an attitude. It is not so much the mind that goes in most cases, unless something very unusual happens. It's the humiliating sagging and the dimming of the eyes and the loss of clarity of hearing and the bowing of stature and the constant contact with Medicare. If ever in one's lifetime it's necessary to have a sense of humor, this is the time. There is a saying: "Once a man, twice a boy." I hope so.

Life is good, life is precious. Be good to yourself and others. Love and protect your family. My life has certainly been good. A storybook childhood and adolescence. More than an adequate abundance of things. And most of all, a blessed family. Sharlene and I have been good for each other. We have been friends as well as in love. Our childhood together has been a common denominator that has given us joy through the years. We were blessed with two great children and now their spouses. Each of our grandchildren is very special to us. Pray for them as they face an ever-changing, hostile world. It is not the same gentle and protective environment in which I was reared.

To Matthew, Kelley, Adam, Kevin, and Kurt: Love God and believe. Honor and love your parents. Do that which is good.

Proverbs 25:11 "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in ~~pictures~~^{Pitchers} of silver."

JUST SOME RANDOM THINGS

On a one-to-ten scale, Iowa would probably rate a six for wind. It is good for the corn and especially so in the fall when those warm, gentle breezes from the southwest are nature's way of drying the crops for harvest.

This is not so much about agronomy as it is about hair. The twenties and thirties were the decades of slicked-down hair. A good part should repel any wind up to thirty miles per hour. Vitalis couldn't compete. The solution was found at our local Standard Oil gas station. For fifteen cents a purchase could be negotiated for a quart of lubricant. Of course the container had to be furnished by the user. It was odorless, clear, and the viscosity something like a good grade of molasses, just right for winds under cyclone velocity. Hair wasn't washed daily as it is now, so by the time Saturday came around seven applications had been made.

I relate this merely to recount an incident at church one Sunday. As I sat in the pew, little rivulets of oil began dripping and running down my neck. The people behind me noticed the flow and were soon snickering. I was too embarrassed and shy to do any repair work, so I simply let that perfectly good oil flow. The dry look is superior.

Walnut had a number of pool halls that also accommodated card players and beer drinkers. In addition there were five or six chronic drinkers. During the summer months this group could usually be found in the shade of a mulberry tree near

the depot. Several had located in town as section hands for the railroad and the remainder were locals who did odd jobs. As kids we sometimes harassed them, but mostly we were compatible and just played around them.

One of the fellows was middle-aged and lived with his mother on the east side of town. He was small of stature, a perfect size to have been a jockey. His condition was always evident by the way he walked. Unlike most he didn't stagger. His demeanor was like a tin soldier: eyes straight ahead; small, brisk steps; body straight and stiff. Headed for home, rounding the corner by my Dad's store he seemed to tilt more than lean.

One summer night just before the 4th of July, when all the the farmers were in town, several of us guys were sitting on the steps of the post office just visiting. It was already dark and Ray was headed home, looking straight ahead. He carried his bottle on his backside, tucked under the belt, much like a gunslinger carried his Colt 45. When he was past us a few feet, we dropped an Atta-boy at his feet. The thing exploded, Ray jumped two feet straight up, and the bottle slipped down his pant leg, breaking into pieces on the sidewalk. It was so funny because he never looked back, never broke stride, and remained intent on getting home.

Cherry trees mean various things to different creatures: There's the robin, or George Washington, or the baker, or me. Miss Korman was our economics teacher when I was a senior. She was cute and just out of college. My classes with her were shorthand, typing, and bookkeeping. Most of the fellows in

my class were pretty good-sized for seniors and of college level maturity. I am sure we intimidated her. Miss Korman roomed in a nice house owned by Geo Neff. Her second-floor room had a window that looked into a cherry tree planted ever so close to the house. When the weather turned warm in the spring and most of the lights dimmed, I would often climb up the tree and visit with my teacher. I don't recall our discussions, but it must have been for tutoring, as I did need help.

During the 1920's gypsies were still on the move throughout the countryside. My remembrances of them is seeing them coming down the hill about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile south of town as I stood in front of Dad's business. The word passed quickly and most business places simply locked their doors for protection against thievery. They seemed to be small groups, perhaps extended families or clans. Their transportation always consisted of a wagon, much like the covered wagon of western lore, pulled by a team of horses. Often a crate of chickens would be tied onto the wagon, or perhaps a milk cow. Dogs were always in abundance. The people were clothed in home-made calico blouses and skirts, usually of bright colors. The kids were always dirty and pesky -- probably part of the plan for a handout. The visits were usually short, and the four or five wagons would move on to the next town. A few years later they did trade the wagons for those big, open touring cars. By the 30's, their visits had ceased.

High school days were grand and glorious. we had so much fun and were always busy. It was a time for learning, too.

The athletic teams weren't transported by bus. Our coach hauled four of us in his Model A, and a couple of dads would bring the remainder. Coach Ossian taught by example. The best procedure for starting a car on a cold night was to wad up several sheets of newspaper, slide under the oil pan and ignite. A word of caution here: this procedure should only be practiced by owners of 1931 Model A Fords.

} Girls were important, too. I dated most of the Walnut gals and also those from surrounding towns. I was not a panderer, but more a romantic. Girls were "sugar and spice and everything nice," and to be respected. Dates were special: you know, opening doors, sliding chairs, suits and ties. A typical date consisted of \$1.00 in gas, a nice dinner for two, a movie or dance, and a pork tenderloin sandwich before returning home. Total cost -- 5.00.

One incident should be recalled. Shar and I dated occasionally, but she was most often with my friend. On a particular Saturday I had a date to take her to the Girls' Sectional Basketball Tournament in Avoca. At the same time a girl in Hancock had attracted my attention. The weather was not at all good that day, so I called Shar about four o'clock, explaining that the weather was bad and we should cancel. That problem eliminated, I called Virginia and she, of course, was overjoyed at going with me to the game. Thinking my troubles were all behind me and whistling merry tunes all the way to Hancock, I did not know what awaited. Shar and a girlfriend had decided they would go to the game. They were already seated

in the balcony bleachers when "Ging" (short for Virginia) and I arrived. Naturally, they saw us immediately. Shar was mostly subdued after four or five weeks; and now, after fifty-some years, we hardly ever talk about it. She was blonde, about 5'7", cute -- the bubbly type.

SOME THOUGHTS

Visit your dentist every six months. Ask him how he's doing.

Poetry: Who needs something you don't understand? Just so it rhymes, okay. Maybe every 100 years something like Mighty Casey at the Bat comes along.

Farmers: The premiere way to make a living. Clean air, no traffic, prosperity, and no cows to milk.

Divorce: A cruel implement. Kids two to ninety-two suffer irreparably.

Finances: Don't be greedy. Be satisfied with average returns. Anything too good to be true, probably is.

Youth: A glorious time. Muscles are expanding and the appetite is good. I sometimes look upon youth as thinking we ancients have been ~~perpetually~~ ^{Perpetually} old, and they forget that we too once blossomed at sixteen.

Responsibility: A good character-builder, and honorable, too.

Pimples: We all know how disconcerting it is to have a big, red knob on our nose just when we wanted to look our best. Consider the disadvantaged and impaired who have known "pimples" only.

Retirement: It's poetic -- health and wealth. Without either, it's not golden. By wealth, I don't mean to be mercenary: just enough to pay the bills.

Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

Proverbs 15:1: "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger."

Proverbs 16:25: "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Proverbs 18:13: "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him."

Proverbs 24:10: "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small."

Proverbs 29:18: "Where there is no vision, the people perish, but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."

Old Age: Be prepared for your forearms to look like dried prunes. Wear long sleeves.

Death: I was recently asked if I think of death. Yes, every day. It's not an obsession, but I suspect is sort of a conditioning. What was once an obscure reality is now a practical reality. In my experience most of the aged have been conditioned and are ready when the times comes.

TIMES CHANGE

Perhaps the jubilation and optimism of the 1920's was more because the war was over than a real case of prosperity. Certainly, there were the Carnegies, Mellons, Duponts, and Rockefellers, but we always have a few of them around. Almost everybody was doing the Charleston and frequenting speakeasies. Stocks were on a rampage and new millionaires were made every day on Wall Street.

Something else was happening simultaneously. In those days grocers had to order canned goods in the fall in advance for the coming year. In 1924 my dad had a basement full of such items purchased for the next year's inventory. A few months later prices fell precipitously and the loss was staggering. Most people think of the Depression as an event beginning with the crash of Wall Street in 1929 and the closure of banks in 1931-32. It's likely the tidal wave was gathering momentum as early as 1925.

Somehow we survived. Perhaps it was the character of the citizens. Everyone being in the same straits helped level the load. There was still hope. The songs were upbeat. One song had the words "Potatoes are cheaper, tomatoes are cheaper; now's the time to fall in love," etc. Another, "No more money in the bank; no more babies left to spank; what to do about it? Just turn off the lights and go to sleep."

But the times were not easy. All towns opened up jailhouses and allowed transients a place to sleep overnight. City halls

were a place to obtain "chits" for a restaurant meal. Bakers usually handed out old pastries. Money was a scarce commodity.

Walnut felt the impact in 1932, when all three banks shut down. Only one would ever open up again. Depositors lost something like ninety percent, and for a short period script was the medium of exchange. Dad took butter and eggs from farmers in exchange for groceries. The ladies made butter and it was brought in in slabs, weighed, and credited to the farmer's charge account. A slab might weigh ten pounds and be worth eight cents a pound to the farmer. Dad in turn sold it for ten cents a pound. As you can imagine, some was very good, sweet butter. Some was rancid and sour. The bad went out the back into the garbage. It was not prudent to offend a customer by refusing to accept the butter. Eggs were generally in twelve-dozen cases. The price allowed the farmer was six cents a dozen, and the eggs were sold for seven ^{OR} ~~five~~ eight cents a dozen. The loss in eggs was not so great as in butter. It was my job to candle the eggs for any that might be rotten.

While in high school I worked for Dad in the chicken hatchery. It was enjoyable. We hatched several thousand, ~~and~~ a couple of times each week through the season, March through May. I raised chickens at home, having converted the cob shed into an incubator room. When the birds were large enough to determine sex, I sold the pullets as layers to farmers. The others were fed to about 2½ pounds, at which time they were sold to restaurants. That was fun. I can recall sitting in the warmth and glow of the incubator and listening to the chicks

"peep" as I anticipated my profits.

Roosevelt is the man credited with resolving the Depression, and no doubt he was the man for the job, but the period was far from being over when World War II came along. It was really the full employment of the war that stimulated the economy and put people back to work.

In 1939, just two miles south of Walnut, an eighty-acre farm, nice house, corn crib, barn, and hog house sold for \$8,000. Anticipating a shortage of automobiles for sale during the war, Shar's dad bought a 160-acre farm, house, and full set of buildings for \$18,000. When the estate was settled in 1974, the farm sold for \$105,000. I have always regretted that Shar and I did not make an offer to Jack to buy out his half.

My heart is in Iowa land.

