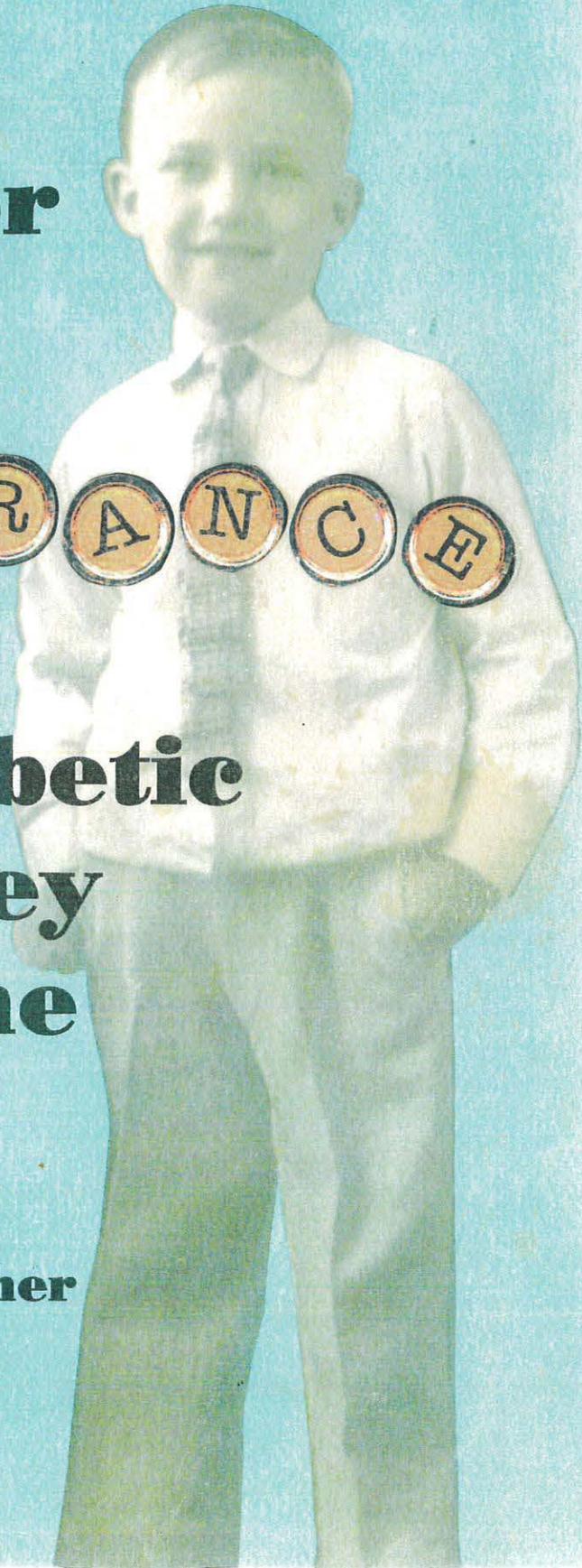


R is for

R E M E M B R A N C E

**An Alphabetic
Journey
In Time**

By Don Fischer



Preface

Life is a gift. My blessings are many. Kindness and goodness have become my two favorite words; both in practice and in receiving. My own mother, my guarding angel of the first twelve years of my life, was the seed source of such kingly attributes.

For 55 years I shared the best of times with my beloved Sharlene. Our early years were no less happy, being playmates and having memories of our school days together. Kathy and Scott brought us "peace like a river" at a time when many young people became the scourge of their parents. Debbie came next into our circle, to be followed by Keith, and then came our grandchildren: Matthew, Kelley, Adam, Kevin, and Kurt. It is to Debbie that I must give acknowledgment for compiling the first 20 years, as told by some of the more noteworthy events. Debbie and I had lots of fun putting this together.

My heart is in Iowa land.

Donald Leneigh Fischer
2009

A

is for **autumn, apples, and alphabet**

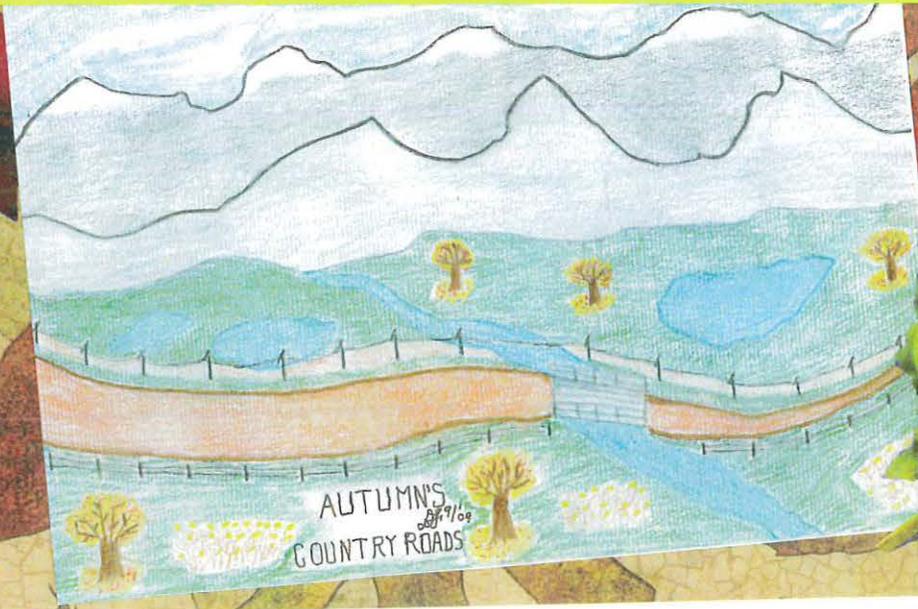
Apples come to my mind . . . and I am reminded of Mr. LaFrantz. He was our school custodian. He held that position for many years, including all twelve years of my presence there. He was not a man of means but had a huge heart. Every Christmas on the evening before the last day before our break, Rudy would place a big, red, polished Delicious apple and a large navel orange on every desk, grades 1 through 12. Such actions win hearts and embolden memories.

My first grade teacher's name was Miss Roberta Robinson. 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 . . . the system served us well.

**A TEACHER AFFECTS ETERNITY,
SHE CAN NEVER KNOW WHERE
HER INFLUENCE STOPS.**
HENRY BROOKS
ADAMS



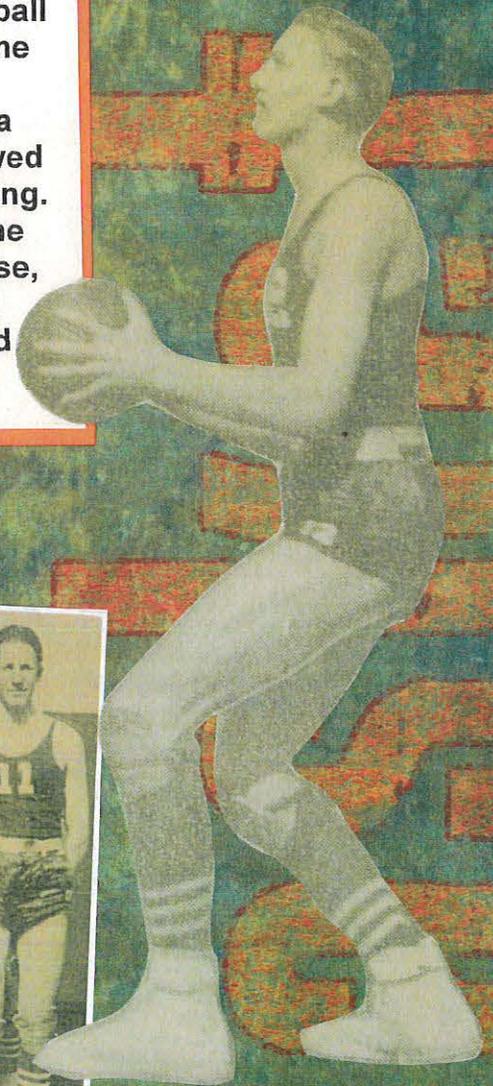
Beauty is . . . an autumn day clothed in fading sunlight . . .
Autumn days were usually mellow in Iowa. Perhaps the best season. October is the time of year in Iowa when watermelon ripen. Most farmers planted them in the middle of corn fields, so they could not be seen. It always amazes me how hard it 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.



B is for baseball and basketball

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 possessing 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. It's when a person is really young that those magnificent dreams are possible, and you can picture yourself as another Babe Ruth . . .

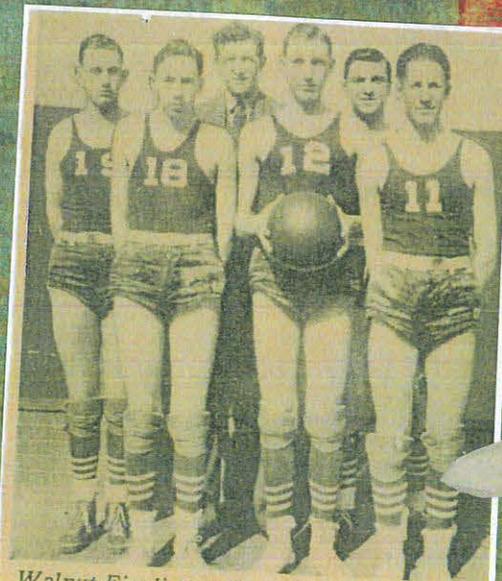
Dad and his brother played on the Walnut baseball team. The field had a covered grandstand behind home plate and a concession stand underneath, to the rear. We boys would shag foul balls and be rewarded with a cold drink at the end of the day. Walt and I were allowed to sit in the third base dugout, which was pretty exciting. 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.



Fisher, Caddock Star In Walnut's Lineup

WALNUT, IA. — With Don Fisher averaging better than 15 points per game, Walnut High soared to the top flight in the Southwest Iowa conference recently.

Fisher, six-foot senior forward, and Bob Caddock, 6 foot, 1 inch guard, are the outstanding performers of the club.



Walnut Finalists to Lose Entire First Team

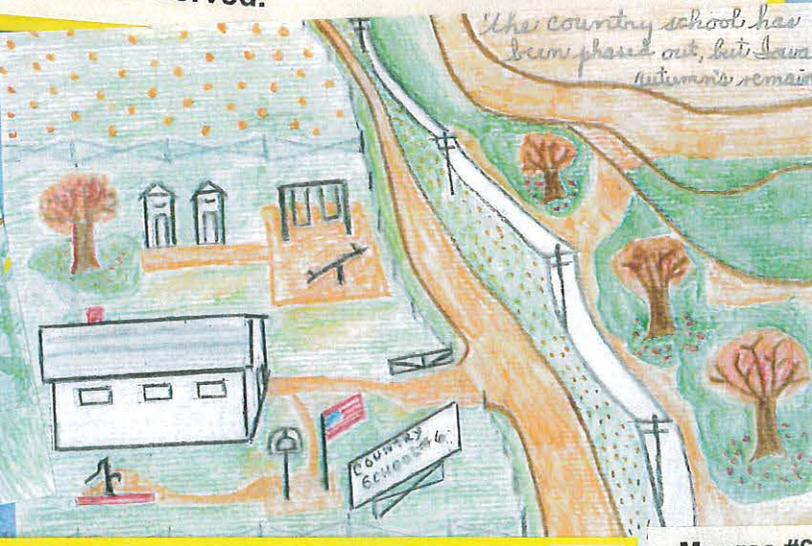
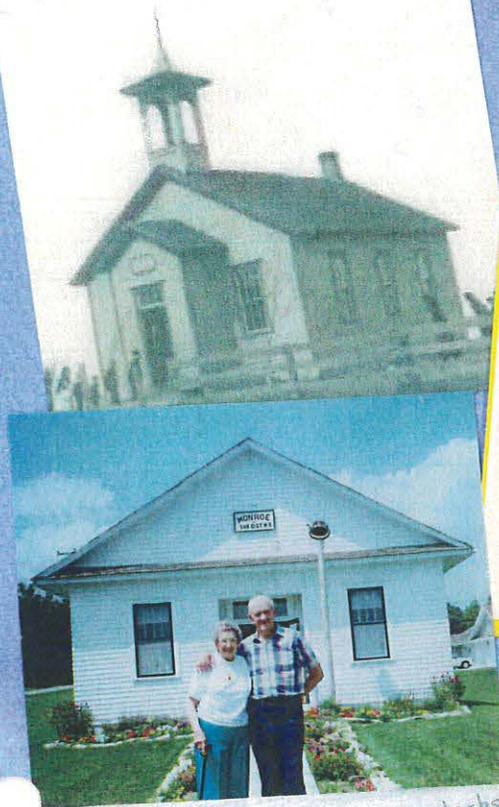
Walnut battled to the finals in the Oakland sectional with Avoca this year, but what the situation will be next season is a problem. Walnut finished second in the Southwest Iowa league in 1937 and 1935. Every member of the first team will graduate this

year. The team, left to right, back row — Blaine Longnecker, Coach John Ossian, Bob Caddock; front row — Bob Bowman, Don Fischer, John Paulsen — World-Herald Sports Service Photo.

C is for corn and country schools

School Days! Days of magic to be sure. New friends; new horizons. The ABCs of education were "reading," "riting," and "rithmatic."

Along with statehood in 1846 came increased population. The land was quickly settled and large families ensued, demanding education for their children. The one-room, grades one-through-eight country school was born. Every two miles an acre of land was forfeited for a school structure. Teachers were high school graduates from nearby towns, often taking room and board with a family served. To the front of the school was a long bench. The teacher would call for the appropriate grade, if any, to come forward and be seated for a period of instruction. When the country kids came to town for their high schooling, they seemed to do well. Most of my aunts and uncles attended country school, if at all, and many of my cousins. The school attended was Monroe #6. The era ended with WWII. We had been well served.



Monroe #6

I have fond memories of walking a country road on a warm fall day when the shadows are long and the air is hardly moving. The silence was broken only by the lonely voice of a farmer, hidden by the golden-brown stalks, asking his team to move ahead a few steps. The command was usually, "Hi,ya." Accompanying the "Hi ya," was the sound of picked ears being thrown, without looking up, against the bangboard provided on the far side of the wagon. The bangboard, several feet higher than the normal wagon side boards, allowed the picker to toss each ear without looking, knowing it would be deflected and rest in the box. Well, labor has been reduced by machines, production increased; but the joy of hearing the sounds of a successful season echoing across the silent fields has gone. I love the farmer/horse relationship. The discipline and harmony. And, oh yes – the last of the blooming wild roses in the crevice of a ditch smiled, too.



D

is for Dad and Des Moines

The way my dad's parents addressed him was amusing to me. His name was August, but they added several syllables, making it "Ouuuhgust." He was the ninth of eleven children, born on November 29, 1897, on the Fischer farm. 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. My folks were set to move to one of Grandpa's farms in the spring after their marriage in 1920, but before this happened, Granddad decided (that is how things were done then) that two of his sons should be merchants. So, very quickly, Dad and Uncle Ed were in the grocery business. Dad remained in the grocery business until 1936, when he remarried and made a complete change. 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.

I remember that, on a May evening in 1936, he sat me down on our front porch and told me of plans to be married. He had been seeing Caroline, a widowed neighbor. He wanted my approval and blessing. His question was, "Do you think we can make it?" That's consideration. Dad never complained.

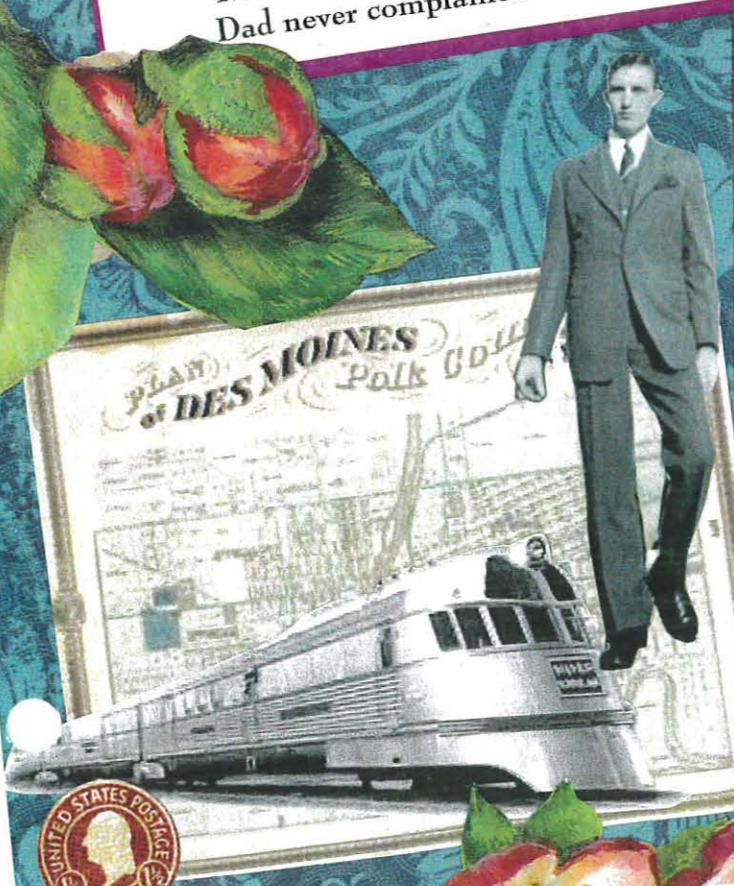


August Fischer
November 29, 1897 - December 4, 1975



A year or so after graduation I began living in Des Moines for the next year-and-a-half. While there I made friends, and in a short time Don, Ted, and I shared an apartment, which was located in downtown Des Moines. It was roomy and had a basement entrance. The building above was commercial. The three of us were over six feet tall, young, and thought we made an impressive trio while walking the streets.

At that time Sharlene was enrolled at Iowa U. We had dated in high school, were friends, and the friendship was growing with each encounter. On extended breaks, Shar would go home for a few days by train on the Rock Island Zephyr. My heart had become a compass for her, and would lead me to the railroad depot as the train would pass through at a little past midnight on her return to Iowa City. Rain or snow or sleet, I would wait on the landing for the train to make a stop. It was only for a few minutes, and I would race the length of the train until I found her beautiful face pressed against the sooty window. Soot and glass are no barrier for young hearts ablaze. I know of nothing as pure, exhilarating, or as effervescent.



E is for Eggs and Ednah

In my teens I had considerable experience with both the chicken and the egg. Even so, the age-old problem of which came first was never revealed to me. When in the grocery business, my dad accepted eggs on a barter exchange for groceries. The eggs were delivered into my hands in 15-dozen or 30-dozen crates on a weekly basis, determined by the size of the farmer's flock. It was my duty to candle* those eggs to make certain that they were fresh and not fertilized. In the hatchery only select farmers were chosen as a source for eggs and were paid a premium. The flocks chosen had been tested for disease and inoculated. A certain number of roosters were required for so many hens. In this situation I candled to make sure the eggs were fertilized. My knowledge and worth were now beginning to pay me dividends.

Fresh EGGS
FOR SALE

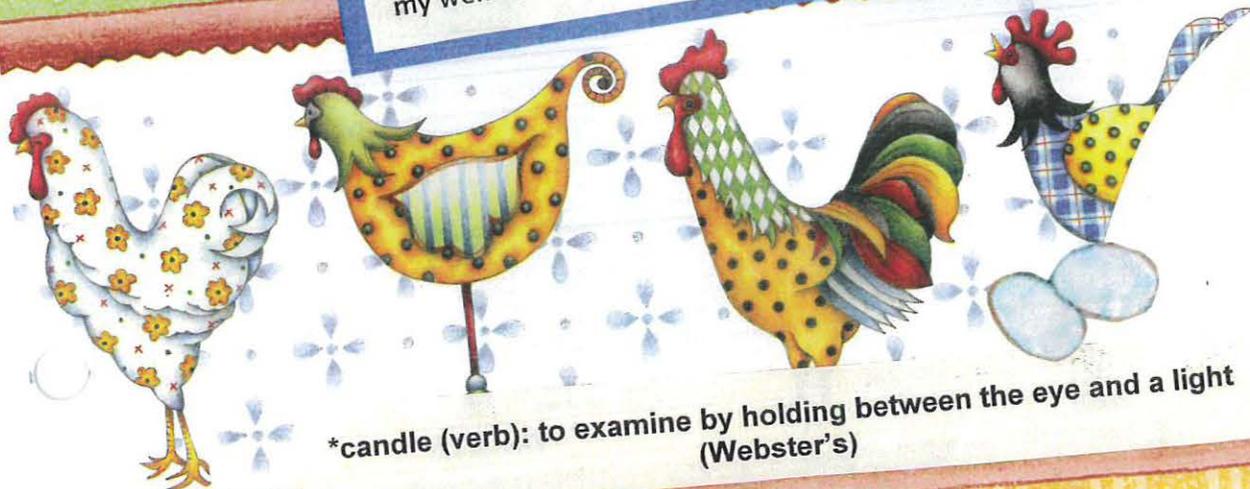


HEN

Aunt Ednah was always good to me. She was my mom's only sister, and a few years younger than my mother. I should imagine that the reason for her closeness to me was not that I was the firstborn of nephews and nieces; but more probably, because I was her only sister's only child. Aunt Ednah taught country school for several years. I admired her desire for knowledge. She had a good business head. She, of all my aunts and uncles, was sure to be in touch and inquiring of my welfare. Every child needs to know that someone cares.



Aunt Ednah and Dorothy
1921



*candle (verb): to examine by holding between the eye and a light (Webster's)

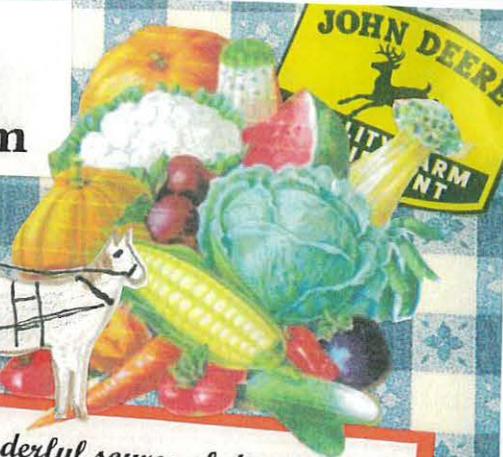
F

is for family and farm

Old Mc Donald had a farm



PEAS



The family farm... a wonderful source of discipline and the work ethic, where almost everything was produced, fresh and nutritious.

Whether literate or not, the farmer then, more so than today, had to be a jack-of-all trades, knowledgeable in everything from animal husbandry to agronomy, etc. The days were long and hard. No modern conveniences. The Monday morning washing alone was a major, major chore, exacerbated by large families requiring clean clothes. Just getting clothes dry was confounding on many days. Then there were the heavy irons and the need for even heat to smooth the wrinkles. There were no days off.

CORN

SQUASH

TOMATOES



ONIONS

BEANS

The dictionary defines "family" as parents and their children. That is only the beginning. Family is so much more: it is aunts and uncles; it is grandparents and cousins. It is love and nurture; security and understanding. It is a home occupied by loving people.

On Sundays in Walnut, we would visit relatives. Generally several aunts and uncles and kids would come together about 2:00 p.m. The gatherings were pretty much the same no matter where we happened to be. Often times in the summer the men would churn a couple of 5-gallon containers of ice cream. About five o'clock, the men who were farmers would get in their cars and head home to do chores (milking, gathering eggs, feeding the animals) and return two hours later for a scrumptious supper prepared by the lady folk over a hot kitchen stove. Those were meat and potato days. It was either roast pork, beef, or fried chicken. I really have no explanation as to why, but we almost always had canned white cherries for dessert. Delicious meals. Can you imagine the extent of dishes required to feed 10, 12, or more people? Hot water having to be heated on that same hot stove. Gobs of dishes were washed in much the same water in one dish pan. Well, that is just one aspect of life then. They were happy people.

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. It was generally after midnight before the gathering broke up. The men played cards all evening. The women visited, but, 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.

When it came time to go home, water was heated in big pans and poured back into the car radiator. I particularly remember how snugly it was between my parents on the ride home, with the headlights shining so brightly on the snow, and the sound of the side-curtains flapping away.

G

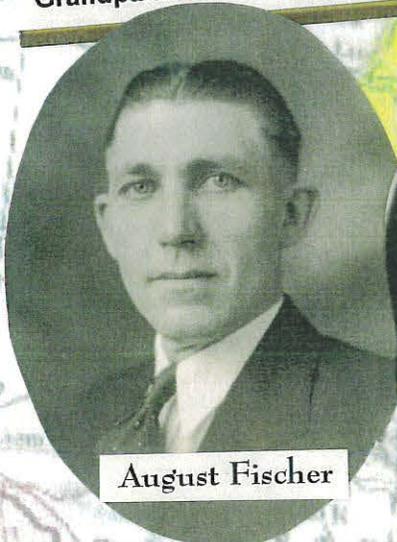
is for Grandparents



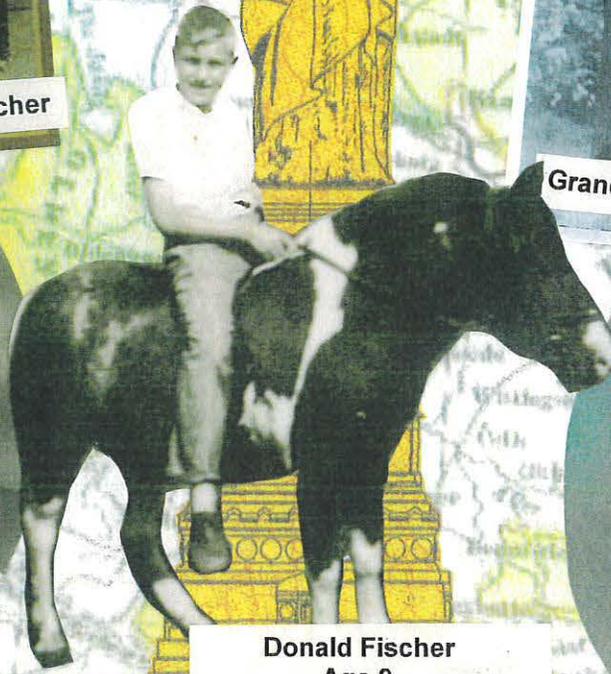
Grandpa and Grandma Fischer



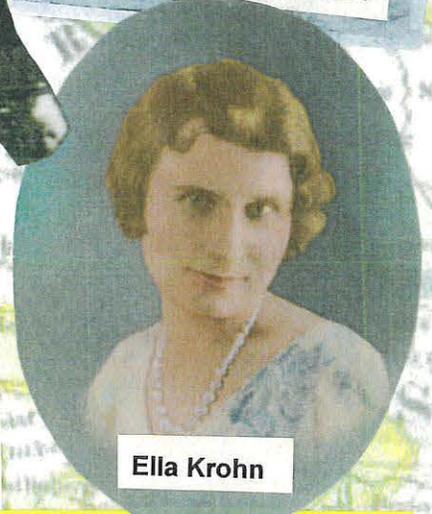
Grandpa and Grandma Krohn



August Fischer



Donald Fischer
Age 9
At Uncle Bill Krohn's farm



Ella Krohn

My paternal grandmother, Christina Maria Henrietta Sornsen, was born in 1861 and came to America in 1879 at the age of 17, immigrating with her entire family from Angela in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. My paternal grandfather, Georg Ludwig Wilhelm Fischer, was born in Guttenburg, Iowa in 1856, and settled on a farm near Walnut at the age of 15. Grandpa and Grandma Fischer were married in 1880 and became the parents of eleven children. August was their ninth child, born on November 29, 1897.

My maternal grandmother, Catherine Margaret Hinz, was born in 1881, in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. My maternal grandfather, Herman Julius Krohn, was born in 1871, in Gerdershorf-Holstein, Germany. Grandpa and Grandma Krohn were married in 1898 and had four children. Ella, their second child, was born on May 6, 1900.

My maternal Great-Grandfather Hinz arrived in Avoca, Iowa in 1882. He was a cobbler by trade and had served in the Prussian Army in that capacity. He escaped from the army and immigrated to America, leaving behind his wife and two small children. On his arrival in Avoca, he had lived in a cabin in Meyer's Grove, and made wooden shoes, which he sold in Avoca and Walnut. I often played in Meyer's Grove as a child, not knowing what tale the past held – that his source of wood for the shoes came from that grove. Eventually, he began making leather shoes. Approximately three years after his arrival, he had saved enough money to send for his family.

I looked in awe at my grandparents, knowing from where they had come and what they had accomplished. The awe was not from fame and fortune, but that they had survived.

December
25
Christmas
Day

H

is for holidays and hitchhiking

I think it would be fair to say that holidays years ago had a significantly different connotation than they do today. May I share with you some memories of former celebrations?

New Year's Day was a mellow day, sitting in a cozy living room around the radio with snow heavy on the ground outside, listening to a commentary of the Rose Parade, and later, the bowl game. In those days, California seemed as far away and mysterious as Japan -- a good broadcaster could describe the floats and warm sunshine and steer one's mind into a very exotic place. Dinner was the inevitable goose.

The Fourth of July 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.

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. 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 entitled the receiver to a free duck or goose. This could only happen in a small town.

Christmas Eve was celebrated in Avoca at Grandma Johnson's, with my grandparents, my Aunt Ednah, my Uncle Bill and his wife and two boys, and the three of us. 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, and a drape had been placed over the door. 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. The next day we went to Grandpa Fischer's. It was the biggest event of the year. All fifty of us were there, and we arrived early and stayed late. It was a large home with a basement, first and second stories, and a full attic with stairs leading to it. We kids worked it over at every level. What patience my grandparents had. I don't recall a tree, and there was no gift exchange at the gathering.

It was the summer of 1938. It was a good summer, full of new experiences and adventure. I had just graduated from high and was 17 years old. It was time to move on and break the ties that had bound me to Walnut and my childhood years. I checked the want ads in The Omaha World Herald and found a man who would be driving to California and wanted three passengers to share the expenses. The cost per passenger was \$15. Three days later I was in Glendora, California with my friend George (Turtle). After visiting Turtle and other friends for awhile, Walnut called me home, and I answered the call. I sent my clothes home and kept \$25 for emergencies, in case my plan of hitchhiking and/or catching a ride on eastbound freight trains should fail. Most of the time I rode in a vacant freight car, as hitchhiking was very slow. There were hundreds of men on the move, and I selected one who looked reliable and got his permission to "ride on his coattails", for he was an experienced traveler. And so the miles clicked and clacked by without mishap. Back in Omaha, I hitchhiked the remainder of the miles home. My childhood was coming to a close.

Don Fischer
Graduation picture



I is for icebox and ice house

The back porch housed our icebox. "Box" is an apt description. I judge the dimensions to be something like 16" x 30" x 5'. The walls were 3" thick, with two compartments and two separate doors. All the iceboxes 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 system operational. The ice man made his rounds twice a week. He had a horse-drawn wagon (really!), and to receive ice you simply put the ice sign in the front window. 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 we always followed the ice wagon to get a chip as the delivery man cut out a small block from the larger block.



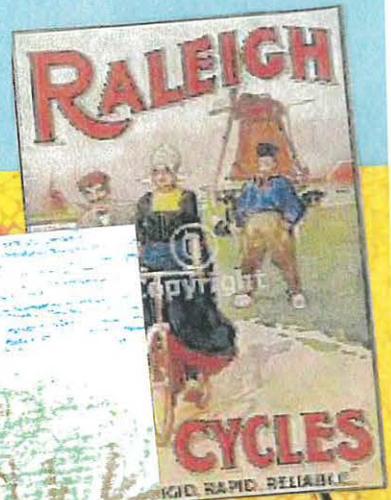
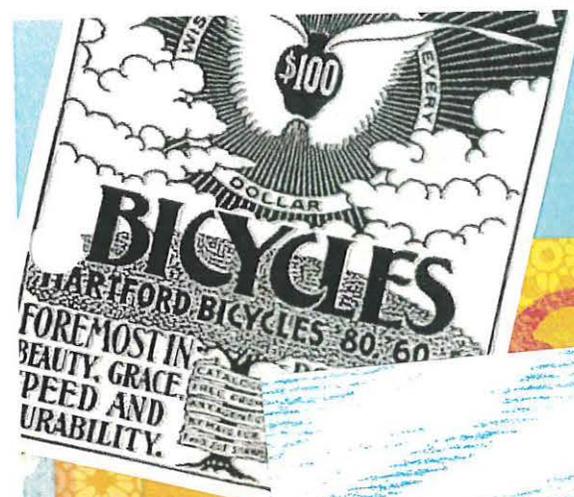
Don Fischer, age 8

PLAYTIMES PAST

Harry Nieman's icehouse was close to the tracks. Harry was also our baseball coach, and we would often play catch across the tracks, using the icehouse as a backstop. After becoming really hot from a workout, we would crawl under the sides for a refreshing pause - bare naked, of course. Sam Cade worked for Harry, and usually, after we freshened 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.



J is for jig

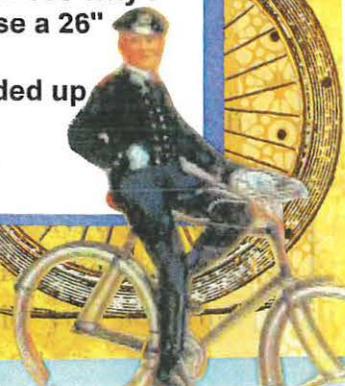


As I reflect back, my thoughts become centered on my blue Raleigh bicycle. The total cost at that time, including basket, could not have been more than \$18, which was a considerable amount in those days. More than likely it was a one-sided partnership, with my dad being the senior partner.

I had a job at that time for the sole purpose of raising money for the bicycle, albeit a part-time job, further delineated by pieces produced, which was two cents per item. My workshop was a shed on the alley, infested by huge and numerous rats. I had at hand many bundles of shook that were parts of 30-dozen egg crates. The shook consisted of two basic parts for the completed product: three pieces were needed for the sides and one bottom. And three more substantial pieces for two ends and a center divider. Before nailing together, the three heavier pieces were placed in a spring-loaded framework at just the correct dimensions to receive the two sides and one bottom. That is a "jig." The number of nails for each function had been set out. It was all automatic, requiring no real burden to the brain, which suited me fine. Without interruptions, I could nail, on average, five crates an hour, which nets out at 10 cents for each hour worked. The bicycle cost \$18, or 180 hours of time – 4 ½ weeks. My summer vacations were roughly 12 weeks long, with 4 ½ weeks taken out for crates. With other things to do I could not possibly devote more time to that confining kind of work, so now you see why I conclude that my dad was instrumental in raising the funds needed to purchase a 26" blue Raleigh bicycle with basket.

And the jig: it took all the mental activity out of the project, which speeded up production.

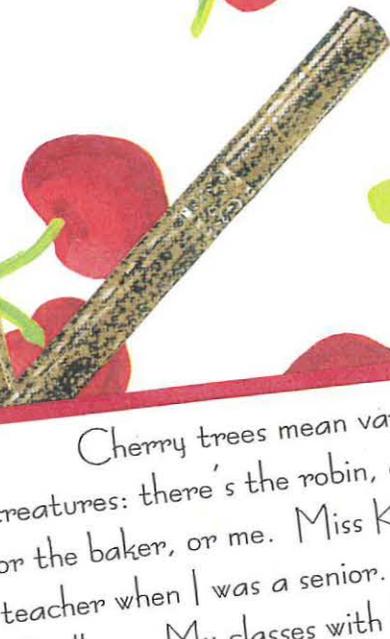
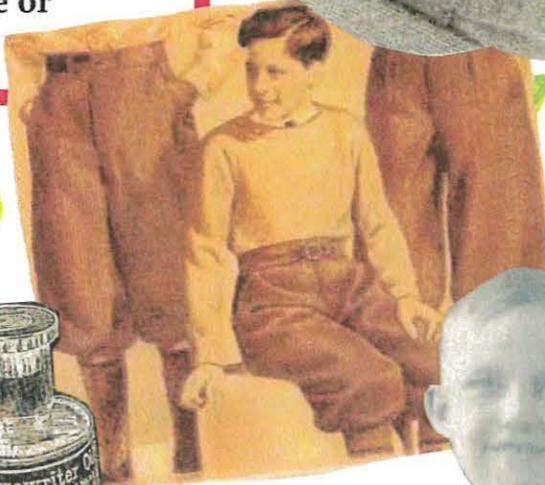
The "jig" is natural for some, mainly the Irish, and more fun, I presume.



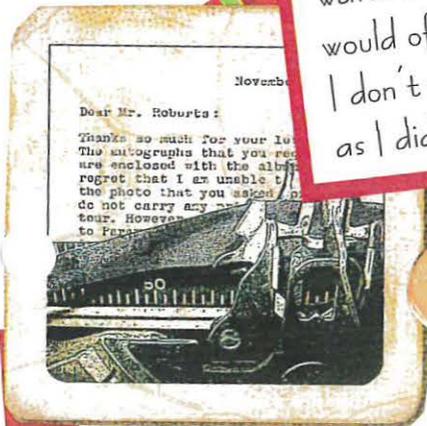
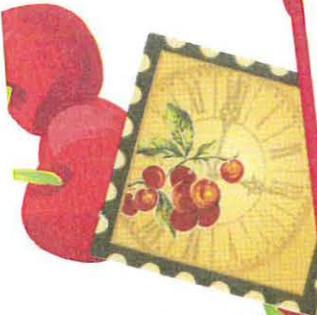
K

is for knickers and Miss Kooremon

I liked knickers. They were sporty and the hosiery, being knee-length, was really colorful in plaids and all sorts of color combinations. To be complete the outfit required black/white or brown/white oxfords, and a snazzy cap.



Cherry trees mean various things to different creatures: there's the robin, or George Washington, or the baker, or me. Miss Kooremon 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 Kooremon 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 been for tutoring, as I did need help.



C H E R R Y

Don Fischer
in his spiffy long pants!





L

is for **loft** and **long-johns**

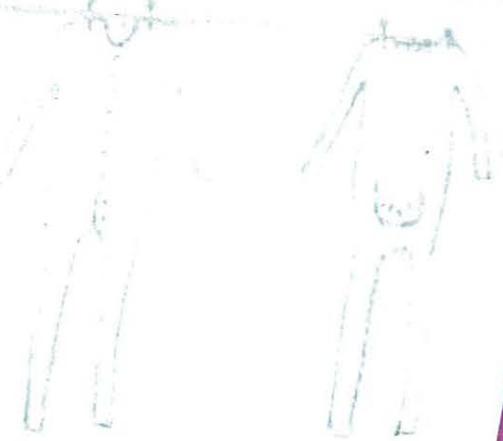
The words "loft" and "mow" are almost interchangeable, in that each is under a sloping roof and provides storage. Those large, stately, even magnificent barns, found on all Iowa farms many years ago, have outlived their purpose and are being destroyed.

The hay mow was a great place to play in the winter when days were cold or during a rainstorm. The mows were full of hay or straw. It was fun to seek out the highest rafter in the mow and jump into the soft cushion below. My grandfather's barn in town had a loft, which he used for storage. One of the most memorable items was a one-horse sleigh. The winter of 1936 was very cold and snowy. He got the sleigh down for me, and with the use of his sleigh bells and floor-length fur coat and hat, and gauntlet gloves, I was well-equipped to go merrily across the deep snow. The local butcher, Mr. Moritz, provided one of his horses.

Probably the most unscrupulous use of a loft was in the clubhouse my three friends and I devoted to the storage of corn silk that we had collected in gunny sacks during the fall months. It was a neat clubhouse. We had several cots permanently in place and a wood stove large enough to keep us comfortable and for parching corn. The corn silk provided us with just the right material for rolling in newspaper and smoking on the long winter nights, and where we often spent our Friday nights.



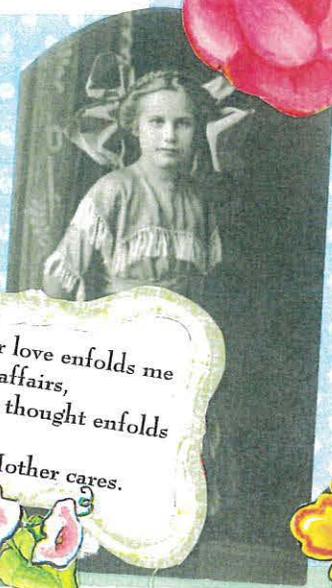
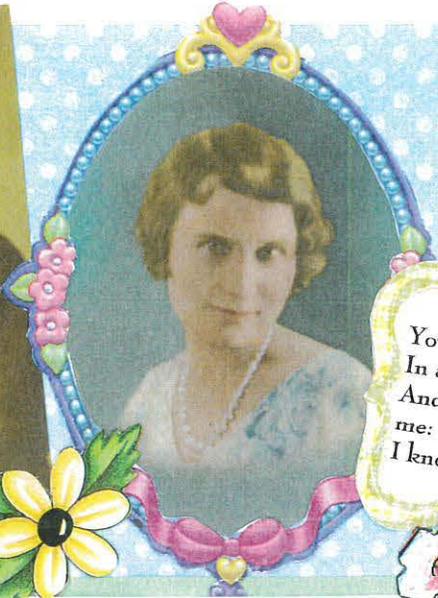
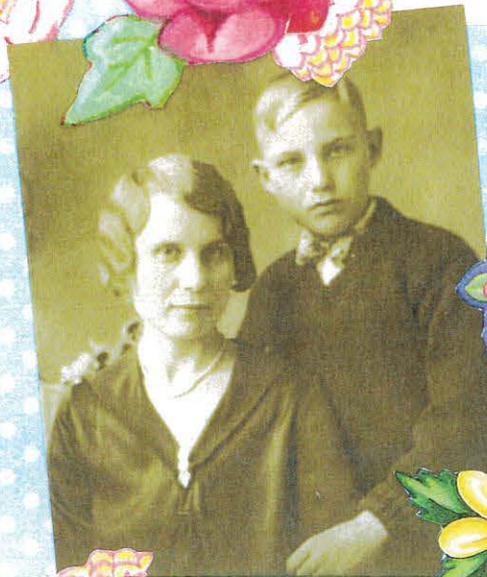
The fragrances ...
the animals ...
jumping from the rafters into soft straw in the mow ...
an era has gone.



Taking a bath was a chore. Fortunately, it only occurred once weekly, usually on Saturday. 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. Of course, a bath meant clean underwear, which then 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 make the matter worse, knickers were in style for young boys, and I didn't get a pair of long pants until I was ten years old.

M

is for Mother and Model T



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

My mother was born Ella Marie Krohn on May 6, 1900. She graduated from Avoca High School, probably at age 18, and may have taught country school for a year or two before marrying my dad. She and my Dad were married in January of 1920. I know that her family lived on a farm. My dad spoke often of visiting, and how he loved my grandmother's apple pie.

In my mind's eye, she was special. She had many friends, was nice-looking, and dressed the part of a young woman in the 20s. I say this from hearsay. My dad was totally devoted to her. Two women have told me that my mother was their Sunday School teacher when they were girls, and that they loved her and would try to be the one seated beside her. My personal feeling is that she was sweet, kind, intelligent, compassionate, and loving. When my feelings were hurt, she would gather me in her arms and sit with me in the big black leather chair, soothing the hurt.

After I was born in February 1921, my mother was advised against having any more pregnancies. In time, the decision was made to have a second child, and at the end of the second trimester, Dr. Moore prescribed full bed rest. That was November, 1933. On Wednesday night, February 14, 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 hospital in Council Bluffs, and my aunt and cousin stayed to drive me in later that night. My mother died the next morning. I remember how peaceful and pretty and young she looked in the hospital bed.

Her body was brought home, and furniture in the guest bedroom was removed and it became the viewing room. We the bereaved sat by to receive visitors, and the continuous flow of friends and relatives prompted perpetual tears. The funeral was on Sunday, February 18. The baby boy was nestled in her arm.

I love her today more than ever. She somehow knew that her time was short, and asked me to memorize a poem. Many times those words have appeared on the scope of my memory at just the right moment. (The poem appears above.)

I remember that, while in high school, two friends and I purchased a 1919 Model T Ford from old Doc Vaughn, who was our town marshall for as far back as I can remember. He served minus a billy club, a sidearm, or handcuffs. The three of us chipped in \$5 each and for \$15 had this little beauty for ourselves. That Model T held up for exactly three weeks. It quit on us about a block north of the schoolhouse on the west side of Main Street, where we left it. To this day, I do not know what happened to the remains.



N

is for notions

Visual aid

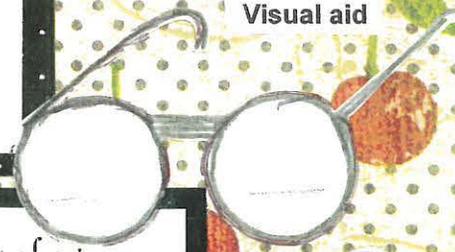
My dad had a grocery store until I was about 14 years of age. I have many memories of those days. The building that housed the business was owned by Dad, but had not always been a mercantile establishment. In previous years it had been a saloon.

During the 20's, the merchandise included more than groceries. Also offered were bolts of fabric such as gingham, woolens, silk, sheeting, muslin, and cheesecloth. There was also a line of men and women's hosiery, overalls, and tobacco. I was intrigued by the pins, needles, dress patterns, thimbles, hooks, and darning hoops that made up the array of notions. It was all interesting to me, and I became aware of many things that no longer have as much meaning in today's culture and jargon. I learned how and which fabrics could be torn, and which needed to be cut. I learned about different fabrics, such as shantung.

The floor in that old building was wooden, and one of my loves was to sweep the entire length of the building with a straw broom. On that type of wooden floor it was first necessary to sprinkle sawdust mixed with oil on the floor to pick up the dust. After this, I would start at the front and sweep all the way to the back. It was a job which needed attention several times a week.

The store front had large plate glass windows with display decks inside. Keeping the windows clean was also my assignment. On the outside surface I used a long-handled brush and a squeegee; inside, to avoid excessive water, I dry-washed the glass using Bon Ami, which required considerable labor.

Thinking back, my dad allowed me a lot of freedom and instilled confidence with his hands-off leadership. I would so much like to talk with him now and give him a hug. He was a man's man in every sense, but without the "good-old-boy" sense of superiority. How lucky can a kid be?



Safety pin



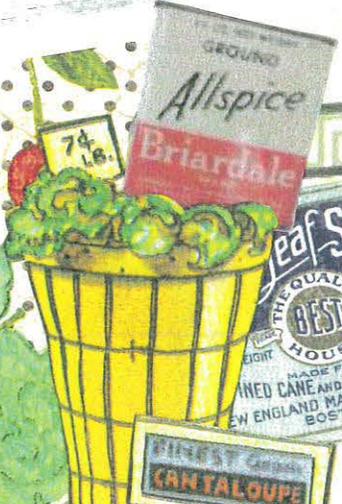
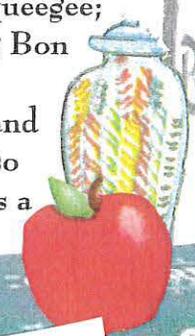
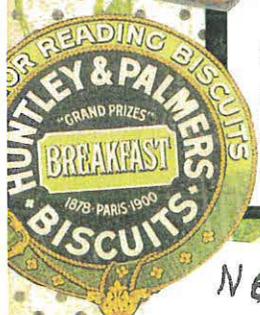
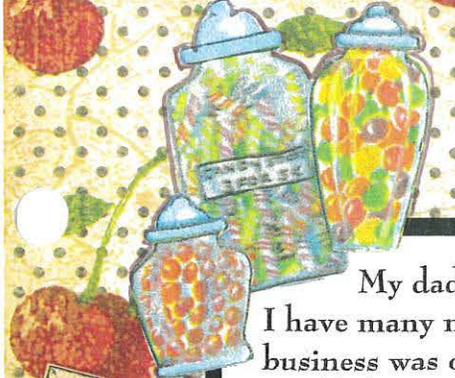
Spool of thread

Needle

Crocheting needle

Thread

Thimble





is for **Once Upon A Time** .

Yes, it was "Once upon a time" so many, many years ago. . .

It was near the 4th of July, and Walnut would have a parade and circus. Our entourage was comprised of 10 and 11 year-old patriots. We began by assembling all the little red wagons in the community. These wagons would be pulled by members of our group. The wagons would have wooden boxes as cages to accommodate dogs, cats, and some wild species we had trapped for the occasion.

One such creature was the "grinny," a small ground squirrel. The grinny was striped gray and black, and passed easily for a zebra or tiger. Each cage was labeled appropriately as to the genus.

Hand bills had been placed in stores announcing the event and permission was granted by the mayor for the parade to proceed from lower Main Street to the school grounds. The parade went well; and after circling our wagons and allowing a time for the spectators to view the animals, it was our intent to have a program appropriate for the 4th of July.

Early in the spring I had begun trumpet lessons from a senior in high school who was an excellent trumpeter. I had not progressed well, but was full of confidence when the program director asked for musical leadership. The program called for the assembled crowd to rise and sing "America," under my musical direction. Two notes came forth, and snickering and laughter broke the silence.

In the crowd was Mrs. Sabina Burke, a hardened republican and a patriot of the old school. Portly, a dowager of the first degree. Mrs. Sabina Burke, the wife of Billie Burke, loved the flag and America, the land of the free and home of the brave. Mrs. Sabina Burke came forward, called the assembly to order, and lustily led in the singing of "America."

Ordinarily, the show must go on. In this case, the moment had been lost. Long live the the likes of Mrs. Sabina Burke and Billie, her husband and purveyor of penny candies.

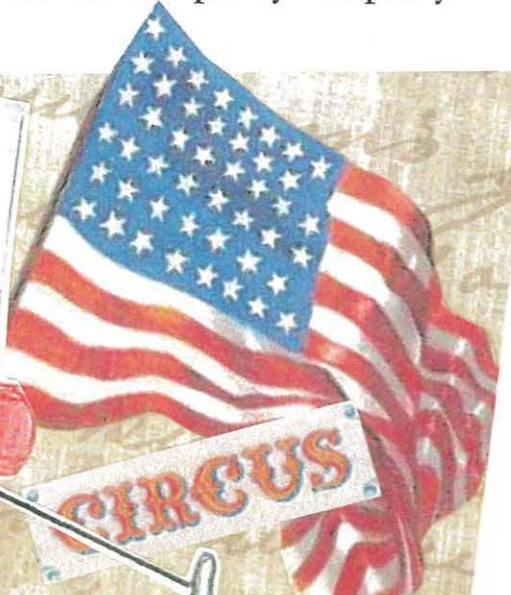


"Three cheers
for the
Red,
White and
Blue!"



Asian Tiger Beware

CIRCUS



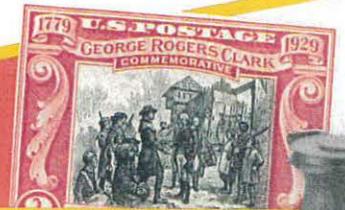
P

is for potbelly stove, privy, and phone



1927 EDITION OF The SEARS, ROEBUCK Catalogue

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.



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-round 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.



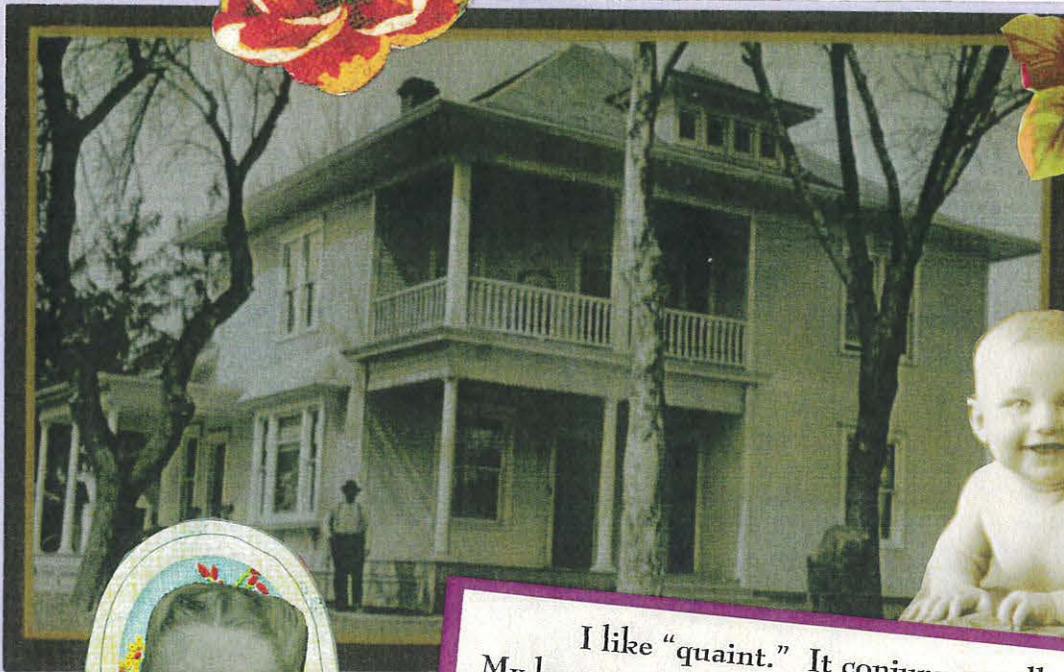
Our telephone was in the kitchen, attached to the wall. The number was Green 141 (That's 79 years ago). By picking up the earpiece, the response was "Number, please." Day or night, the operator knew you and you knew the operator. The operator could complete a call, give the time of day, sound the fire alarm, locate the doctor, or just visit for a moment or two. Absolutely no buttons to push. Now that's service.



Don Fischer, age 3

Q

is for quaint and quarter



Don Fischer in 1921



Christina Fischer



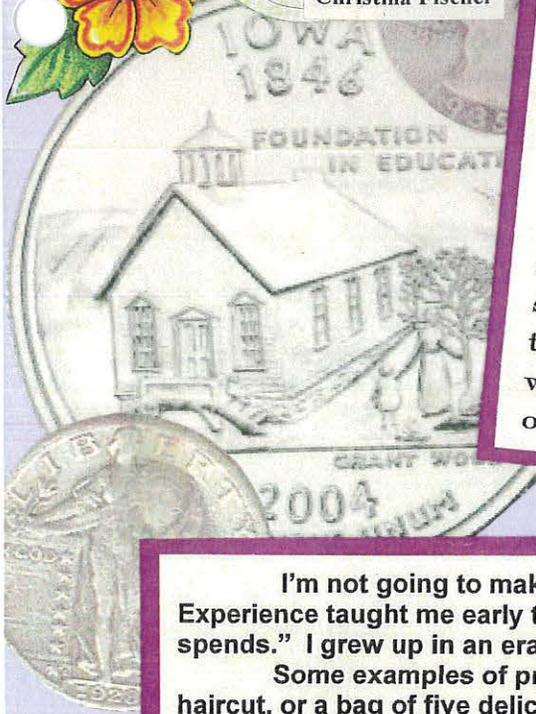
I like "quaint." It conjures up all sorts of memories. My hometown was "quaint." I think of my grandmother who lived up the street from our "quaint" little home. She was born in Angela, in Schleswig Holstein, Germany. At the age of 17 she left Germany with her parents and settled in Walnut in 1879. Grandma was "quaint." A more loving person one could never have known. She was the mother of eleven children, losing one at a young age. Her manner of dress was "quaint." Always neat and clean and the same style, which had become "quaint" by the 20s and 30s. Her hair was "quaint" also, in that it was parted in the middle and drawn tightly back into a bun. Her fingers were always busy, even at day's end, when the evenings were mostly silent and long. She would sit in her own chair, and in her lap she would form a type of basket out of her ankle-length dress and tend to her darning, which today is "quaint." So now you know why I like "quaint." "Quaint" is loving, endearing, and something or someone to be cherished.

Darning egg
Early 20th century

I'm not going to make you uncomfortable or preach my philosophy about money. Experience taught me early that, "It is not so much what one makes, but rather how much one spends." I grew up in an era when nickels, dimes, and quarters had value. And yes, pennies too.

Some examples of prices from the height of the Great Depression: a quarter would buy a haircut, or a bag of five delicious hamburgers, or a first-run movie admitting one child and one adult. Two quarters would secure a man's labor for an hour or buy a man's denim work shirt. I will never forget one Sunday when I was with several of my cousins, asking Dad for 25 cents for a movie and refreshments. I got the quarter, but accompanying the handout was the question, "Do you think I'm made of money?"

These are a few prices from an advertisement in my hometown newspaper for groceries, probably in 1933. A quart of milk, 6 cents; bread, five cents, three bars of soap, 17 cents; two large packages of Kellogg's Wheat Flakes, 15 cents; lettuce, six cents; four lbs. of rice, 19 cents; coffee 23 cents p/lb.; two dozen navel oranges, 29 cents; two large cans of salmon, 23 cents. So, I am preaching, but perhaps you now better understand why my head shakes right to left when the price of a modest home is \$300,000.



RR is for railroads, roses, and rain

True story. The beauty of such a night is surreal. It was many years ago. I was just a boy walking the countryside with friends. The night was clear and cold. One's own breath hung suspended like a cloud. The world was silent. Snow had fallen during the day. The fields were white as cotton down. The sky was blue and bright as midday, twinkling. As we watched from our vista, the east-bound train made its way across the open field. Plaintively the whistle sounded. Black smoke belched forth and wistfully trailed away. These old eyes shall never again gaze upon such a sight.

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 . . .

The train is of the Rock Island line, going east and headed for Chicago, about 475 miles away. The year is 1932, picturing Walnut Creek after a gully washer washed out and broadened the channel, and gave us a summer place to fish and swim.

Be
good
Yourself

Smell
the
Roses

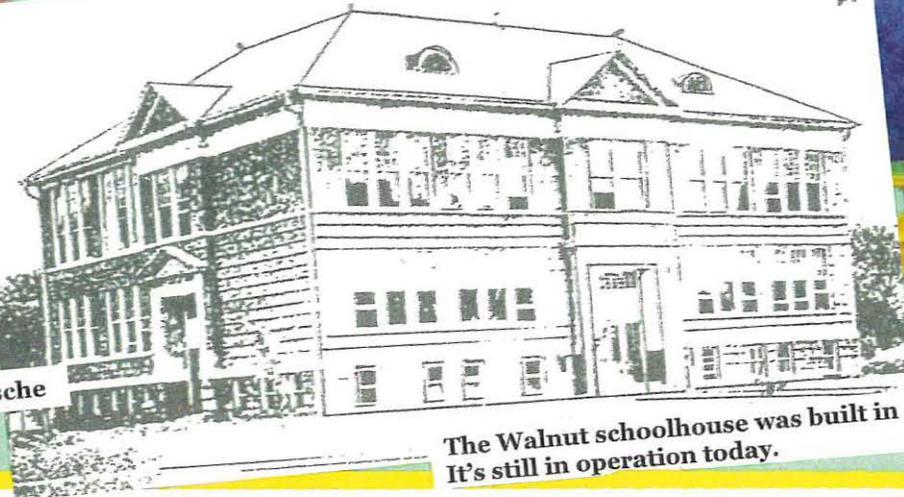


12 Hours
San Francisco
and Los Angeles
113 miles of trip
along oc

FINEST
RAIN
WORLD
Chicago
ON AN

S

is for school and sheaves



Drawing by Vernon Paasche

The Walnut schoolhouse was built in 1913, for \$24,364. It's still in operation today.

At school, I was not part of the brain trust, although every minute was fun, being with my friends in town from grade one through grade twelve. Our country friends joined us at the ninth grade level. There was 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: 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.

I was nurtured on "Bringing in the sheaves, we shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves." These old and beautiful hymns often awaken with me and go round and round through my head all day long.

Harvest time for small grains such as oats, barley, and wheat is late July and early August in Iowa. Between grades during my high school years, it was my good fortune to work on farms during harvest time. It was a great experience to work out in the fields, gathering the sheaves and making them into shocks. The work was hot and hard, but it was so very good to be working with the farmers, for whom I had great esteem. The pay was \$2.00 a day, plus meals. The grain had matured, been cut, and tied into bundles of about 20 lbs. each. The purpose in shocking was to keep the grain dry until it was threshed and stored in granaries. Seven bundles made up one shock, and the seventh bundle was laid across the top of the pyramid and served as a watershed. When it came time for threshing the bundles were no longer scattered about the field, but in shocks for more efficient loading onto hay racks.

Farmers were generally a jovial group and took great pleasure in kidding town kids about their work ethic. On Sundays at church, farmers were identifiable by the sun-induced ring around their forehead. I had such a ring and a straw hat. The hat had become grimy and shaped just to my liking.



Don Fischer, age 10

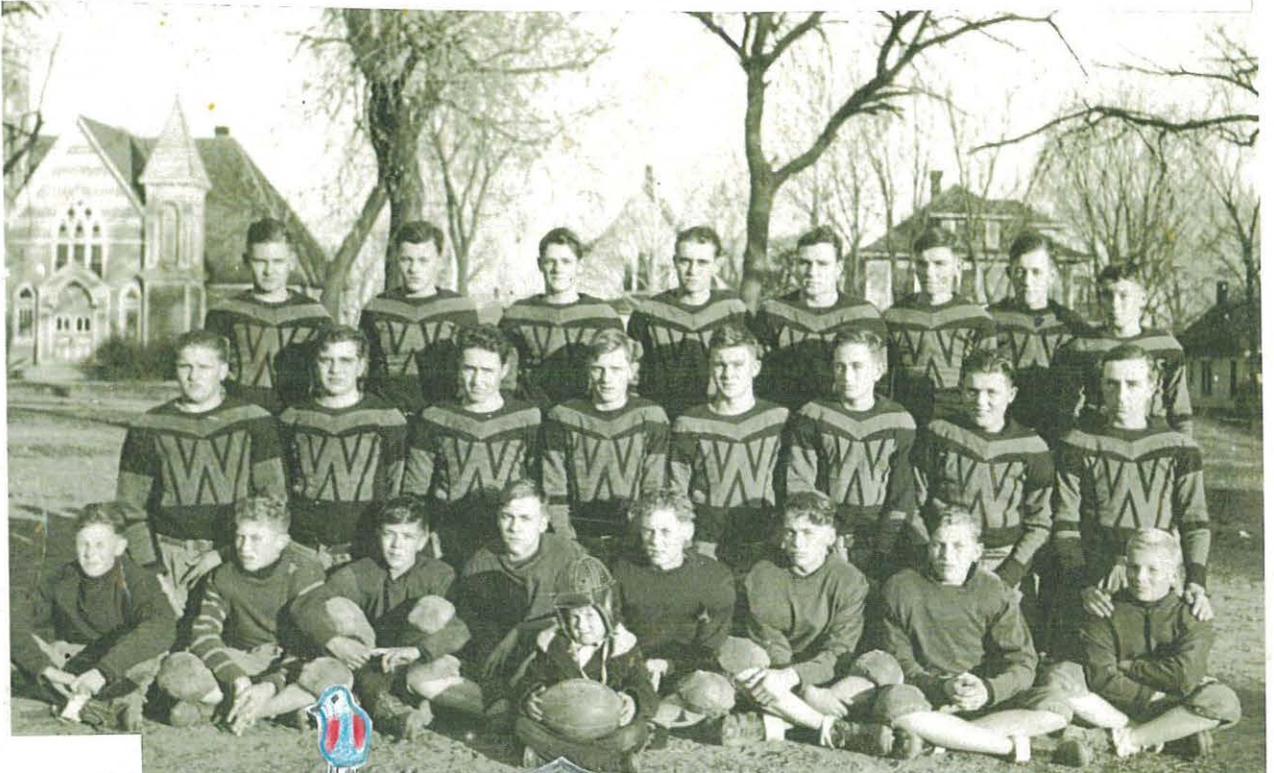


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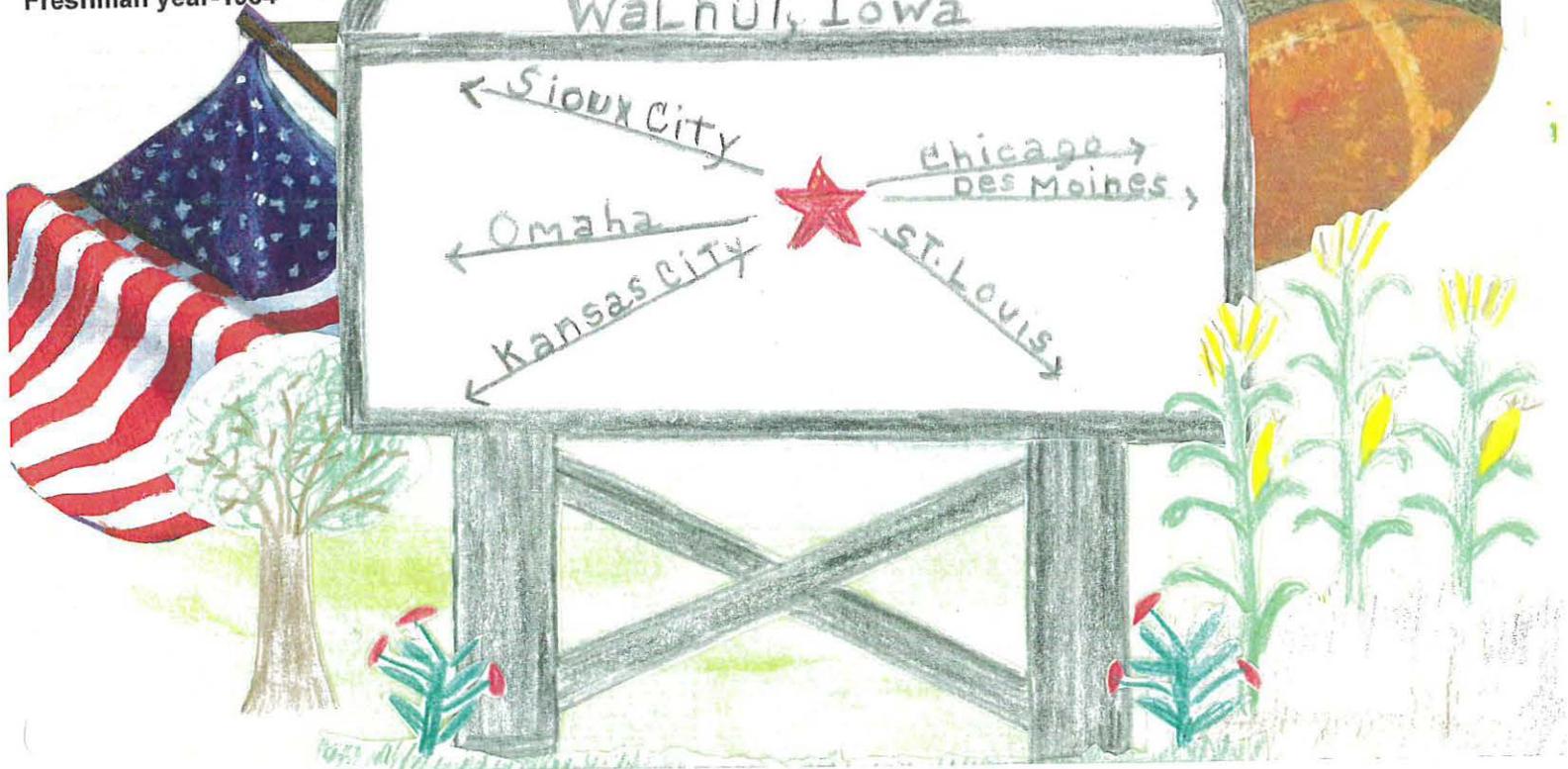
is for **team** (Go Warriors!)

During the 1930s, the Cardinal and Black Warriors of Walnut High School just may have had some of her greatest sport teams. In 1933, the Warriors led in all sports throughout the conference. 1934 was also a good year.

TEAM



Fischer
(first row, second from right)
Freshman year-1934



Home of the **Cardinal** and Black Warriors

U

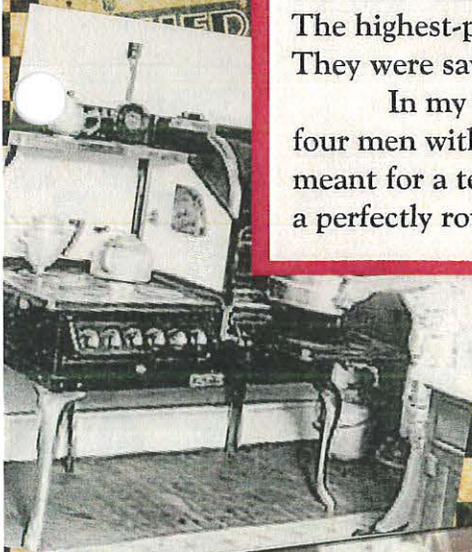
is for utilities



Utilities: Water, electricity, gas, and telephone are the most commonly billed to homes and businesses today, but it was not too long ago that having access to all of these services was a rarity. I suppose the greatest windfall of all came with the passage of the Rural Electrification Act (REA), in the 1930's, which gave rural citizens access to power.

During the summer months of 1939 I worked for the Marshall Electric Company, bringing power to a segment of farmers just north of the small village of Hancock. I am sure of the summer because the social security card that I have carried for 70 years verifies the company and date of issuance of the card. What a joy it was for those people to have the opportunity to dispense with lamps when moving from room to the next in the dark of the night, or to be able to have power pumps for water from windmills, or washing machines that rotated the dirty clothes, instead of having to tumble them by hand. That job paid me \$15 dollars a week. It was hard labor. There were no benefits, and if a rain shower came along, we would sit in our cars. The foreman deducted such time lost from our \$15. The highest-paid men received \$18 for a full 40-hour week. They were sawyers who cut down trees in clearing the right-of-way.

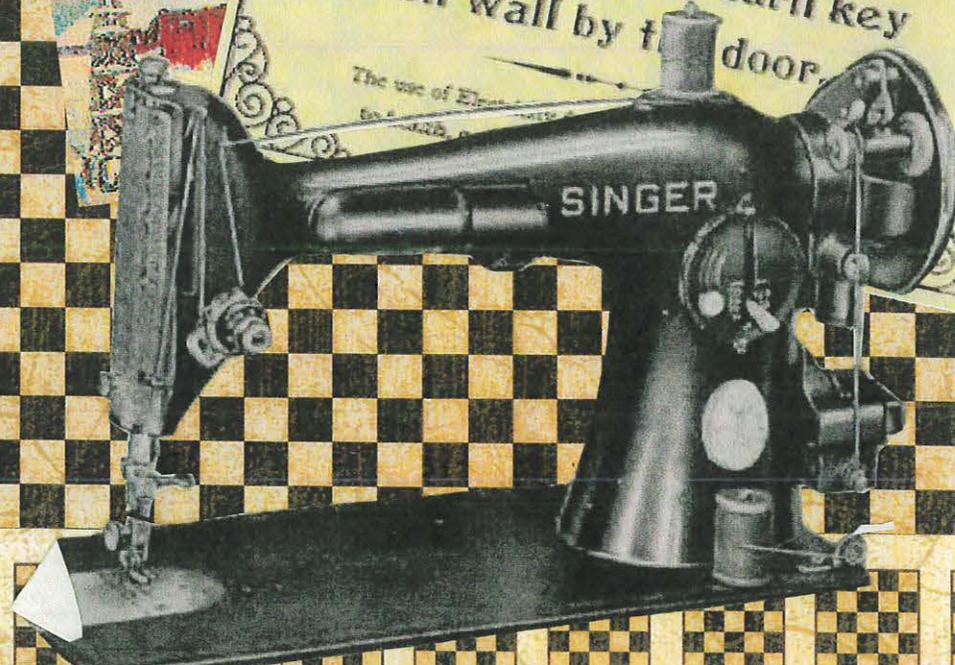
In my town, as a child, I was intrigued to watch three or four men with extra long-handled shovels stand around a hole meant for a telephone pole, as they dug deeply, in syncopated rhythm, a perfectly round cavity in Mother Earth's surface.



Do not attempt to light with match. Simply turn key on wall by the door.



FDR (Center) signs the Rural Electrification Act with Representative John Rankin (Left) and Senator George William Norris (right)



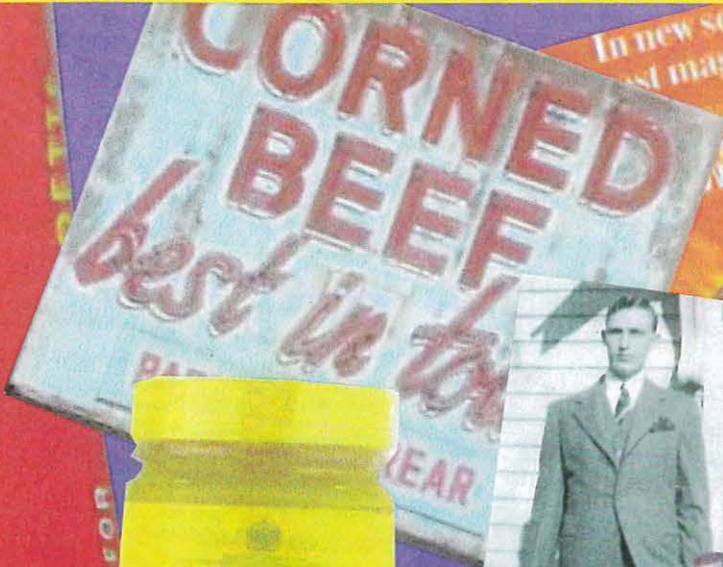
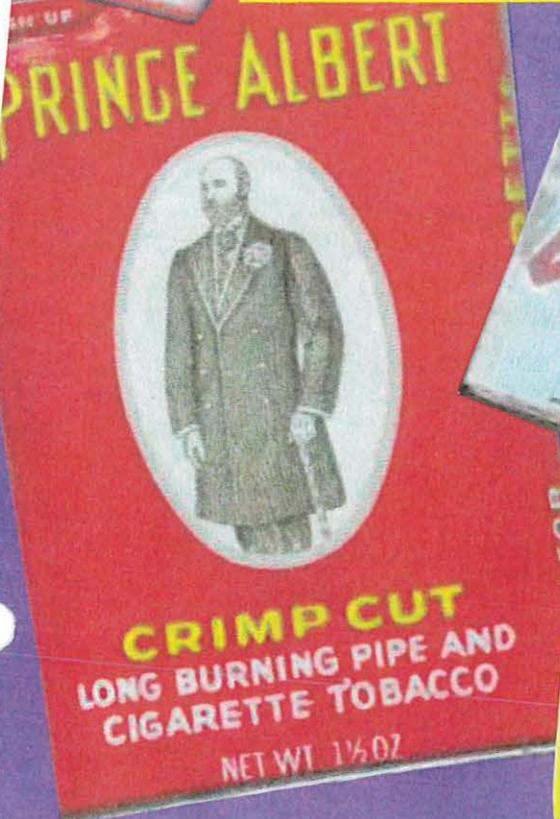


V is for Van



Van: of medium size; probably in his late 50's; receding hair; friendly. Van had a tobacco shop just around the corner from the J.C. Penney store in downtown Lincoln, Nebraska, where I was employed. It was a small shop, like a large walk-in closet. Tobacco of every description was his mainstay. It was my source of Camels or Chesterfields, or some nice-smelling blend for my pipe. Every young man had a pipe. It was a sign of being, well- Errol Flynnish. I usually spent my half-hour lunch period on one of the two stools in Van's shop. There was always an open stool, for Van had only a few select lunch customers. There was no menu, and probably had never been a health inspection. It was simple. Van served coffee, chocolate malts, and corned beef on rye, toasted, with a tad of mustard. It is not difficult to become addicted to such a delightful entree. The price was right, too. Twenty-five cents covered the sandwich and malt. Van didn't expect a tip. He was cook, bottlewasher, and waiter combined. The experience was a memorable time that ended with the "Day of Infamy."

Those were happy days in Lincoln. I liked my job and was doing fine. Had numerous friends and lived in fine surroundings. Everything was "grand," grand being the key word for "good" in those mellow years. I had even seen "Gone With the Wind."





is for Winona Lake, Indiana



We would soon be in Atlantic, where we would pick up Highway 6, going due east. Our cruising speed would be 45 miles per hour, and the round-trip in excess of 1,000 miles.

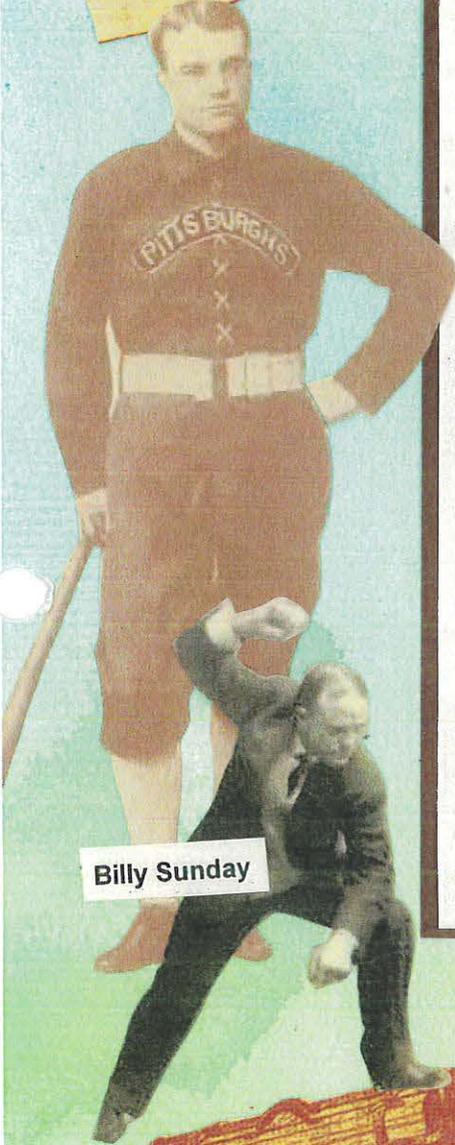
Our destination: Winona Lake, Indiana.

It was the summer of 1934. We were a happy group, full of excitement, anticipating a week of adventure. We had each taken a seat which would be ours for the entire trip. Age had much to do with our specific seating assignments. Dick, Bob, and I were the youngest, so we were assigned the back, each of us having attained 13 years of maturity at that point in time. Earl, Dick and Bob's brother, was sort of the moral leader of our group, being 15 years of age. Our driver, another Dick, was the owner of the 1931 Model A Ford. Dick was a farm boy, having just turned 16, which allowed him to have a student driver's permit for driving to and from school.

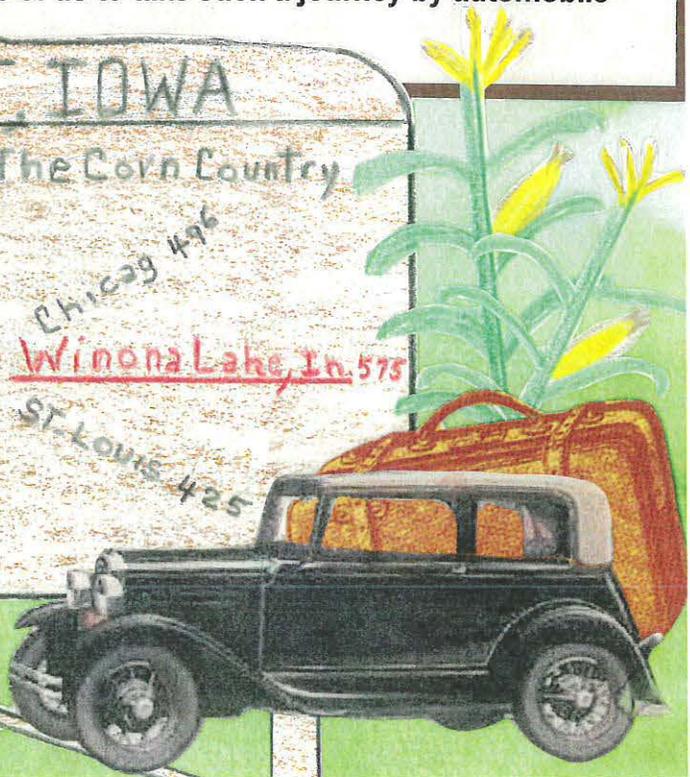
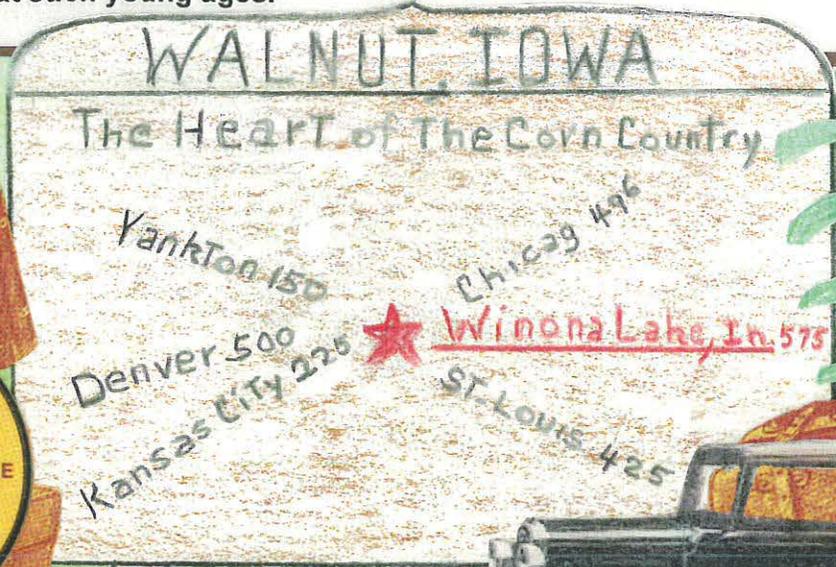
Winona Lake Christian Camp is near Gary, Indiana and Chicago. The camp is still in operation, having a long history of service, and including famous guests such as William Jennings Bryan and the famous baseball player-turned-evangelist, Billy Sunday. A number of the boys enrolled were city-wise. In those days Chicago was the seat of notorious robbers and gunmen, so we country boys were overwhelmed by our counterparts.

One such was Hoot Gibson, for sure a tough. I had an encounter with Hoot. During a baseball game I was waiting my turn on the field and was sitting on the higher tier of the bleachers. Spitting is an art perfected by both fans and players of the game. Repugnant, yes. Fate so deemed that none other than Hoot Gibson would be standing well within my range and trajectory. I nailed Hoot right on the top of his head. Well, "all things work together for good," and being in a Christian Camp environment saved my soul, which actually happened at a later time at one of the evening meetings.

It was a memorable time. The journey ended without injury or mishap. I suppose the remarkable part of the adventure is that our parents trusted the five of us to take such a journey by automobile at such young ages.



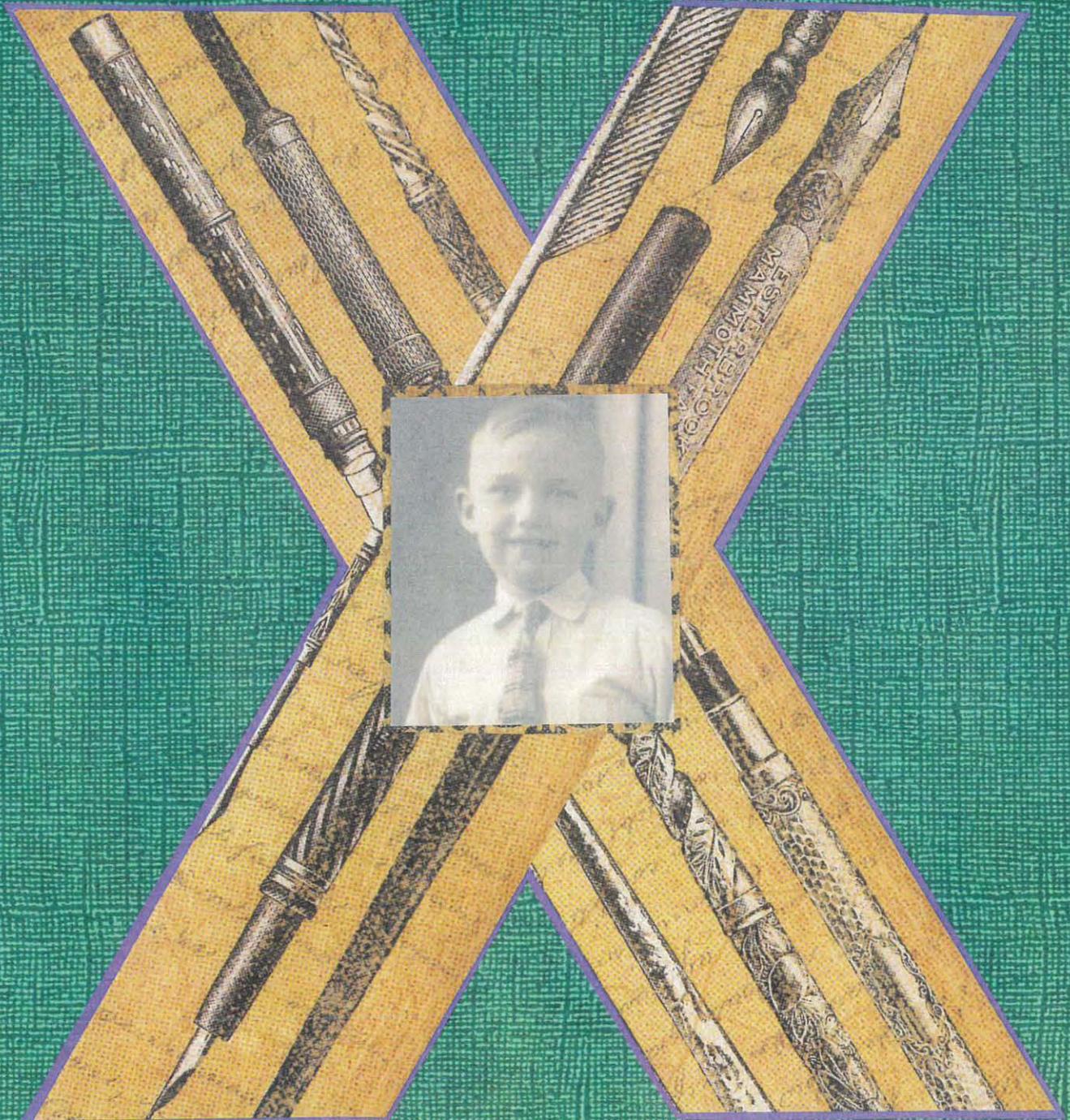
Billy Sunday



X is for eXcellence

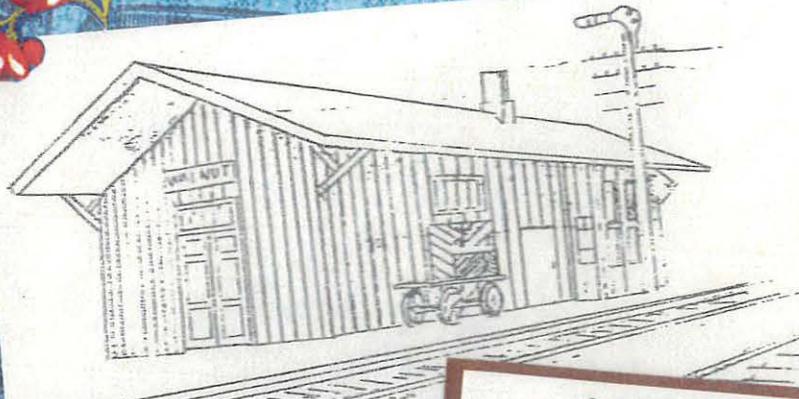
I speak of my two penmanship teachers, both Walnut girls who acquired diplomas in higher education and appeared at different intervals during my grade-school years. Excellence was required and demanded of each student. Excellence in penmanship came about by drilling, drilling, drilling. The drill consisted of two exercises known as "circle, circle, circle" and "push-pull, push-pull, and push-pull," which meant excellence when conquered. Excellence in penmanship is attained through drilling and relaxing using the entire forearm in making symbols.

There you have it: the secret of eXcellence!



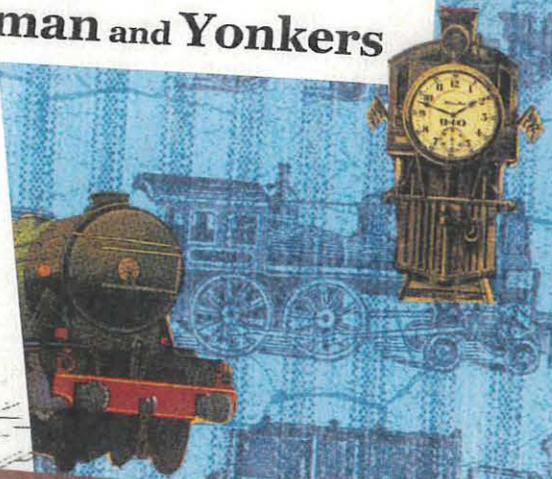
Y

Is for Yardman and Yonkers



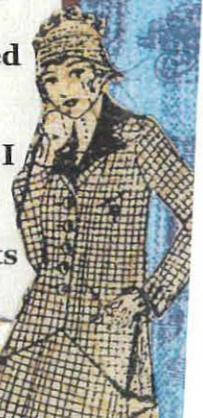
The Rock Island Depot was built in 1872. The last train roared through Walnut in September, 1953.

Drawing by Vernon Paasch



A partial definition of "Yardman" is "a person who works in a railroad yard." Mr. Eastman was that – also the telegrapher and the depot agent and the seller of tickets. He was the father of a boy in my class and a girl who was younger. The depot was our playhouse, for Mr. Eastman gave us considerable latitude while in the jurisdiction of his "yard." The building remained open at all times. It was a haven on cold winter nights, being located at the bottom of a steep hill designed by God for sleigh-riding. The large coal-burning stove provided the warmth needed for tingling ears and numb fingers. I do not recall the exact year, but was in or near 1930, and the west-bound morning Rock Island freight train had become my obsession. My dad had placed an order for a 26-inch blue Raleigh racer, with a basket. Chicago was so far away and the days dragged, but Mr. Eastman listened to my inquiries with patience and let me help move the big iron-wheeled freight cart into position awaiting each incoming train. Nothing. Day after day: nothing. Then one day the large freightcar door was opened and I could see it. There it was, still in a wooden crate, but there. Mr. League, the drayage man, made the delivery to the receiving door in Dad's store. Life would never be the same. I had wheels.

During the later years of the 1930 census decade I was living in Des Moines, Iowa, going to school and working odd jobs. The population of Iowa's capitol was 142,550, by far the largest in the state. Most of the jobs that I held at that time were for meals. Two hours would provide for a meal off of the menu. There were no malls then, but still, Des Moines had very nice downtown stores. Yonkers was a complete department store, very nice, the leader in fashionable wear; the Macy's of the midwest. Upstairs was a formal tea room where salon music and stringed instruments were played. Meticulously folded white napkins and cloths of fine linen adorned the tables each day. Flowers were always fresh. The maitre-d was a pipsqueak of a fellow, hateful. He was the hiring agent, also, standing stiffly and watching every move that the busboys made. Our uniform was a freshly laundered white shirt and black trousers. We were expected to have our trays full in both directions, whether returning used dishes to the kitchen or exiting the kitchen with a pot of tea. One must be extremely hungry to undergo such scrutiny, which I was not. Although I probably should have been elated at being part of such prestigious surroundings, I sounded the dreaded two-word phrase: "I quit." I traded it all for washing dishes in a Rexall soda fountain. Anyway, chocolate malts are filling.



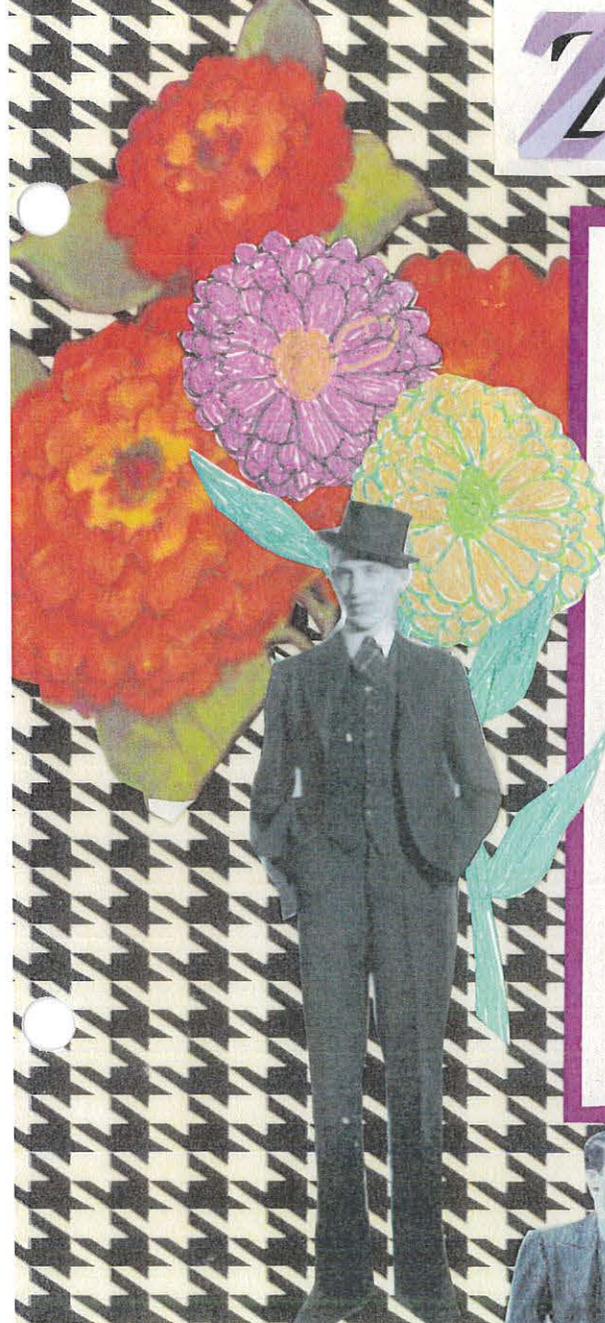
Z

is for Zinnia and Zoot Suit

Several months had passed since my mother's death. Life had changed. My heart was lonely. Dad and I were now being cared for by an elderly German lady, a widow, who was performing the household duties that formerly had been done by my beloved mother. It was early summer. For the preceding months Dad and I would visit the cemetery almost daily, just before nightfall. He would sit on the low stone at the foot of the grave and sob. Those were trying times. As I was a young lad, I suppose my sorrow was not at the depth to which my father was suffering. I began wondering what I could do, and then it struck me that flowers, when provided at one's own labor and with God's grace, spoke from the heart.

So my labor began by preparing a small section of soil on the sunny side of our house. The zinnia was my choice to express my love for my mother, for the flowers were bright and happy, just as she had been. The seeds were planted and diligently nurtured and watered until some weeks later I began to see buds, and before long, flowers. It was only partially successful, for the flowers were few and short-stemmed, hardly good for cut flowers. Nevertheless, there was joy in Heaven, I know.

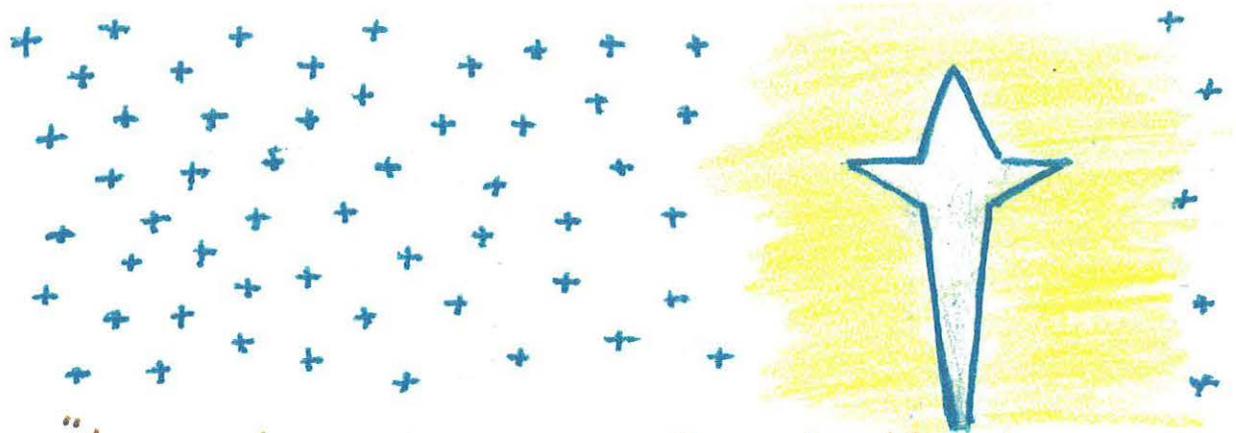
Today the zinnia has a special place in my heart. They are colorful and smiley and remind me that a better day will follow.



Don Fischer
Zoot Suit-less in 1939



The famous zoot suit. Famous, yes, but it was not a fashion plate. More of a craze during the late thirties and early forties, worn by the attention-getters. It was tailored to be loose, boxy, and showy. The long gold chain was the focal point. It took a war – but taste and tradition finally won out.



"I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus, the Savior, did come for to die
For poor ornery people like you and like I.
I wonder as I wander out under the sky."

I do not know the name of the author who penned those beautiful words. With the passage of time the "why of it" has become clear; and I no longer wonder as I wander out under the sky, why Jesus, the Savior, did come for to die. Rather, now I pause to give thanks for the "Grace" extended to me, a poor ornery sinner such as I.



Childhood: That time of buttermilk skies and cotton candy todays and tomorrows. For some, the childhood life has no beginning and no ending – it just is. It is a time of learning and and sorting out. It is the time when the adult is born.

The memories you have been reading are from oh, so long ago. This is now: ten years into a new century, and I wonder, "What does the future hold for those I will leave behind?"

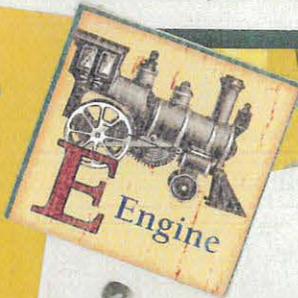
At present my distant legacy is in my two great-grandchildren, Emily and Sophie. I met Emily at her first Christmas, or was it Thanksgiving? She was the center of attraction, and I soon had my few moments with her, cuddled in my arms. Emily studied me for a few moments and then began to cry. Her fear was short-lived, and soon peace was restored. My first meeting with Sophie was in her own home when she was only two months old. No tears this time, only restful sleep. So Emily and Sophie are my far-distant future, my legacy. My legacy to them is to live a happy life of kindness and laughter. I have found that such a life is shaped through the possession of wisdom, which has its genesis in having "fear of the Lord." Wisdom is knowing that God created all things, and that "It was good." Wisdom is knowing that in the beginning this "goodness" was lost, and all that had been good came under the dominion of Satan. Wisdom is knowing that this present world is not now perfect, and that God is not the author of tragedy. And finally, wisdom is trusting in God to lead one through the difficult times that occur in each life.

Well, Emily and Sophie, I understand that these are heady words for you to understand at such an early age, but the time will come. Enjoy your gift of life. It is a precious gift, given at great cost.

So . . . I look forward to being in the good hands of Emily and Sophie – and any other great-grandchildren who may come to join them – as my surrogates far into the future.

Proverbs 17:6a is a verse that I claim as my very own. It states that "Children's children are the crown of old men." I wear five crowns, each one being equally loved and held in esteem. You – Matthew, Kelley, Adam, Kevin, and Kurt – are my present legacy and joy.

You know that you are loved.



Where The Tall Corn grows
Looeo
back-quack
Spring chicken

tootles



August

Walnut 1938

