

# Grandpa

An Autobiography

by

Carlyle E. Hystad

For My Grandchildren

# **The Early Years**

**Dedicated to my Grandchildren**

**Michael**

**Julia**

**Caroline**

**Amanda**

**Ashley**

**Megan**

**Anna**

**Claire**

## My Birth Day

It was very late in the evening, 11:36 p.m. to be exact, when I came into this world as a living, screaming being, covered with wet and slime and abused with a hard slap on the butt. I was not at all happy about it. Why was I being tortured, with the cold, the bright light in my eyes, the beating? Was I suspected of being a spy? Had I been captured by the enemy? Was this Germany? I looked for a calendar to check the date: July 17, 1938. Hitler was making aggressive moves in Europe; he had already taken over Austria and part of Czechoslovakia. Maybe I had been so unlucky as to be born in Germany, or worse, in Austria or Czechoslovakia!!

I looked for any sign of a friendly face; maybe someone would rescue me. An ugly old woman pretending to be a nurse had me firmly in her grasp and was taking me away, maybe for more torture. I screamed as loud as I could, but it seemed that nobody heard me, or maybe they were hardened against the violent screams of all those being tortured. I was trying hard to think of a way to escape, but my mind was hazy and confused; I probably had been drugged.

Just when I was starting to despair, a young woman appeared over me and gently picked me up. She took me to another room and held me to her breast so I was warm, and I could get something in my stomach; now this was more like it. I didn't know who she was but I was going to stick with her, at least for now.

The next morning I watched closely to determine who were the friends, and who were the enemies. I listened carefully as the officials scurried in and out and asked lots of questions. I learned that the young woman who had taken me to her bed was called Esther, or sometimes Mrs. Hystad. She kept referring to herself as Mommy. She said she had named me Carlyle Everett; I was not at all sure I liked that name, although Carlyle had sort of an aristocratic ring to it.

I also learned that someone called Mrs. Bellmon was sharing this little room with us, and that she seemed very attached to a baby girl also born on July 17; she was called Marlys. Our paths would cross many years later.

I received a great scare later in the day when a dark, gruff looking man came into the room and grabbed me. I started screaming and was prepared to fight to the death, but he just gave me a hug and then passed me back to Mommy. I was informed that this was Daddy. He had a very dark tan on his face and arms; almost black. No hair on the top of his head, but a ring of black hair around the back and sides of his head, like an oversized horseshoe. He also had lots of rough, black stubble on his face. He did not look friendly (and that unfriendly look never changed much over the years; in fact, I think that was the one and only time he ever hugged me). I was hoping that we would not be seeing much of this guy called Daddy.

On the second full day with Mommy, I learned some more as I listened to Mommy giving information to complete a birth certificate.

Mommy was 26 years old. Her maiden name was Esther Lillian Frazee. She was born in McKenzie County, North Dakota. She was a house-keeper. I was her fourth child, and the others were still alive; oh no, don't tell me I am going to have to share this woman with three older siblings!! If I'm lucky, maybe they have been given up for adoption, or have gone to live with a grandparent or something!

We were in a place called St. Francis Hospital, in the city of Breckenridge, in the county of Wilkin, in the State of Minnesota, in the country of the United States of America. Whew; thank goodness I'm not in Europe. But Minnesota? That's polar bear country. Why not California or some nice warm place?

I also learned that my designated father was Carl Nordahl Hystad, who was white (he didn't look white to me), 34 years of age, working at farming, and was born in Coleman, South Dakota. The birth certificate also attested that I was full term and legitimate. Well, I guess that is better than being called a fraud, but how did they know I was legitimate? I could be faking it! The attending physician signed the birth certificate:  $\mathcal{E}^{\wedge\wedge\mathcal{R}}\sim\sim\sim\sim\sim$ .

The next day Mommy bundled me up, even though it was quite hot that day, and carried me to a jalopy of an automobile being driven by that same dark man she called Daddy. We bounced along for several miles as I tried to catch up on my sleep. I don't know why those big people don't appreciate the importance of sleep for a little tyke like me.

After what seemed like hours, we arrived at "home", in what some people called a "town" of Everdell, Minnesota. There were only a few buildings there, and we headed for a shack that apparently passed for a house, where Daddy parked the car. It suddenly dawned on me that I had been born into poverty; I may have an aristocratic name, but it looks like this family is white trash. Look at this dinky little house; almost no furniture; and who are those grimy children wearing those ragged, hand-me-down clothes? They must be my siblings. And they are all boys! And they look like someone out of a Charles Dickens novel.

I was forced to be introduced to all of them. Norris (or Norry) is the oldest; 8 years old in April; Wallace (or Wally) is next; he will turn seven in August; and then Milton (called Mickey) who has just turned four in June. Wally and Mickey both had runny noses, and this was July! Norris gave me a disdainful look, and commented that he was meant to be an only child. Wally pretended to be very interested in me, and very kind, but then he covered up my face with a blanket when Mommy wasn't looking. Mickey was obviously trying to figure

out how he could use me as a new toy; maybe he could take me apart and see if he could put me back together again. Is this bad luck or what? Three older brothers? Living in poverty? Out on the prairie of north western Minnesota?

Yes, I learned something about this place. We were on the southeastern edge of the Red River Valley; what used to be the bottom of a very large lake; flat as a table top, and it stretched for over five hundred miles along both sides of the Red River. I discovered to my amazement that the Red River flows north from Breckenridge into Canada and eventually into Hudson Bay. I was under the mistaken impression that all rivers in the middle part of America flowed south into the Gulf of Mexico. Interesting what you can learn if you keep your ears open and your mouth shut.

The fellow called Daddy worked as a farm hand for a local farmer. He made very little money, but we usually had enough food to keep our bellies mostly satisfied. Mommy worked hard to grow food in a garden and patch up the old clothes that friends and relatives had given her. And trying to keep those three monster brothers of mine from killing themselves or each other, or me.

The next year was so bad that I decided to sleep through most of it; it was my only form of escape from the brothers and the poverty and the dust and those scary looks from Daddy whenever he came near. But there was one incident that I thought was sort of interesting, and Mommy kept talking about over the years. When I was about 3 months old, Mommy had left me in the middle of her bed while she was outdoors doing chores. She thought I was too small to roll off the bed or get into any trouble. Well, I decided I would play a little joke on Mommy. I wiggled to the side of the bed that was close to the bedroom wall, and then I slowly slid down between the bed and the wall until I was on the floor. About that time, Mommy sent Norry in to make sure I was O.K. When Norry came in, I didn't move a muscle;

he finally saw me under the bed; he thought I was sleeping. He went back out to tell Mommy that I was on the floor but I was fine; I wasn't crying. Mommy screamed and ran into the house; she thought I had fallen off the bed and killed myself. When she picked me up I said "fooled you". Or I would have said that if I had been able to talk. Mommy didn't think it was funny, but she did seem to be very happy that I wasn't dead.

## **Moving to Clitherall**

In the Fall of 1939, things started looking up. Daddy had rented a farm about 25 to 30 miles east of the Valley, near Clitherall, Minnesota, and he would now be able to run his own place rather than work for someone else. The family loaded up its few meager belongings and moved to the Hokanson Place, which was what the neighbors called the farm. The place had a large house compared to what we left, with three quite large rooms and one small room and an unheated enclosed addition all on the main floor, with four more rooms upstairs. It was almost middle class in its size and appearance. Of course there was no electricity or plumbing, or gas.

The rest of the farm was not nearly as nice as the house, with a small old barn, an old log building used as a granary, some old chicken coops, and several sheds in various stages of dilapidation. And the land was not very good. Sandy soil, with a good portion of the farm covered with swamp and woods.

But it was a beautiful place. A large lake, Crane Lake, was just down the hill behind the barn; there were trees, and a nice creek, and hills, and interesting places to explore. Compared with Everdell, it was like heaven. We even had a wind mill that worked, pumping water for the livestock and for us, while keeping the cream and milk cool in the water tank.

## Learning to Walk

I was 15 months old, and I was not yet walking. My brothers were starting to say nasty things about me; maybe I was a little slow or retarded or something. Mommy was getting a little impatient with me. I had been observing my brothers' ability to run around wherever they wanted to go, while I was limited to scooting along on my rear, or crawling on my hands and knees and getting sore knees and dirty hands. I had practiced walking several times when no one was watching. I really didn't want anyone to see me fall. I wanted to be able to just start out walking like a normal person. So I practiced in secret. I fell many times. I bumped my head, hurt my butt, and was generally bruised by the experience.

At one point I was about ready to give it up and just keep on scooting on my butt for the rest of my life. I was torn between my desire to walk like my brothers, and my reluctance to sustain more injuries. Then on the day we moved to the Hokanson place, I was scooting around the house, getting in the mud that was being tracked in as they moved in the furniture, dishes and pots and pans (it had snowed a little, creating muddy conditions). Mommy was getting exasperated with me. She said: "Carlyle, why don't you get up and walk." So I just stood up and walked. No one had ever asked before. I just needed that little bit of added motivation to overcome my fear. And I never looked back; I never scooted again. Within days I was running around like a regular kid.

Well, not quite like a regular kid. My brothers were permitted to go outside wherever they wanted; to the barn, or the granary, or the chicken coop, or down to the lake, or way down in the woods to the creek, or all the way to the school house, over a mile away. I had to stay in the house. I could only go outside if someone was with me to watch me. It wasn't fair. Why was I the only one in the family to be treated this way. I could take care of myself.



The family settled in to life at the Hokanson Place. Norry and Wally went off to the one-room school house out by the county highway. They had to walk over a mile to the school, crossing the Peterson farm, where Oscar, Emil, Victor and Hulda Peterson lived; three bachelor brothers and their sister.

Daddy had to cut and chop wood to heat the house. He had a pot belly stove in the living room, and a wood burning cook stove in the kitchen. That was all that stood between us and death by freezing in that cold Minnesota winter, when the early morning temperature would often be minus 30 degrees or colder. Fortunately there were many trees on the farm that could be used for firewood.

Mommy believed that she needed to go to church regularly to make sure Jesus liked her so she would be allowed to enter heaven. She did her best to convince her four sons of this. She had almost given up on Daddy, but she still managed to get him to church a few times a year. She had given up her church, the Presbyterian Church, to join the Lutheran Church, because Daddy thought he was a Lutheran if he was anything, but that still didn't help get Daddy to church very often.

## **Baptism**

Mommy insisted that her children would be baptized, so it was my turn on May 19th, 1940. I was almost two years old, but better late than never, Mommy said. I was properly dressed in the best hand-me-down clothes available. The whole family went off to Eagle Lake Lutheran Church. The Reverend Seastrand, Pastor. The ceremony was not a pleasant memory. First, I was almost too big to be held easily, but I was too small to stand over the baptism font by myself, so it was a bit awkward; and why was I the only one up there who wasn't a baby? Second, I had this brief moment of terror when I thought it might be some sort of human sacrifice ceremony, with me as the sacrifice, when

I heard Pastor Seastrand say “this child we dedicate to thee, O God of grace and purity”. Third, I did not understand how it would help me get into heaven to have a little water splashed on my head. Mommy told me I would understand when I was older. Just one of many things she told me that was not quite correct, but well-intentioned.

Mr. and Mrs. Ewald Sandstrom and Mr. and Mrs. Ben Bjornson were the witnesses and god parents. The Sandstroms were good friends of Mommy and Daddy, or at least Mrs. Sandstrom and Mommy were good friends, and continued to be as long as they lived; and Mrs. Sandstrom never forgot that she was my godmother, although she was never called upon to save me.



*Here's a picture of me taken shortly before my baptism. I was soaking up some of that Spring sunshine.*

The summer of 1940 was good, because I was allowed to be outdoors some more, with a little bit of freedom to explore. I learned something about horses (we had five or six at the time), about cows and calves and bulls (we had a mean bull), about chickens, pigs, and about “my” dog Shep. I watched in horror as Mommy drove Dexter, a very large and clumsy gray horse, as she helped Daddy with farming by raking hay. I was terribly afraid that Mommy would be hurt and I would be left alone with Daddy and those three brothers. My brothers were often put in charge of taking care of me while Mommy worked in the fields or in the garden, which usually meant that no one paid any attention to me unless I let out my loudest scream.

## **Alone with Shep**

In December of 1940 a major disaster struck. Mommy went away to the hospital for a few days and came home with a baby; a baby girl. I was depressed for many days. How could she do this to me? I had always been her favorite. She had always given me more attention and love than any of her children. Now she was giving most of her time and attention to this intruder. I finally concluded that Daddy had forced Mommy to do it; Daddy must have picked out this baby at the hospital and made Mommy take care of it; she was doing it against her will; otherwise she would never have abandoned me like that.

I was alone, except for Shep. My brothers were too busy with school and chores and playing their games outside, to spend time with me. I was not big enough to participate in any of their fun. And Mommy was busy with the baby, Valeria was her name, and all her other work, including milking cows twice a day, baking bread, churning butter, washing piles of dirty clothes, and making meals for seven of us. She seldom had any time for me anymore. And I almost never saw Daddy except at dinner and supper, which always hurt my eyes because all of the smoke from Daddy’s cigarettes would come in my direction. Daddy would be outside working when I got up in the morning, and

he would be outside working when I went to bed at night. I looked forward to becoming a man so I would never have to go to bed, like Daddy.

The summer of 1941 was a great relief, because I could go outdoors again. I could play in the lilac bushes where I had a little fort. I could climb on the pile of chopped wood, or go down to the barn and watch the calves, or chase some chickens. And I had a birthday party with lemonade and cake.



*Here I am in some of my second-hand clothes, standing on the porch of the house at the Hokanson Place, with my dog Shep.*

My happiness that summer was overshadowed a bit by the news from one of my brothers, probably Norry, that someday the sun would stop shining and the whole world would be dark and cold and everyone and everything would die and that would be the end of life forever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever, and if I kept on saying ever forever there would still be no life after the last ever, and no one would even be there to keep saying ever. I felt like I had this heavy weight on my shoulders for many weeks, contemplating the end of everything and feeling that I should try to do something to prevent that from happening, but I had no idea what could be done. It was a troubling time, and I never thought about going to heaven as an escape from this disaster; I guess I assumed that the sun also would go black in heaven.

But I would forget about the sun dying when Mommy would make a good dessert and I would get my share. A cinnamon roll, or some pudding, or a chocolate cake, or even some ice cream that everyone would help make with the old ice cream maker. Mickey often tried to get me to give him my share of the dessert, and sometimes he would just take it from me, so I learned to hide from everyone when I had a particularly good dessert. I had good hiding places where I could savor my dessert; I would eat as slowly as I could, to make it last and last as long as possible.

## **Working on the Farm**

I also had work to do, including helping my brothers husk corn for the pigs and cattle.

*See photo on next page of the four of us busy at the corn pile in the Fall of 1941, when I was three years old. Notice the interesting array of clothes we were wearing.*



In the winter of 1941-42, I came face-to-face with death. The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December, just three days after Valeria's first birthday. But that really didn't mean much to me. What really upset me was the cow. One morning I heard Wally say that one of the cows was having problems calving. When I had a chance I went to the barn to see what was happening. There my brothers told me that the cow had died. My first question was to ask when it would come back to life again. They told me it would never come back to life; it was dead, and that was the end. Mommy came and took me back to the house. I never saw the dead cow again, but I never forgot that cow. It was my first experience with the death of a creature that I knew, and it was as shocking as the information that the sun would die someday.

The summer of 1942 started out to be excellent. It was warm; I no longer had goose bumps all the time. I spent most of my time outdoors, exploring the farm buildings, getting to know the cows and the pigs and the horses. The horses were named Beauty, who was brown, Fly, who was black, Dan, who was dapple gray, Dolly, who

was brown like Beauty, Dexter, who was a dirty gray color, and Fly's baby, the Colt. One day I was trying to help my brothers herd the horses into the barn so they could be harnessed to do some work. One of the horses just jumped over the top of me and ran away into the pasture. I guess I was still a little too small to be herding horses.

But I was big enough to explore the woods all the way down to the lake; and I could climb the big tree down by the garden. And my brothers would take me with them sometimes down to the lake to take a bath and play in the water. Mickey dug up turtle eggs on the lake shore. We picked June berries. I even got to ride in the hay wagon a few times, with Beauty and Fly, the two most gentle horses, pulling the wagon down the drive and across the field to pick up more hay.

Another nice thing about summer was that I wouldn't freeze my butt when I went to the toilet. Our toilet was a two hole outhouse about 150 feet from the house, over by the wood pile. In the summer it would be warm in the outhouse, although there would be lots of flies, and it was quite stinky sometimes.

## **Going to Town**

Some Saturday nights we would all get in the car and drive to Clitherall so Daddy could sell some eggs and Mommy could buy some groceries. Sometimes Mommy would give me a penny or a nickel so I could buy candy at Wastweet's Café. Clitherall was a big town. It had two grocery stores, two gas stations, two restaurants, a farm produce company, a lumber yard, a grain elevator, a two-story school house, a post office, and stock yards where cattle were loaded into railroad cars. And it had a movie theater, with real movies showing some Saturday evenings. My brothers and I watched a movie there once that summer; it was mainly galloping horses with some guys wearing black hats and some wearing white hats, and a lot of shooting and jumping on and off the horses. I was not greatly impressed.

I started spending more time outdoors or in the barn or the granary;

sometimes with my brothers; sometimes by myself. I learned to climb on the back of the smallest milk cow and pretend that I was a cowboy. I climbed into the hay mow and burrowed my way into the loose hay. I explored the pasture with Shep, and would help bring the cows home for milking in the evening. I learned about fire weed, and how it caused my arms and legs to turn red and burn and itch. In the evenings I liked to sit by myself and listen to the loons down on Crane Lake, as they made their lovely, but lonesome calls.

I had no toys to play with; no bicycle; no wagon; no baseball bat or basketball. No toy trucks or cars or tinker toys or puzzles, or sleds or train sets. We had a rubber ball that we used to bounce against the house, or play catch; and we had a rope swing on a tree behind the house.

## **The War**

Mommy cried about her brother, Uncle Vance, going off to fight in the war; she was afraid he would be killed. Mommy also was afraid the Germans or the Japs would attack us. On the rare occasions when a military airplane would fly over the farm, Mommy would scream and yell at the kids to take cover; we might be under attack. My brothers just laughed at her. Just like they did whenever there was a thunder storm. Mommy would scream and cry, begging all of us to get in the house and away from the doors and windows. She was sure we would all be struck by lightning. My brothers just laughed at her.

Everyone was worrying about the war. We could not use the car very much because gasoline and tires were rationed (but we didn't use it very much in any case). Some food items were rationed also, but we grew most of the food we ate. We stopped using sugar on our breakfast oatmeal and bran flakes because of the rationing. Our cousin Dallas Hystad went off to fight in the war.



Mommy and Daddy did find time to have a family picture taken that Fall. I was four; Mickey was eight; Wally was 11; Norry was 12; and Valeria was almost two. Mommy was 30, and Daddy was 39. Notice that my hair has turned dark, from the blond color of the previous year. Also notice the nice new shirt I'm wearing. This was one of the few new pieces of clothing that I ever had in those years, because I got hand-me-downs from my older brothers



## **Christmas**

Christmas in 1942 was special because it is the first one I remember clearly. Daddy and my brothers had cut down a small evergreen tree somewhere and built a wooden stand for it, and put it up in the living room. Mommy decorated it with some paper and candy and ribbons and a few shiny, round balls. She attached a few candles to the tree, the small ones like you use on birthday cakes, which we were to light only on Christmas eve and Christmas night. My brothers told me that

Santa Claus would come on Christmas eve, and he might bring some presents, and every day I would ask them if this was Christmas eve. Finally, it was Christmas eve. After supper, we cleaned up the dishes, and my brothers told me that we all had to wait in the kitchen and close the door and listen carefully for Santa. We waited and waited, and then Wally said he heard Santa on the front porch, and then I heard Santa, and I thought I caught a glimpse of his reindeer and sleigh as he flew away after dropping off the gifts.

We peeked into the living room, and there were presents under the tree, and all the candles on the tree were burning. It was beautiful; it was magical. We all gathered around the tree, and Mommy led us in singing some Christmas carols, and then we got to open presents. I got some underwear, and some stockings and a pair of mittens. My brothers also got some new clothes. It was a wonderful Christmas.

## **Falling on My Head**

The winter of 1942-43 was a bad one. Snow was so deep that all the roads were blocked for miles around. Even the horses had a hard time making it through the snow. The snow was over six feet deep in many places, with drifts over the top of some of the farm buildings. It was in the middle of this snow-bound isolation that I created a crisis. I was riding my favorite cow in the barn, while Norry and Wally were cleaning the barn. The cow was spooked by something and jumped suddenly, and I fell off head first and struck my head on a sharp, pointed rock in the foundation of the barn. The next thing I remember was watching a stream of blood fall onto the snow as Norry carried me to the house. I had a large hole in my forehead, and I was slipping in and out of consciousness.

Daddy was not at home. He was about two miles away working with several of the neighbor men to help the county snowplow open up the main highway. The snow was so deep the snowplow could not get through except with the help of many men with shovels. Mommy sent

Norry and Wally off to find Daddy and to tell him to bring a doctor back as fast as possible. Meanwhile, Mommy tried to keep me from dying; she held a cloth on the wound to slow the flow of blood, and she tried to keep me awake; I just wanted to go to sleep. A few hours later, Daddy arrived with the horses and sleigh, bringing the doctor.

The doctor poured some liquid into the wound that burned and made me cry, and then he pulled the skin back together and held it together with some metal clamps. He told Mommy that I should be fine; just make sure I got plenty of rest, and don't let me cry because that might pull the clamps out and open up the wound. Fortunately I overheard this conversation, and I used it to my advantage over the next few weeks until the wound was fully healed. Whenever I wanted something, or didn't want to do something, I would pretend to start to cry, and Mommy would immediately give me what I wanted. It was a sad day when the doctor removed the staples and said I was fully healed.

Another bad thing about winter time: it was freezing cold in the outhouse, and if I had to do a big job my rear end would get very cold. And if anyone peed on the toilet seat it would freeze solid right away, so we just peed in the barn or in a snow bank, rather than get the toilet seat all covered with ice. We had sort of a toilet in the house for use only in the winter time when it was just too cold or stormy to go to the outhouse. It was a big bucket with a toilet seat over it, and Daddy usually would keep it down in the cellar or out in the washroom, and he would have to dump the bucket when it started to get full. It was pretty cold in the cellar or washroom, but much better than going outdoors in a blizzard.

## **Food in Storage**

Even with the deep snow and cold weather that kept the roads blocked, we had enough food to eat. The cellar still had many jars of vegetables and fruit on the shelves, from Mommy's garden. There were jars of peas, string beans, corn, beets, carrots and pickled cucumbers.

There were jars of jelly and jam made from strawberries, raspberries, June berries, gooseberries, and apples. There were jars of apple sauce made from the apples from the crab apple tree, and sliced peaches and pears made from the boxes of peaches and pears that Mommy bought at the store last summer. The potato bin still had many bushels of potatoes. There were frozen beef roasts and steaks and hamburger left from the steer that Daddy and the neighbors butchered last Fall. Or we could always go catch a rooster or two for dinner. And we had plenty of milk, butter and bread.

When we ate dinner and supper, we always sat at the same spots at the table. Daddy sat at the head of the table. I had to sit next to him, on his left, because I was the smallest and my brothers didn't want to sit by him. Mickey sat next to me; Norry sat at the other end of the table; Wally sat next to him on the other side, and then Mommy was across the table from me, with Valeria in the highchair. Daddy always smoked cigarettes at the table, and the smoke would always come right to me. I couldn't stand the smell and the smoke and it hurt my eyes. I decided right then that when I was a daddy I would never smoke cigarettes.

Because I was the smallest person at the table, I sometimes was the last person to get any food; my brothers would grab the bowl of potatoes or the plate of meat before I could get any, and sometimes there was almost nothing left when I got my turn. But I always had all the milk I wanted. And I learned to grab my food quickly to make sure I got my share before it was all gone.

## **Welcoming the Sun**

Finally winter ended. The snow gradually melted, creating little streams all over, and little ponds that would freeze at night, with rubber ice that we would bounce on in the morning until it broke and we got wet. A key milestone that Spring was the day I could walk all the way from the house to the barn without stepping on any snow or

ice. It was already May, and the apple tree would soon be blossoming. I liked the longer days; I could stay outdoors longer, and we did not need to use the kerosene lamps and lanterns so much. In the winter, we needed several lanterns in the morning and evening to see to do the chores. And we had two or three lamps in the house so Mommy could see to cook supper. We always had a lamp in the middle of the kitchen table where we ate. In the summer we could eat supper in the daylight, and it would still be light when I went to bed.

I would soon be turning five. Only one more year before I would start school, but I was still having problems pronouncing some words. I could not say "r". A car was a "caa". A horse was a "hose". I pronounced my own name "Kilyle". Which is why my brothers started calling me "Ky". No matter how hard (hod) I tried, I could not pronounce "r".

But I could do more chores now. I could gather eggs in the hen house. I could help feed and water the chickens. I could help husk the corn to feed to the cattle and pigs. I could even help turn the crank on the butter churn. I helped Mommy pull weeds in the garden. I picked potato bugs off the potato plants. I tried to help my brothers shock grain, but I was not of much help; the bundles of grain were bigger than I was, and I could not start a shock. But I could add bundles to a shock once my brothers got it started with the first four bundles leaning against each other.

## **Thrashing Time**

I tried hard to help with grain thrashing. Daddy had bought a thrashing machine and he had worked out an arrangement with four of the neighbors to work together as a thrashing crew to do all five of the farms. I was not allowed to go with the crews to the other farms, but when they came to our farm I was in the middle of it all. I went along with my brothers as they pitched bundles onto the wagon to haul them to the thrashing machine and pitch the bundles onto the conveyor that carried them into the machine. I watched carefully as

the straw was blown out of the big pipe that looked like an elephant trunk and formed a huge straw pile. I climbed up on the grain wagon to watch the grain pour into the wagon from the thrashing machine. I made sure I stayed well away from the very large belt that went around and around from the tractor to the thrashing machine and made all the gears and belts and chains on the thrashing machine move in amazing harmony.

I was fascinated by the teams of horses driven by the neighbors, and by the way some of the neighbor men put tobacco into their mouths and then spit all sorts of nasty looking stuff for hours after. I was fascinated by the activity at the house, where the neighbor women had all arrived to prepare morning lunch, mid-day dinner, and then afternoon lunch, for the thrashing crew. They took the morning and afternoon lunches into the field for the men. But everyone came to the house for dinner. They prepared a huge feast that looked like Thanksgiving dinner at about 12:30, and the men and boys ate it all up in a few minutes. I asked Mommy why some of the men held their fork in their left hand and their knife in their right hand while they ate. We had been taught that we should always hold our fork in the right hand, except for Mickey who was left handed and refused to use his right hand. Mommy told me that the neighbor men were from the old country and they had not been taught proper manners yet, and I should not do what they did.

## **Another Sister**

In early August, disaster struck again. I woke up one morning and was informed that the doctor had been to the house during the night and delivered another baby girl. She was named Phyllis. Why did the doctor think we wanted another baby girl? Why didn't he deliver that kid to someone who wanted a baby, like maybe the Petersons; they didn't have any babies? The Hansons didn't have any babies; the Johnsons didn't have any babies. Take the baby to one of them. We already have too many.

It was the final straw that broke my small remaining special tie to Mommy. She informed me that I was a big boy now. I could take care of myself; I could help my brothers with the farm chores in the morning and evening; I could help her around the house, to bring in more fire wood for the stove, and help wash the dishes and sweep the floor. Daddy didn't say anything to me, as usual.

In September I helped with the potato harvest. Emil Johnson and Ellsworth Holo, his nephew, came with their big potato digger, pulled behind their tractor, to dig the potatoes, and my brothers and I picked up the potatoes and dumped them into gunny sacks to be picked up by Daddy and hauled to the house and dumped in the cellar until the cellar was almost full of potatoes. Those potatoes would feed all eight of us all winter long, with enough left over for seed potatoes for next year.

My brothers and I would sometimes pick up a very small potato that was too small to keep and we would throw it at someone. But we almost never hit anyone. I threw some of those little potatoes at Ellsworth who was riding on the potato digger, and finally I got one close enough to him that he was able to catch it. He threw it back at me, and hit me right in the middle of the forehead. It hurt a little bit; not enough to make me cry or anything, but I decided to act like they did in the cowboy movies and I fell over like I was dead. Ellsworth thought he had killed me. He yelled at Emil to stop the tractor, and he and Emil and daddy all came running over to me. Just as they got to me I jumped up and yelled "fooled you", and everyone laughed and laughed, particularly Ellsworth.

That Fall, Norris decided he would run away from home. He walked and hitched a ride to get into Clitherall where he convinced a farmer to give him a job as a hired hand. Norry had completed the eight grade, and he had decided it was time to go out on his own. He was thirteen. Mommy was quite upset. Daddy also; he was in danger of

losing his best farm hand. They found Norry and convinced him to come back home. Daddy promised him that he would send him off to boarding high school the next year. But he would need to be home to work on the farm during the summer months.

## **Milking the Cows**

There was always a lot of work to be done on the farm, but the most demanding job was to milk the cows every morning and evening. Regardless of the weather, and even if everyone were sick with the cold or the flu, the cows had to be milked every morning and every evening, seven days a week. In the winter time it was always dark at milking time, both morning and evening, which made it hard to see with the dim kerosene lanterns. Milking the cows would take about an hour each time, if there were at least three people milking. Daddy and Mommy both milked, and as Norry and Wally got strong enough to squeeze milk from the cow's teats, they were required to help. Milking was not nice work, because some of the cows did not like to be milked and they would try to kick the milker, and they would switch their tail around and slap the person in the head, and sometimes they would pee or poop just when the milker was getting settled on the three-legged stool, so they had to jump out of the way to keep from getting splashed.

With four of them milking they could do it all in about 45 minutes, but then they also had to strain and separate the milk and store it in the cooler. The separator was used to separate the cream from the milk, by spinning the milk in a large metal container so that the cream would fly off in one spout and the skim milk would run off in a lower spout. Mommy used some of the cream to make butter and for cooking, and Daddy sold the rest at the produce store in Clitherall or in Battle Lake. The skim milk was fed to us kids and to the pigs and calves.



When the milk ran through the separator, it was strained through a thin cotton pad to remove any dirt that shouldn't be in the milk. Every morning and evening my dog Shep would wait by the separator until the job was finished, and then one of us would remove the strainer pad, soaked in milk, and throw it up in the air for Shep to catch. Shep would always catch it and swallow it in one gulp.

## **Bath Time**

Working with the cows and pigs and chickens, and all the other farm work, sometimes caused us to get a little dirty, and Mommy insisted that we have a bath every Saturday, even if we weren't dirty. On Saturday afternoon she would heat some extra water in a tub on top of the stove. Then she would get the galvanized wash tub from the wash room and put it on the kitchen floor near the stove, and fill it half full with water. Then each of us kids would take turns getting scrubbed in the tub. Sometimes the water would get so dirty that daddy would need to dump out the dirty water and Mommy would fill it again to finish the line of kids. Norry and Wally really hated getting this public scrubbing; they thought they were too old for this, and didn't like being fully exposed at their age. In the summer time they would go to the lake to take a bath, but the lake had a thick layer of ice from late September until May.

## **The Sled**

Christmas was unusual that year. We had the usual Christmas tree with candles on it. Mommy had baked lots of cookies and cakes, and both divinity and fudge candy, and we waited for Santa to arrive on Christmas eve. Sure enough, he came again. But his year, in addition to small packages under the tree, there was a big toy under the tree; a slightly used Flexible Flyer sled. Mommy said it was my Christmas present. I was delighted. This was the first big present that I had ever received. And it was mine; not my brothers'. I was special; Santa liked me the best. I couldn't wait to get it out in the snow.

But my brothers had other ideas. They did not have any sleds. The next morning when I woke up I immediately ran to see my sled by the Christmas tree. But it was gone. Where is my sled? I ran to Mommy in a panic. She said “your brothers must have taken it out; I’ll help you get dressed and you can go out too.” Sure enough, there they were, playing with my sled; going down the hill at great speed. I demanded my sled, but they ignored me. Finally, they agreed to let me have a turn. They even pulled me back up the hill on the sled. But they wouldn’t let me have the sled. I complained to Mommy, and she made them give me the sled. I played with it for awhile until I got tired, and then I took it back to my fort in the lilac bush to hide it where my brothers couldn’t find it.

That afternoon, I went out to play with my sled again, and it was gone. No where to be seen. I hunted for the culprits, and finally found them sliding down a hill in the pasture. Again I finally got the sled to myself, and then I hid it in a different spot, underneath some blankets in the wash room.

The next morning when I went to get my sled, it was gone again. This was really getting annoying. Once again, I found my brothers sliding down the hill on my sled, and they wouldn’t let me use it until Mommy came out and yelled at them. That day I kept the sled with me at all times so they couldn’t take it. And that afternoon, after playing with the sled, I waited until it was getting dark and then I hid the sled underneath the car that was parked out in the front yard. The car was completely surrounded by a snow drift, so you couldn’t see under it; it had been sitting there for many days with the snow gradually building up around it.

The following morning I came downstairs for breakfast, and my brothers all left the room. Mommy was acting strange. I ate breakfast and then got all dressed up and went outside to get my sled. I headed for the car. But the car was not there; it was gone, and so was my sled.

Ellsworth Holo, a neighbor who was there to help daddy saw up some big trees for firewood, was at the tool shed nearby. I asked him if he knew what happened to the car and whether he had seen my sled. Ellsworth said "they didn't tell you?" Tell me what? "Well, your sled is completely destroyed. See, here are the remains; it's all broken up. Your parents used the car last night; I guess they went over to the Sandstroms. Your dad shoveled out the car and he drove over your sled as he drove away. He didn't know it was there. I know they are very upset about it, because I'm sure they can't afford to buy another one."

I was in a state of shock. My sled; my only toy; gone. And I knew they could not replace it. It's my fault. How stupid of me to hide the sled under the car. What a bonehead! That's what I deserve for being selfish. I should have just let my brothers use the sled. Now none of us has a sled.

Mommy said she was sorry, and she would see what she could do about finding another used sled somewhere, but she didn't seem very optimistic. Daddy never said anything to me about it. My brothers never mentioned the sled again. I never did get a replacement, and I never had a sled again until I was an adult; neither did my brothers. We never had ice skates either, although we lived right next to the lake. We never had a pair of skis, although we had snow for at least six months of the year.

## **Trying to Keep Warm**

Now that I was a big boy, I slept in the same room with my brothers, at least during the winter months. We slept in two double beds in the upstairs room directly above the living room that had the wood stove. A vent in the floor allowed warm air to come up into this room to keep us from freezing to death. When we went to bed one of my older brothers would carry the kerosene lamp upstairs to light the way, and set it on the table between the beds. The last one into bed was expected

to blow out the light, but no one wanted to be the last one so usually everyone jumped in bed at once and no one blew out the lamp. Then Norry would say “last one asleep has to blow out the lamp”, and we would all laugh. I never had to blow out the lamp.

Even with the vent in the floor, over the wood stove, it was usually very cold in our bedroom. We would go to bed wearing our long-john underwear, and in the morning I would pull my clothes in under the covers to warm them up, then make a little tent and get dressed under the covers. I thought that goose bumps were a normal part of life. I seldom had enough warm clothes to wear.

This was the winter that the house almost burned down. Because of all the wood that we burned in the stove in the living room, the chimney got full of creosote, and one day it caught fire. Flames and smoke and sparks were shooting out of the top of the chimney, and a loud roaring noise was coming from the stove. Daddy told Mommy to get everyone out of the house. We all grabbed our coats and pulled on our overshoes, and Mommy bundled up the girls, and we all went outside. I was waiting for the house to go up in flames. But it didn't. The fire went out. Daddy had to make some repairs on the chimney up in the attic, but he was soon able to build a fire again, and we didn't need to go live in the barn with the horses and cows.

Some winter evenings we would try to listen to the radio. Daddy would hook up the big battery, and sometimes we could hear voices or music coming from the big brown box, but usually it was mainly static and whistles. Norry and Wally would move the wire that was used as an antenna, to try to get a better sound, and sometimes we were able to listen to Fibber McGee and Molly (on Tuesday evening), or Jack Benny, or Superman, or just some music.

I preferred to listen to daddy playing his violin or mandolin. Many Sunday afternoons in the winter he would get out either his violin or mandolin and play songs that he or Mommy liked. Some of them

were very fast and happy, and some were slow and sad, and some were just nice. Dad could play almost any song if he knew the tune or if someone hummed it for him. Mommy told us that daddy used to be a leader of a dance band before they were married, and he could play many different instruments.

## **Summer Delight**

The summer of 1944 was terrific; all summers in Minnesota are terrific, because the contrast with the rest of the year is so great. This is the mandatory manic period after the many months of depression. I turned six years old, and I would start school in the Fall. Mommy decided that it would be a good idea if I got to know some other kids my age who would be going into first grade with me. There were only two others that she knew of: Clayton Paulson and Charles Olson. So Mommy invited them over to our place for a party to celebrate my sixth birthday. It was a big deal. The Petersons brought their motor boat over to our part of Crane Lake and gave all of us rides in the boat. This was the first time I had been in a boat. Mommy made ice cream and cake and lemonade and it was all delicious.

The adults talked about the three Cs, Carlyle, Clayton and Charles, and of course they all knew that their child was the smartest and would do the best in school. But the three Cs had very little to do with each other during this introductory meeting; I simply didn't know what to do with another kid my own age.

## **The Fishing Expedition**

Later that summer Norry and Wally found an old wooden row boat that had been abandoned on the shore of Crane Lake. It was badly rotted, and certainly would never float. But they pulled it home with a team of horses and proceeded to "fix" it. They patched it with tin cans and tar paper and roofing shingles and anything they could find. Then one day daddy and Mommy and the girls went to Fergus Falls, on an all-day shopping trip, to buy things for the upcoming school year.

So Norry and Wally used this as an opportunity to try out their boat.

The four of us pushed the boat into the water and jumped in. Norry had a pole with a line and tackle, and he was going to fish. Wally was assigned the job of rowing the boat. Mickey and I were each given a tin can and told to bail water out of the bottom of the boat. Water was leaking in fast, and we were both dumping water out as fast as we could. Norry told Wally to row out into deeper water where the fish would be, and he dropped his line in. He quickly caught a nice walleye pike. And then another. The water was getting deeper in the boat, and we were bailing faster. And then it started raining. Norry liked that; he said fish would bite better when it rained. So Wally kept rowing, and Norry kept catching fish, and Mickey and I kept bailing water for our lives. None of us knew how to swim. We had no life jackets or anything else that would float. We were fishing in 50 feet of water, a few hundred yards from shore.

I kept telling Norry that we needed to go to shore; the boat was leaking faster. Wally was getting tired of rowing and he wanted a chance to fish. Mickey was getting tired of bailing water and was starting to slow down. Finally Norry let Wally fish while he rowed, until Wally caught a nice walleye. By then the water was at least five inches deep in the boat and gaining fast. Norry calmly rowed to shore with his catch, and I lived to tell the story.

## **Starting School**

In September I started school, in first grade, at Public School No. 155. Wally was in eighth grade and Mickey was in fifth grade. There were only about five other kids in school, including Orris Sandahl, Leroy Rix, Clayton Paulson, Charles Olson, and one little first grade girl, Elaine Bjerketvedt. The Olsons moved away shortly after school started, so there were three of us in first grade, Elaine, Clayton and Carlyle.

I liked school. I wanted to learn how to read and write. We had no kindergarten, and Mommy and daddy never tried to teach me to read, so I was starting from zero. Clayton's mother had been a school teacher before she married Thorfin Paulson, so Clayton already knew how to read, at least a little.

I usually walked to school with Wally and Mickey, but some days they would be late finishing their farm chores so they would tell me to go on ahead so they wouldn't have to wait for me. They could walk a lot faster than I. So I would start down the drive and across the field, then cross the road separating our farm from Peterson's, and then walk along Peterson's dirt drive all the way across their farm, past their house and barn, and down the hill, and then across the County highway to the little white school, which was located just behind Paulson's apple orchard. Some days I would get all the way to school before Wally and Mickey caught up. Some days I would go slow and wait for them and then they would get mad at me for making them late for school. One day it was the start of deer hunting season and I was hearing gun shots coming from all different directions as I started walking to school by myself. When a shot sounded really close I would dive into the tall grass and wait until it was quiet, and then I would run as fast as I could towards Peterson's house. More shots, and I dived into the ditch and waited. I finally made it to Peterson's house without being shot, and I waited there until Wally and Mickey came and walked with me the rest of the way to school.

## **News from the Outside World**

Norris went away to boarding school in October, at Morris, Minnesota. It was a boarding school for farm kids and it was only six months a year so the kids could be home in the warm months to help on the farm. After a few weeks at Morris, Norry came home for the weekend. He talked non-stop about all the new things he had learned and the people he had met, and we all listened in awe at his wondrous

experiences. In particular, he learned a lot of new things about girls and something called sex, and he taught us several naughty songs after he made us all promise never to tell Mommy or daddy. We all memorized those songs that weekend, and I remember them yet. I didn't understand most of the words, and certainly not the meanings of those jingles, and I never taught them to anyone else.

That winter was bad as usual. Cold and lots of snow. Daddy would take us to school with the horses and sleigh if it was very cold, like colder than 30 degrees below zero, or if there was a cold wind blowing. Otherwise we would walk. Sometimes the snow was so deep and soft that I could barely walk. I would try to follow in the tracks made by Wally and Mickey, but their steps were so far apart I could barely reach them, and then I would sink all the way up to my crotch with each step. Sometimes the snow was packed so hard that I could walk on top without sinking in. When it was really cold we would stop at Peterson's house to warm up on the way to and from school, and Hulda would sometimes give us something to eat and drink. Hulda looked a little unusual because one arm was only about six inches long; it sort of stopped up above where the elbow should be, and then she had a couple of little fingers growing from that stump. But she was always very good to us, and happy to see us.

On the really bad days, daddy would hitch a team of horses to the big farm sleigh, which had a large box on it to haul grain and milk and other farm goods. Daddy sat up above at the front of the box, and he would cover the box with canvas to help keep out the cold, and we would crawl in under the canvas and shiver as he drove the horses to school.

I was learning to read quickly. "See Dick run. See Dick and Jane run fast. Dick and Jane see Sally. See Sally jump." At this rate I would have learned everything there was to know before the year was over. The teacher didn't have a lot of time to spend with us, because she also



had to teach Mickey in the fifth grade, and Orris in the sixth grade and Wally and Leroy in the eighth grade. But we could all listen to the other lessons, so we started learning about geography and history and multiplication right there in first grade. After noon recess every day the teacher would read a chapter from a book, and now we were reading about a deer named Bambi.

We didn't have any toilet indoors at the school; there were two outhouses, one for boys and one for girls, way at the back of the play ground. We had to walk through the snow to get to the outhouse, which was always ice cold. We never asked to be excused to go to the toilet in the winter time, unless we were really desperate.

That winter had problems in addition to the cold and snow. Mommy was mad at daddy for some reason, but I didn't know why. I heard her tell daddy that she wanted to move back to Watford City, to be with her family. She wanted to go back home. The disagreement became worse, until one evening Mommy said she was leaving. She was going to walk over to Johnsons and have them give her a ride to the train station. She had a suit case, and her big coat, and was going out the door into the cold night. I was terrified. I told her she couldn't go. She wouldn't be able to walk all the way to Johnsons in this cold and snow. She would get lost in the night, and she would freeze. But she was mad and crying and wouldn't listen. As she started away from the house, daddy came and grabbed her and pushed her back into the house and told her he would not let her go. Mommy went into her bedroom and barricaded the door. I didn't know if she were still there; maybe she climbed out the window and ran away. I started trying to figure out how I would survive there without Mommy; maybe I could find my way to Watford City too. Maybe Mrs. Sandstrom would save me. I didn't see Mommy again for two days, when she finally emerged from the bedroom and started doing her usual work again. I never knew what caused the problem or why she decided not to leave.

## Getting in Trouble

Spring did come again. The snow melted. I was learning to read and write. I was enjoying school and was learning how to play games with the other kids in school. Clayton, Elaine and I would play together outside during recess, and we would have a longer recess than the older kids, probably so the teacher would have fewer disruptions while she conducted classes with the older students. One day Clayton suggested that we should grab Elaine and lift up her dress so we could see what she had under there. I thought that sounded like a good educational experience, so we grabbed Elaine and pulled her dress up over her head, but we didn't see anything of interest. We both had younger sisters and we had watched our mothers give them baths, so we discovered nothing new.

The next day, Elaine's parents came to school and had a long private talk with the teacher. The following day the teacher had a long private talk with Mommy and daddy and Clayton's parents. And then she had a talk with Clayton and me. We had been charged with sexually harassing Elaine. Actually, she didn't use those words. She said we had done a very bad thing when we lifted up Elaine's dress, and Elaine's parents were very upset with us, and she had told our parents and it was up to our parents to punish us further.

I expected to get a spanking from daddy, with the leather strap that I had seen him use on Mickey's bottom many times. But Mommy just told me I should never do such a thing again. Daddy never said anything. I expect Clayton got a spanking; his mother was very embarrassed. She was a Sunday School teacher, and kids of Sunday School teachers were not to do such terrible things. But I imagined that she blamed me for being the ring leader of that crime spree.

The summer of 1945 was great. The war was coming to an end in Europe, and it was hoped that Japan would surrender soon. The war was good for most farmers, with high prices for farm products. And

daddy was talking about buying a farm of his own. Uncle Vance survived the war in Europe and was coming home.

## **Shopping in Fergus**

One day Mommy told me that I could go along with her and daddy to go shopping in Fergus Falls. Valeria and Phyllis also went with us, and daddy drove in the 1936 Chrevrolet over twenty miles to Fergus. I followed Mommy into the big store called Penny's; I almost got lost in there, because it was so big, with many women shoppers. When Mommy was done shopping we went back to the car that was parked on the street in front of the store, to wait for daddy to finish his shopping. While we were sitting there, I noticed a man walking down the street towards the car who had black skin. I had never seen anyone with skin that black before. Daddy had dark skin in the summer time, but not nearly as dark as this man. I pointed at the man and yelled: "look at the black man, Mommy". Mommy whispered to me to keep quiet, and to sit down and stay out of sight; he was a Negro and he might be dangerous. I shrank down in the back seat, but I peaked at the black man as he walked away from the car and down the street. I asked Mommy where the black man came from. She said he probably came from the cities, where some Negroes live. I tried to imagine what a big city would look like. Were the people all black and dangerous?

## **Driving Horses**

That summer I spent more time helping with farm chores, helping Mommy with the garden, gathering eggs, feeding the pigs, and trying to help with the haying and shocking grain. One day I went in the hay wagon with Norry and Wally, to the farthest field we had, up north of Peterson's place, to get a load of hay. They loaded up a high load of hay, and the three of us rode way up there on top of the hay, driving the horses who were a long way down below us. Norry and Wally started fighting about something, and Norry let go of the reins to wrestle with Wally. So I grabbed the reins and steered the horses all

the way back home again as my brothers rolled around on the hay. Norry tried to convince me that the horses knew the way back home and there was no need to steer them, but I was not buying that.

## **Yet Another Sister**

In August, Mommy went away to the hospital again, and once again she came back with a baby girl. This one they named Eileen. This was getting boring. It didn't make any difference anymore. It would not have any impact on my life.

Mrs. Hershey came to help out around the house for a few days while Mommy was in the hospital. Mrs. Hershey lived on a farm about two miles up the road towards Clitherall, and Mr. Hershey was away fighting the war. Mrs. Hershey also had several children. I thought she was very attractive and very nice. I thought maybe I would marry someone like her when I grew up.

It was time to go back to school. I started second grade. Wally had finished elementary school and expected to be going away to Morris, and Mickey was in sixth grade. Now there were even fewer kids in the school since two had graduated, and there were no first graders.

## **Moving Down**

It was about this time that I heard daddy talking about buying the old Anderson place a few miles north, where the Hersheys lived. He was buying two farms next to each other, and we would live on the place that had the big barn. We would soon be moving. I would need to go to a different school, probably that big two-story school in Clitherall, where there would be maybe 20 kids in each of the two rooms. I didn't like that idea. I was happy where I was.

But one day I was told that we were moving. We all loaded up everything into wagons and started moving. We pulled some wagons

behind the car, and some with horses, and some with the tractor. And we herded the cattle down the road to their new home. We moved the barn cats too, but they kept finding their way back to the Hokanson Place. They were like me; they didn't want to move, and they didn't.

The new place was a real disappointment. The house was much smaller. There was a small kitchen, a small living room and one more small room downstairs. Upstairs there were only two small bedrooms with sloping ceilings, and a little space in the hall at the top of the stairs, where daddy put a small bed.

There was barely room for everyone to sleep. Wally and Norry slept in a bed in one small bedroom upstairs. Mickey slept by himself in a small bed at the top of the stairs, and I had to sleep in a bed with Valeria and Phyllis in the other little bedroom. Mommy slept in the little room downstairs next to the living room, and baby Eileen slept in a crib in the living room. This was not good. When Wally and Norry went away to school I could sleep in their room, and sometimes Mickey would sleep there with me, but he sometimes wet the bed so Mommy usually made him sleep in the little bed at the top of the stairs.

It was here that I discovered that daddy slept. I had never seen him in bed before, and just assumed that he never went to bed. But finally I saw him sleeping one morning, and Mickey informed me that he went to bed in that little room with Mommy every night. I was disappointed to learn that I would need to waste a good deal of my life sleeping, even when I grew up.

The new place had some advantages. It had a very large barn and a good silo, and a large granary and chicken coop. It also had much more good farm land, with a total of 320 acres in the two farms.

## Second Grade

Mickey and I had to go to school in Clitherall. I was in the lower grade room, which had first through fourth grades, and Mickey was in the upper room, upstairs, which had fifth through eighth grades. Daddy or Mommy took us to school every day in the car except when there was too much snow, because it was too far to walk; it was over three miles. When the roads were blocked with snow we couldn't go to school at all. Some days we had to walk home from school when the weather was nice.

I didn't like the school. I didn't know any of the kids, and the teacher always looked like she was mad. She was very strict and having fun was not allowed. Some of the kids made fun of me because I still couldn't pronounce "r" properly. And I had to fight a couple of town bullies who thought they could beat me up. Fortunately, I was as big and strong as any of the kids my age, and was able to defend myself, and Mickey would fight any of the older kids who might pick on me. Mickey wasn't very big, but he would fight anyone; he was never afraid of getting hurt. No one wanted to fight him because he would get wild when he fought.

Wally didn't get to go to school in Morris that winter; Dad said he had to stay home and help with chores. Mickey had to help milk the cows, and I was put in charge of the chickens. Before school each day I had to fill the chicken feeders with grain, and fill the water tanks with water that I had to carry from the pump house. I also had to carry the slop from the kitchen to feed to the pigs, and throw some corn over the fence for the pigs. In the afternoon when I got home from school I fed and watered the chickens again, and gathered all the eggs. We had over 200 laying hens, and most of them laid an egg every day, so I had lots of eggs to pick out of the nests. Some of the hens didn't want me to take the eggs, and would peck my hand when I would try to reach under them to take any eggs. I learned to quickly grab them behind the head and pull them off the nest so I could get all the eggs.

Then I had to take the eggs to the kitchen and wash them clean, to remove any chicken manure and other dirt that was on them, and put them all into egg crates. When I had 24 dozen eggs in the crate, daddy could take it to town to sell them.

I also helped feed hay and silage to the cows, and then I helped Mommy wash and dry the dishes after supper. Daddy was able to buy some things to make life a little easier now that the war was over. He got some more gas lamps and lanterns, that gave much more light than the kerosene lamps and lanterns. This made it easier to read and do my homework after school, and easier to do chores in the barn and chicken coop. He also bought a milking machine with a gasoline engine. The milking machine made it possible for daddy and Mickey to milk the cows, and Mommy did not need to help anymore. Daddy also bought a second old tractor, so we now had two tractors and we still had two teams of horses. Daddy, Norry and Wally could all be working in the fields at the same time during plowing, planting, haying and harvesting.

That winter, daddy and some neighbor men cut chunks of ice out of Clitherall Lake and brought it home on the big sleigh pulled by a team of horses. They stacked the blocks of ice and put sawdust around each block to keep them from freezing together, then stacked some more on top of them until they had a large stack of ice, which they covered with straw to keep the sun off. This ice would be used in the ice box all summer long to keep our food cool.

I got all "A"s on my report card that year. At the end of the school year the teacher told me that I had the highest grades of everyone in the second grade. Probably because I had no close friends to distract me, and I was always afraid of the teacher. I always did my assignments and homework so I wouldn't get in trouble with that teacher.

Summer came again; school was over; and I was glad. But I wasn't entirely happy because Norry and Wally were home from Morris so I

had to go back to sleeping with Valeria and Phyllis. That was very disgusting. Here I was, a big boy, working on the farm, taking care of the chickens, weeding the garden, and doing all sorts of chores, and I had to share a room and a bed with these girls who just played and never had any chores to do, and were basically just nuisances. It was not fair.

## **A Little Red Wagon**

I guess Mommy understood that I was unhappy, but she couldn't see any alternative, and she had seven of us to try to satisfy. I overheard Mommy tell Mrs. Broberg that I seemed to be unhappy, and I didn't talk very much; she said I was busy thinking instead of talking. She did try to cheer me up; she convinced daddy that they should buy a little red wagon for me. I couldn't believe it. A brand new, bright, shining, red wagon, with four wheels and a metal box, and a black handle. The only problem was that I was already almost too big for a little red wagon. I was eight years old. Some of the other kids in my grade at Clitherall school already had bicycles. But I never let Mommy guess that I thought I was too old for a wagon, and I tried to play with it. It was useful sometimes to haul feed for the chickens, and to bring in wood for the stove. And I let Mickey, Valeria and Phyllis use it whenever they wanted.

During the summer I noticed that Mommy was getting very fat; her stomach was getting very large. Mickey told me that she was going to have another baby. What? Where are we going to put another baby?

There was some good news that summer. Daddy and Mommy had organized the neighbors to re-open the local one-room school house, up on the County road between Brobergs and Cleve Johnson's place. It was only about a mile away. There would be about ten kids in the school, including Mickey and me, and Valeria would be starting first grade. I would not have to go back to the Clitherall school with that grouchy teacher.



In September I started third grade at the new school, Public School No. 53. There were three kids in my grade: Clayton Paulson (the Paulson school had closed because they didn't have enough students after the Hystads moved), Duane Koep, and me. Duane Koep had a younger brother in the first grade, and other brothers and sisters at home. The Koeps were very unusual in our neighborhood; they were not Norwegian or Swedish, but German, and they were Catholic, not Lutheran like everyone else. Mommy was very suspicious of Catholics, but she said it was all right to go to school with them as long as you didn't marry them. They seemed to be fairly normal to me, although they had to eat fish on Fridays, which I thought was very peculiar. In any case, I had no interest in marrying any of them. Duane was as tall as I was, and sort of fat, and he tried to beat me up one day, but I won the fight or at least didn't get beat up.

## **Twin Sisters**

On the morning of October 2, 1946, I woke up to find that Mommy and daddy were gone. Daddy had taken Mommy to the hospital during the night, and Mickey told me that she was going to have a baby. I walked to school with Valeria, and Mickey stayed home to take care of Phyllis and Eileen. When I got home from school that day, daddy was back home, and Mickey told me that Mommy had twin girls, and they were named Judy and Joyce. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I was excited about the novelty of twins, but how were we going to fit two more babies into this house? I would be forced to sleep with girls for the rest of my life, the way things were going!!

To make matters worse, Mommy and daddy decided that daddy's sister, Auntie Selma, and her son Bruce, would come live with us for a few months. She could help Mommy take care of the twins and Eileen (who was only 15 months old). Bruce was Mickey's age. So now we had two more people living in this dinky little place. It was getting ridiculous. I started spending more time outdoors and in the barn (where it was quite warm from the heat of the cattle). I looked forward to going to school so I could get away from the mad house.

The summer of 1947 was a great relief. I could spend most of my time outdoors. Auntie Selma and Bruce had gone back to North Dakota. I still had to sleep with the girls when Norry and Wally were home, but I was getting used to it. The twins were crying a little less.

Daddy bought a new tractor in 1947; a "C" Allis Chalmers. It was a small tractor, made for cultivating corn and mowing and other light farm duties. Daddy decided that I was old enough to start driving the tractor in the field. I had been practicing driving the new tractor for a few weeks, but now I was going to be a real farmer. I would soon be turning nine years old. Dad showed me how to cultivate corn, and told me to go to work on the field just east of the granary. I spent much of the next month cultivating corn, and then I helped with haying, while continuing to take care of the chickens and pigs, and helping Mom with dishes.

## **A Fork in My Foot**

One summer day daddy asked me to herd some of the cattle; he was going to let some of the cattle out in the yard area to eat the tall grass, and I was to make sure they didn't wander away or get out onto the road. He also told me to stay out of the barn because he was going to put the bull in the barn with one of the cows for breeding, and it might be dangerous to go in there. I watched the cattle, and made sure they stayed in the yard. They were all busy eating grass so I decided I would peak into the barn to see how the bull was doing. I went into one of the side doors, but couldn't see much, so I quietly moved farther into the barn, climbing over the manger and into the area where the bull and cow were. It was dark in there, so I moved closer. Then the bull saw me and started towards me. I turned and ran, but my foot hit a hay fork that had been knocked onto the floor. One of the curved tines of the hay fork went right through my shoe, into my foot between the big toe and the next toe, and came out the top of my foot. I fell down, but was able to crawl to the door and get away from the bull before he got me, pulling the hay fork with me. I pulled the fork

out of my foot. It didn't hurt all that much. I could still walk, and it wasn't bleeding hard, just a small trickle.

I was in big trouble. I had disobeyed dad twice, by going into the barn and by not keeping my eyes on the cattle. I knew I would get a spanking with the leather strap if dad found out. I ran back up the hill to check the cattle; they were still all there. My foot was starting to hurt more. I didn't want to tell anyone; the only way I could stay out of trouble was to keep quiet about the hole in my foot. The foot started hurting more. I could barely walk. I had to go chase a couple of steers that were wondering off, and when I got them back with the herd I couldn't stand the pain any longer. I hobbled to the machine shed and found Mickey and asked him to watch the cattle, and then I went to the house and told mom what had happened. She screamed and called dad. He came to the house, looked at my foot, heated some very hot water on the stove, poured it into the dish pan, poured a half bottle of Lysol disinfectant into the water, and then held my foot in the water. I thought I would die, but then the pain gradually went away. I had to keep soaking my foot in hot Lysol water for a long time, and then dad bandaged it up and found a big shoe that would fit over the bandage. Then he sent me back out to herd the cattle. He didn't even give me a spanking with the leather strap.

Summer came to an end too soon and I was back in school, in the fourth grade. It was still Clayton, Duane and me in the fourth grade, and Mickey was in the eighth grade, and Valeria in the second grade. Shortly after school started a new student joined us in fourth grade; a girl name Sharon Bergsten, whose father had bought the old Anderson place down between the Hansons and the Hokanson place. This fourth grade class was getting pretty large, but Clayton and I were still the smartest kids. Clayton usually got better grades than I did, but I thought that was only because his mother helped him at home, and my parents didn't help me at all. The addition of Sharon to the class created some problems, because she decided that I was her boyfriend, and at recess she would pull me

into the woodshed behind the school house and kiss me and hug me. This made the other boys mad, and then I had to try to win fights with Clayton and Duane again so they would stop pestering me.

## **Getting Electricity**

That winter of 1947-48 we had some very good news. We were going to get electricity. As soon as the ground thawed, the REA would be running a power line along our road to provide electricity to all the farms in the area. Daddy hired electricians to come and pull wires through the walls and ceilings in the house, and put wires in the barn and the granary and the chicken coop and the machine shed, and the pump house. The REA came and put up tall poles and strung wires between them. They put in a meter, and the electricians hooked up our wires to the meter.

When I came home from school one day, the electricity had been turned on. I went into each room in the house and pulled the light cord to turn on the light in the ceiling. I went to the barn and turned on the lights. I went to the chicken coop and turned on the lights. I went to the granary and the machine shed and turned on the lights. I went to the pump house and turned on the light. I even turned on the yard light that was way up at the top of the electric pole by the pump house. It was fantastic. We didn't need lamps anymore; but we kept one just for emergencies. We didn't need to carry lanterns to the barn or the chicken coop anymore. We could even see to walk between the barn and the house without a lantern. I could even see to read the books that I brought home from school.

A few days later, a man named Mr. Herfindahl, who owned the appliance store in Battle Lake, came to the farm with a truck, with some refrigerators in the back. Dad bought a refrigerator from him, and they unloaded it and plugged it in right on the spot. We didn't need the ice box anymore. And mom bought an electric iron to replace the

gas iron that she had been using. Then dad bought an electric motor to replace the gasoline engine we used to pump water. That was the most amazing of all. I always had trouble starting the gasoline engine to pump water; I could barely turn the big fly wheel, and sometimes it would backfire and kick back and almost break my arm. Now all I had to do was push up a little lever and the motor started humming and the pump started pumping and the water started running. Mom also got an electric motor for her washing machine to replace the gasoline engine, and I know she was happy about that.

We even got an electric radio, and mom was able to listen to the radio station in Fargo, North Dakota, which made her feel a little closer to her home in Watford City.

Of course, we still didn't have an indoor toilet or running water. We still had to go to the outhouse, which was down the hill behind the house. Mickey and I would carry buckets of water from the well to the house, to fill the water tank on the side of the cook stove, and fill the drinking bucket which stood on the wash stand. We would dip warm water out of the tank on the stove and pour it into the wash pan which was on the wash stand, and wash our hands and face in that in the morning before we went to school. And I had to wash my hands before meals. We had a dipper with a long handle in the drinking water bucket, and we would all drink out of the same dipper when we were thirsty.

Every Sunday evening we would carry several buckets of water to the house to fill a large tub placed on the top of the kitchen stove. The water would heat up during the night, and then mom would use it on Monday for washing clothes.

## **Last Family Photo**

That Spring, in 1948, mom decided we should have a family photograph taken, because Norry had just graduated from high school at Morris, and would be leaving home. So this might be the last chance

to get us all together in one picture. She made an appointment with a photographer in Fergus Falls and she found some pretty good second-hand clothes, and even bought some new clothes, to dress up all eleven of us. When we were all scrubbed and dressed, we looked almost like town people. We needed two cars to get all of us to Fergus, and there the photographer recorded us for history. I was almost ten years old. And obviously the cutest member of the family.



Front row: Valeria, Judy, Phyllis, Joyce  
Middle: Eileen, dad, Carlyle, mom  
Back row: Wally, Norry, Mickey