

CHAPTER TWO

GROWING UP

1948 - 1956

Summer of 1948

The highlight of the summer of 1948 was the family trip to Watford City, North Dakota; back to my parents' home town. Mom, dad, my five sisters and I went on the trip in the old 1936 Chevy. Wally and Mickey had to stay home and take care of the farm. Norry had already left home after graduating from Morris.

It took us almost two full days to drive from the farm to Watford City, about 500 miles. We had car trouble in Valley City and had to stop for repairs, and then we stopped and spent the night in a little motel room somewhere near Dickenson, North Dakota. The next day we drove through the Badlands on the way to Watford. North Dakota was a big surprise to me because it looked entirely different from Minnesota. There were no lakes, and almost no trees. When we were on a plateau I could see for many miles in all directions. As we went farther west it got drier and more brown, and the ground was more rolling, with large buttes randomly poking up a hundred feet or more in the air. The sky seemed to be very big because I could see so far in all directions.

The Badlands had been formed by the Little Missouri River washing away the soil for thousands or millions of years, so there were steep cliffs dropping from the grass prairie down to the wide river valley below, with the river winding its way among the small, crooked trees dotting the river bottom land. The cliff walls were brightly colored reds, oranges, grays and browns. The road through the Badlands was

very steep and narrow, with many hairpin curves, and mom was worried about crashing over a cliff. As we came up out of the Badlands and crossed the rolling prairie country, we suddenly had a view of Watford City off in the distance, sitting there majestically on its hillside, beckoning its wandering children to return.



This is a photo of the prairie near Watford City.

When we arrived in Watford, we immediately went to see mom's older sister, Auntie Alice. Auntie Alice and Uncle Perrin Thompson had a nice house about two and a half blocks from main street, across from the school. We were all welcomed into their house to stay with them during our visit. We were reintroduced to our cousins, Shirley, Maurice, Nyla, Kennard (Buzz), and little Leroy. Buzz was 12, two years older than I, and he was anxious to show me around town. But I wanted to go see my twin cousins, Clifford and Clinton, who were just one year older than I. Their parents were Morris and Olga Frazee,

my mom's younger brother and his wife. Olga invited me to come and stay at their house during our visit, and I accepted. They had a bigger house, with fewer kids around, and more toys. Buzz got mad at me for deciding to stay with the twins rather than with him, but he got over it later in the week.

I was very envious of my cousins. They got to live in nice houses, in this nice small town of about 1500 people. They did not have to take care of any chickens or cows or pigs, or cultivate corn, or even wash dishes. They had bicycles and all sorts of toys and sports equipment. They did work a couple of hours a day at jobs; Buzz had a paper route, and the twins worked at various jobs like bag boys at one of the grocery stores in town. But their work was easy, and they got paid, and they were allowed to keep the money they made. Buzz had to walk just across the street to go to school, and the twins had only a two block walk to school. I was wishing that mom and dad had never moved away from Watford.

Watford was a typical great plains town. It was laid out in neat square blocks, with Main Street running through the middle of town, four blocks long, and the largest cross street running by the school house and intersecting Main Street right in the middle of town. The stores on Main Street were mostly one story high with a tall facade in front to make the buildings look taller. Main Street was wide, with ample room for parking on both sides. Away from Main Street on both the East and West sides were four parallel streets, creating neat blocks of houses, with several churches dotted around town, as well as a swimming pool, ball park, County building, fire station and the jail.

One day during our visit, we went to Uncle Hank's ranch. He was dad's brother, and he and his two sons, Dallas and Ellery, had several hundred head of Hereford beef cattle. We went there for the annual roundup and branding day. The men had used their horses to herd all the cattle into corrals. Uncle Hank, my cousins Dallas and Ellery

and the neighbor men were all dressed like the cowboys I had seen in the movies. They had large cowboy hats, cowboy boots, thick blue jeans, and cowboy shirts with silver rivets around the pockets. Some of them even wore bandannas to pull over their mouth and nose when the dust from herding the cattle got very thick.

The cowboys separated all the young calves from their mothers, and put the calves into a smaller corral. Then each calf was lassoed, wrestled to the ground, and then branded with a hot branding iron, which burned the ranch initials into the hair and hide of the calf. While they were down, the calves also were given shots, and tagged in the ear. The bull calves also were castrated. It was very noisy, with the calves all bellowing loudly, particularly when they were branded and castrated, and the cows were all bellowing for their calves.

Buzz came with me to see the roundup, and he and I sat on the corral rails and watched all the excitement. We were not big enough to wrestle the calves to the ground, so we were not allowed to help with that, but we did help move cattle among corrals. Dad helped the men do the calves, and mom helped Auntie Emma and the other women with cooking dinner and making lunches.

Late in the afternoon, two of the big bulls accidentally got into the same corral, and they started a major fight; they were in a contest to see which one claimed title to the herd. Hank needed both bulls, and others, to service all of his cows, and he was worried that this fight would result in a serious injury to one or both of these two prize bulls. So Dallas jumped into the corral with a small whip and proceeded to get between the two bulls and whipped both of them until they stopped fighting. The women were all screaming, afraid that Dallas would be killed. But Dallas won the battle, and was the hero of the day.

For the rest of our stay in Watford, Buzz and I were buddies. He took me with him on his paper route and he introduced me to half the people in the town. Most of the people in Watford knew the Hystads and the Frazees; they were both original homesteading families in the county, and many of my relatives from both families still lived in the county. For the first time in my life I got the feeling that I belonged somewhere; I had some roots here in McKenzie County, North Dakota.

My grandfather, Nils Hystad, made a homestead claim on a quarter section of land out north of Watford City, right on the edge of the “breaks” where the prairie starts to be cut by the canyons of the big Missouri River. Grandpa Nils moved his family there in 1908, when dad was five years old. Their first house was made of stone and sod, and it was only about 10 feet wide and 14 feet long; it was hard to believe that grandpa, grandma and all their kids could live in that little hut. But they struggled and made a decent living out of the North Dakota prairie. I knew that several of my father’s brothers and sisters had died as children or young adults, but I knew very little about the lives of my grandparents. I knew that Nils and my grandmother Caroline came from Norway sometime in the 1800s, and that was about all I knew. Dad never talked about his family, and I usually avoided asking him any questions.

While we were there, we spent time with my Hystad relatives, including a visit with dad’s mother, Caroline, who was already 82 years old, and living in Arnegard. This was the first time I remember meeting grandma Caroline. She seemed to be very old, but also very unfriendly, and distant. I said “hi” to her when introduced, but I had no further interaction with that formidable lady. I didn’t remember Grandpa Nils because he died in 1942.

My other grandfather, Morris Clifford Frazee, homesteaded just north of Watford City in about 1906, after moving from Indiana. He

started with a sod hut, and gradually built a large dairy farm that was the primary source of dairy products for Watford. Grandpa Frazee was still alive, but he was living out in Seattle, Washington at the time, so we didn't see him then. Grandma Frazee (Pearl) had died just a few months before I was born, so I never met her. Pearl's parents, my great grandparents, were Theodore Andrew Finley and his wife Mary Smith Finley, who also homesteaded near Watford. So I had deep roots in the Watford City area. I felt at home there. The place was in my blood.

Unfortunately, our time in Watford came to an end too soon, and we were back on the farm near Clitherall. I was back to doing my chores, taking care of the chickens, feeding the pigs, cultivating corn, and a myriad of other duties. One of our chores in the summer was to pick wild berries. We had several Juneberry bushes down by the shore of Clitherall Lake, in the pasture that dad rented, and I spent several days that summer picking June berries for mom to use to make jelly and jam. We also picked chokecherries, gooseberries, and raspberries for mom to make into jellies or jams.

On some Sundays my brothers and I would go down to the Lake in the pasture to take a bath, and play in the water. I didn't like getting in the water there because there was a large patch of weeds in the water that we had to wade through to get into clear water, and sometimes I would get leaches on me while wading through those weeds. The leaches were very yucky, but they didn't really hurt. I didn't know how to swim, because I had never had any swim lessons, and my brothers didn't teach me either. I think Mickey didn't know how to swim either, and if Wally and Norry knew, they didn't bother to try to teach me. So I couldn't go out in deep water; I just went deep enough to get a decent bath. To celebrate my tenth birthday, mom organized a little picnic down by Clitherall Lake.

Clitherall Lake was a very large lake. It was about four miles long and almost as wide, with a very irregular shore line. It was about 90 feet deep in the middle. When the wind blew hard the waves could get very high, with many white caps. It was a good lake for fishing, and every summer fisherman from many other states, including Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, and the Dakotas would come to fish on the lake, usually trying to catch Walleye Pike or the very large Northern Pike.

On Sunday afternoons I would like to go exploring through the woods along Clitherall Lake. Sometimes I would walk almost to the town of Clitherall. I looked for wild animals; sometimes I would see a fox or a skunk. I pretended I was an explorer finding my way through the wilderness, and always on the lookout for Indians. Sometimes I would go the other way along the lake until I came to Scenic Point Resort, which was about a mile from our place. The resort was run by an old fat guy named Lynn Lundquist. He had three or four small cabins that he rented to tourists who wanted to fish in Clitherall Lake. The cabins were not very clean, and there was no running water or indoor toilets. Norry and Wally called the place the "Last Resort". I didn't know what that meant, but they always laughed when they said it, so I assumed it meant that the place was bad.

One Sunday we were just getting ready for Sunday dinner when a small, single-engine airplane flew very low over the house, and then it circled and flew back over the house again, only a couple hundred feet above the ground. Dad said it was Uncle Vance, mom's brother. Mom was very upset; she thought he was going to crash. Vance circled around and landed the plane in the pasture, just a little south of the house. We all ran out to greet him, and walk back to the house with him. He had flown the plane down from Fargo where he was living with his wife Alice and their kids. I liked Vance a lot. He was very friendly to me, and always talked with me like I was an adult. He seemed to be a big guy; bigger than dad; and always in a good mood. Vance gave dad and some of my brothers a ride in the airplane. Mom

wouldn't go for a ride, and she wouldn't let me go either. But it was fun watching the plane take off and land in the pasture, and fly low over the house and barn. Dad and my brothers got to see what the farm looked like from the sky, and they flew out over Clitherall Lake and they could see for miles in every direction.

Mom was proud of her younger brother, but she worried that he would kill himself flying those planes. Mom worried about almost everything. Just about anything was likely to kill us, including bulls, cows, horses, pigs, all sorts of farm machinery, cars, planes, trains, boats, going in the lake after eating, breathing in germs, colds, flu, pneumonia, tuberculosis, polio, diphtheria, rheumatic fever, blood poisoning, lightning, sunstroke, freezing, windstorms, bats, skunks, rats, wild dogs, Negroes, Mexicans, Indians, any stranger, climbing ladders or trees or into the hay mow; there was almost no end to the imminent threats to our lives. Mom had watched her grandmother Finley die in a car accident when mom was 16 years old, and she understood how easy it was for a person to die.

Mom did her best to keep us out of danger; fortunately she couldn't over-protect nine kids. Mom also did her best to make sure we were well fed. I particularly enjoyed her baking: hot bread with butter and jam; fresh doughnuts; banana cream pie; cinnamon rolls; chocolate cake; angel food cake, and more.

Back to School

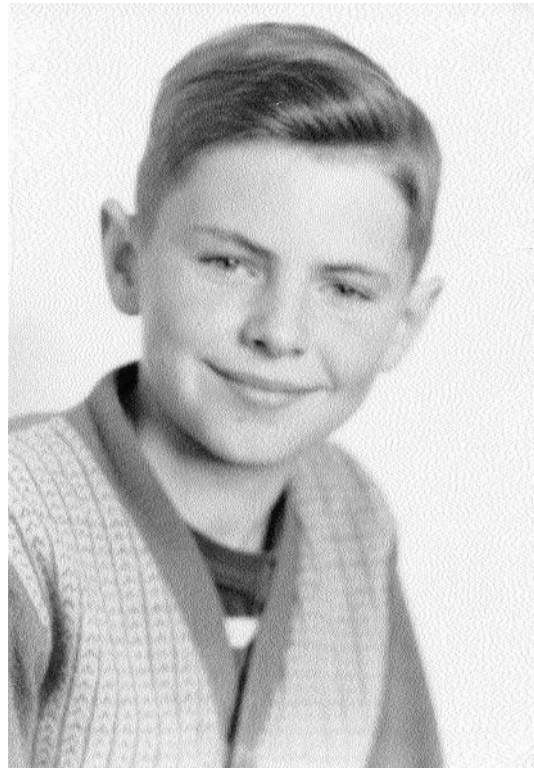
September came too soon, and I went back to school, in the fifth grade. But Mickey would be going off to Morris high school this year, so I was the oldest Hystad kid in the school, for the first time. Valeria was in the third grade. Wally would be in his third year at Morris.

The schoolhouse on the prairie was just one story high, with a little belfry on top, which had a bell to call students in from recess. The only door was on the end of the building facing the road, and inside was a small entryway with a long row of hooks to hang coats, and a jug of

water on a stand and a shelf to put lunch buckets. Beyond the entry was the school room which was the remainder of the building. It was about 18 feet wide and 35 feet long, with blackboards along the front wall, and some old roll maps hanging between the windows on the side walls. In the back of the room was the large coal or wood burning space heater to heat the room, and some cabinets and shelves to store books and supplies. These small cabinets and shelves also served as the “library”. Near the blackboard in front was the teacher’s desk, and over in the front corner of the room was a table where the teacher met with the students in each grade to go through their lessons. In the center of the room were four rows of desks facing the black board, ranging from very small desks for first graders on the north side of the room to very large desks for eighth graders on the south side, with four to six desks in each row.

We had no Superintendent there; no Principal; no office staff; no teachers’ aides; no janitors; no resource specialists; no nurses; no cooks or nutritionists; no police officers; just a teacher and the students. The teacher had been hired directly by the parents of the students, and the parents got daily reports from their children on the performance of the teacher. The teacher knew she would be out of work if the parents were not satisfied.

This is my school picture taken while I was in the fifth grade.



Now that Norry was no longer living at home, Wally and Mickey had to deal with each other more. Wally didn't have Norry as a buddy anymore, and Mickey was getting almost as big as Wally and doing many more farm chores. Wally often would bully Mickey, and tease him, or criticize him; Wally still thought Mickey was dumb and lazy. One day Mickey got so mad at Wally that he grabbed a kitchen butcher knife and started chasing Wally around the kitchen table. I thought he would kill Wally if he ever caught him; but Wally was too fast for him, and eventually Mickey gave up and put down the knife. I felt sorry for Mickey. But Wally seemed to be a little more careful what he said and did to Mickey after that day.

When Wally and Mickey went off to Morris in October, I had to do a lot more work around the farm. I had several new chores to do in the barn, including pitching hay down from the hay mow to feed the cattle. The hay mow was very large; it was over 20 feet from the hay mow floor to the peak of the barn, and the hay was piled almost to the ceiling when haying was done. It was very hard to pull the hay loose; I had to climb to the top of the pile and then pull out clumps of hay with the hay fork and throw the hay down through the trapdoor in the floor, down to the bottom level of the barn where the cows were. Then I would climb down and carry the hay to spread it in the manger in front of all the cattle. I also had to dig silage out of the silo and throw it down the chute to feed the cattle, and give each cow a scoop of ground grain every morning and evening.

I also helped clean manure out of the barn. There was a gutter in the floor behind the cows, so when they pooped and peed most of it would go in the gutter. I had to scrape all the manure and dirty straw into the gutter and then load it all into the wheelbarrow and push the wheelbarrow outside and up a plank to the top of the manure pile and dump it. Every day there would be several loads of manure to remove. Then I would spread some clean straw between the cows and under their legs so they wouldn't get all dirty when they laid down.

And I helped dad load grain and corn into the pickup to take to the grain elevator in town where he had it ground up into feed for the cattle. This ground feed was very dusty, and I would get dust all over me when I would unload the pickup by shoveling the feed into the storage bin in the barn.

I still had to take care of the chickens, gather the eggs, clean and crate the eggs, feed the pigs, carry water to the house, and help mom with the dishes. In the winter time it would be dark in the morning when I got up to do the chores, and it would be dark again when I did the chores after school. I usually got very cold while doing these chores, particularly while carrying feed and water to the pigs and chickens, and water to the house. Even the hay mow and silo were very cold. Only the downstairs of the barn was warm, because of the heat from the cattle.

There were some important advantages to having Wally and Mickey gone to Morris, and Norry off working. I had my own bedroom for much of the winter!! I also had less competition for food on the table, and could now get some of the best food rather than the leftovers. Mom usually had some sort of meat for every meal, including beef roast, meatloaf, meat balls, pork chops, pork roast, Swiss steak, fried chicken, roasted chicken, and various forms of hash. She almost always had potatoes and gravy and some vegetable from the garden or from the canning jars in the cellar. Rarely we would have macaroni and cheese, but that was not something we could grow at home, so it required cash. We never had rice or pasta except the macaroni. Some evenings when she was running low on meat, mom would serve some non-meat meals, such as pancakes with eggs, or milk mush with cinnamon, cream and sugar. I don't know how milk mush was made, but it appeared to be heated milk mixed with white flour until thick, sort of like cream of wheat cereal.

I enjoyed most of the food mom made, except liver from the butchered steer; just the smell of that made me ill. Mom and dad

always insisted that I eat it, and I never would. Mom also occasionally made a tomato stew dish, consisting of chopped up canned tomatoes mixed with chopped up stale bread and some other unknown ingredients, and it looked and smelled sort of like something my dog Shep might have thrown up when sick. I couldn't stand to even look at it.

I guess my sisters helped mom in the house a little, but they still were not expected to do any work outside, and from my perspective they didn't do much inside either, because I still had to help wash dishes. I guess that my sisters thought they had lots of work to do indoors. Valeria reminded me of Mickey; she was frequently getting into trouble with mom or dad for some misdeed or failure to obey. But unlike Mickey, she seemed to enjoy rebelling against the rules, while Mickey seemed to just forget about any rules while he was absorbed in some new adventure.

Phyllis, on the other hand, was the darling daughter. She had an endearing personality and, like Wally, was adept at appealing to her parents. She had a sweet singing voice, and was frequently asked to sing for us. She also had an incredible memory for past events; she could tell us exactly what we ate for supper on a particular evening six months ago, and exactly what everyone was wearing, and what was said by whom. Some evenings at the supper table we would be entertained by Phyllis describing past events in amazing detail.

Eileen and the twins were still too young to have much of an impact on family life, or at least on my life.

That Fall I overheard dad mumbling about that damn Harry Truman out on the campaign trail. Dad was quite disappointed when Truman defeated Dewey. I guess he was looking forward to a political appointment or something if the Republicans had won?

Learning to be Good Lutherans

Mom continued to insist that her kids would go to Sunday School at Nidaros Lutheran Church almost every Sunday during the Summer and Fall. Nidaros church was a pretty nice church for a rural community; it was a large white church surrounded by the cemetery; it had a tall steeple with a large bell; it had four stained-glass windows on each side; it had a balcony where I preferred to sit but I usually was not allowed; and it had a full basement with a kitchen, for Sunday School and Bible School and all sorts of community events.

I had been attending Sunday School periodically for the past three or four years, and I thought I was not learning anything useful. I learned some bible verses, and some songs, but nothing that was ever going to help me make a living. I learned about the Creation, and God making Eve from Adam's rib, and the Garden of Eden and how Eve got Adam in deep trouble just by eating an apple; I couldn't understand why all of us should be punished just because those two naked people ate an apple many, many years ago. I learned that many guys with funny names like Job and Ezekial begat someone else with a funny name, who begat someone else with a funny name and on and on.

I also learned that Jesus was born on Christmas Day and that his daddy was God, and that Mary was a virgin, but at the time I had no idea what a virgin was, and the Sunday School teacher didn't seem to know either, because she was never able to explain it to us. She said it was someone who was pure and unsoiled and not known by man. I didn't understand what she meant by that. But then my brothers explained it to me; it was like a cow having a calf without any bull around. I knew that wasn't possible. And later I wondered what was wrong with Joseph, and what his reaction was when he was informed that his virgin wife was going to have a child fathered by an angel. Probably something like: "Oh, that's wonderful; what great news."

Every Fall, about in mid-October, we would start preparing for the Christmas pageant which all the Sunday School kids would present on Christmas night, right up there at the altar, where we were not allowed to go during the rest of the year. I had started out as a sheep in earlier years, and then graduated to be a shepherd, and this year I was going to be one of the Wise Men. I would have at least one line to say: "I have brought gold and myrrh and frankincense for the Lord our Savior." I had no idea what myrrh and frankincense were, but I didn't need to know, I just needed to say the words. So on Christmas night the entire family, except my brothers, got bundled up and went to Nidaros Church, and we all sang carols and told the story about the birth of Jesus and the star of Bethlehem and the fact that there were no rooms available anywhere so they had to stay in the barn and sleep in the manger. I had real empathy for their situation; I'd rather sleep with my sisters than in the barn, and I hated sleeping with my sisters.

We had many snow storms that winter, and the snow was piled high along the county road in front of the school house. Some days the road would be closed completely as the snow drifted across the snow banks on each side. Each time the snowplow went down the road, the snow banks on each side would get higher and the road would get narrower, until it was just one lane wide in most places, with snow banks eight to ten feet high on both sides. In early February another blizzard filled the road full of snow again, and it was so deep that the snowplow couldn't get through anymore, so they brought out two bulldozers to push the snow banks back on both sides of the road and make it two lanes again.

Shortly after that we had a few days of nice warm weather and some of the snow melted and formed ponds of water in all the low-lying areas. One of those ponds was just across the road from the school house, and each morning the pond would be covered with rubber ice. Clayton and Duane and I were the oldest kids in the school now, and

we were being brave and walking on the rubber ice. If we moved fast and gently over the ice we could keep from breaking through; it was sort of like walking on a soft mattress or a waterbed. But on the second day of this, I was showing off a little too much, and was going farther out on the ice than anyone. Suddenly I broke through the ice and fell into water that came all the way up to my waist. It was ice cold water, and it was difficult to get out of the water because the ice kept breaking around me. I had to wade through the water, breaking ice as I went to get to the edge. I quickly ran into the school house to keep from freezing to death.

The teacher told me to take off my blue jeans and underwear and hang them over the coal-burning heater in the back of the room to let them dry. She told me to hurry and get out of those wet clothes before I caught my death of a cold. I told the teacher that I wasn't going to get naked in front of all the kids in school; there were girls there, including Sharon, who thought I was her boyfriend, and Jeannette Koep, who was in the second grade, in addition to my sister. I refused to get undressed in front of them and sit naked until my clothes dried. There was no place to hide in that one-room school house. About then Clayton volunteered to loan me an extra pair of jeans that he had. So the teacher told me to get out of my clothes and put on Clayton's jeans. But I refused unless the teacher made sure everyone looked the other way while I changed clothes. Everyone looked the other way for awhile as I struggled to pull off my sopping wet, cold jeans and long johns, and then struggled to pull on Clayton's jeans over my bare skin that was still wet.

I kept trying to make sure no one was watching, but I know that some of them peaked at me, because there was lots of snickering and giggling around the room, and Sharon teased me later that she saw my bare butt. And all of the kids teased me about it later. I decided that it didn't pay to be showing off and taking unnecessary risks. I thought I was the biggest and bravest, but I ended up making a fool of myself.

Winter time at the north place always brought with it a few visits by Lynn Lundquist. The first time I saw him I thought he was a large black bear moving slowly across the snow-covered fields toward our house. When he was within a few hundred yards I started smelling a strong odor that was a cross between Lysol disinfectant and chicken manure. He would stop at our house to warm up on his way to Clitherall to buy supplies. Lynn lived alone at Scenic Point Resort, and the road to his house usually was impassable by automobile for several months during the winter, so he would get on his snow shoes and walk to town and back. Sometimes, when the ice on the lake was not covered with too much snow, he would just drive his car across the lake to Clitherall. Lynn was over six feet tall and probably weighed over 230 pounds, and he would be wearing a large bearskin coat that went all the way to the ground. After seeing and smelling Lynn up close, I imagined that he never took a bath or even changed clothes from about October 1st through late May. The skin on his neck and wrists was an orange color, apparently from applying Lysol. He told us that he used to be the school teacher at my school, years ago, and when his parents died he inherited the farm where he now lived.

Spring did finally come again, in 1949, and the ice eventually melted on Clitherall Lake. By time school was out at the end of May, the water temperature in the lake was probably up to about 40 degrees, but that was better than taking a bath in the wash tub in the kitchen with everybody watching me. 1949 was not a good year for the farm; prices for most farm products had been declining since the war ended, and dad was making less money from selling eggs and milk. And then most of the cows got a disease called mastitis that damaged the cows' udders and made the milk bloody. He had to sell the infected cows and buy replacement cows. We had even less money than usual. Wally would be going into his senior year at Morris high school, and he was still at home helping dad with farming most of the summer. So dad had plenty of help but that didn't result in more money.

Chicken Farmers

Dad decided to become a big-time chicken grower. He converted every building space available into brooder houses for chicks. The main brooder house was the farm house on the south place. The house was not lived in, and it had two big rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs, that dad filled with baby chicks. We had about 2000 chicks that Spring. Each room would have several hundred chicks which we got just after they hatched. We had hoods close to the floor, with a kerosene lantern under each hood to provide heat; the chicks would get under the hood to get warm and come out to the feeders and water pans when they were hungry or thirsty. As they grew larger and the days got warmer, they were fed and watered outside. Everywhere one looked there were chickens; thousands of chickens. I had to take care of the chickens on the north place. Dad or Wally or Mickey usually took care of the chickens on the south place, because they could drive over there.

The summer of 1949 was great for me, as usual. It was warm again. I enjoyed cultivating corn with the Allis Chalmers. Mickey and I spent many days hauling manure from the manure pile by the barn, which was not so much fun. I was making plans to be a farmer when I grew up. I decided that I would have a very large farm, and that I would have the very best operation, with top quality livestock and crops. I decided I would have a large dairy operation, a large hog farm, a large poultry operation, and maybe have a large beef cattle herd also if I could get enough land. I had concluded that I could make more money than dad was able to make if I had a much larger farm, with the latest machines. I also thought I should not specialize in one product, such as dairy; I should have three or four specialty areas so that I could still make money even if prices were bad in one area. I also thought that maybe I would buy Scenic Point Resort and expand that into a major year-around resort, to supplement my farming operation. I had no idea where I was going to get the money to do all

this, but maybe I would inherit dad's farms someday, and that would give me a good start.

We had relatives visit that summer. Our cousin Maurice, who was about 17, came and stayed with us for a few weeks; he spent most of his time fishing. His sister Nyla also visited us for about a week. She was Mickey's age, and I thought she wasn't very attractive; she had big lips and was way too old for me, and I thought she talked too much. But she decided she wanted to teach me how to kiss a girl properly. She was only 15, so I don't know how she learned to be a kissing teacher, but she was intent on teaching me. She taught me how I was supposed to pucker my lips, and how I should hold a girl when I kissed her, and she wanted me to practice on her over and over, but I escaped to the corn fields. I had just turned eleven years old, and I was not interested in kissing old girls.

Uncle Morris, Auntie Olga, Clifford, Clinton and Curtis also came to visit. Uncle Morris spent most of his time fishing, but I was able to spend some time with Clifford and Clinton showing them what farming was all about, including how to drive the tractor and how to take care of chickens. They were not very interested in learning about farming; it seemed like hard work. They preferred to go down to the lake to swim, or play hide and seek in the corn field.

This was a bad summer for Mickey. One day I was reading a comic book that someone had left at the house, and Mickey tried to take it away from me. I ran across the yard to get away from him, but Mickey caught me and grabbed the comic book. As he ran away from me, he stepped on a board which had a long nail sticking up from it. The nail went all the way into his bare foot. He pulled the nail out and blood started squirting out in large amounts with each beat of his heart. He had punctured an artery. I helped him get down the hill to the house. Blood was squirting all over the kitchen floor. Mom screamed and tried to stop the blood by holding a cloth on the wound, but blood still

kept coming fast. I told mom we needed to put a tourniquet on his leg, like I had read about in school. We got a tourniquet around his leg and twisted it tight, and the blood flow slowed down. Mom told me to take care of Mickey while she went to the south place to get dad who was working in the fields there. I remembered to release the tourniquet every couple minutes to let some blood flow to the rest of his leg, and then tightened it up again. The kitchen floor was covered in blood. Finally mom came back with dad and we put Mickey in the car and they took him to the doctor in Battle Lake. The doctor fixed him up and gave him a tetanus shot and sent him home.

A few weeks later, Mickey was “investigating” a piece of machinery which was used to strip grass seed from June grass, and he got his hand caught between a chain and gears and cut three of his fingers very severely. I had to help him get his hand free from the gear, and then help stop the bleeding until dad came to take him to the doctor and patch him up again.

September rolled around too soon, and I went back to school, in the sixth grade. Valeria was in the fourth grade, and Phyllis started first grade. School was different this year because the Paulson school was reopened and Clayton and Sharon went back to that school. So it was just Duane Koep and me in the sixth grade. Duane weighed more than me, and I still had to beat him in a fight every so often to keep him from trying to tell me what to do. Unfortunately Duane was not a great student, so I no longer had much competition in school now that Clayton was gone. I got good grades in school, but I found it quite boring now without the competition and without Sharon trying to be my girlfriend.

Arlene Johnson was our teacher. She had been our teacher for the past two years, and I liked her. She lived with her parents just about a mile east of the school, and she was the sister of Cleve Johnson who lived just south of the school. She started teaching at our school right after

she graduated from teachers college, so she probably was only about 23 years old. She was pretty; very slim and had nice blue eyes, and I sometimes wished I was older so I could give her hugs and kisses.

Miss Johnson gave me extra work to do to keep me busy at school. She suggested I do some wood work; learn how to make things from wood. She showed me a magazine article about how to draw large pictures of animals, and then cut their shapes out of wood.. So I tried that. I found some small pictures of animals, like Porky the Pig and Donald Duck and some horses and cows. I marked a grid on the small picture, and made a similar but larger grid on a big piece of plywood that the teacher had at school. Then I drew the animal on the plywood, following the pattern on each grid square. I made some very good drawings of the animals. Then I cut out the figures with a hand jig saw, and painted the animals. The teacher liked the animals and hung them around the room for the parents to see when they came to visit.

In late September we had our usual chicken roundup. Every summer the chickens were allowed to run free outdoors. As the young roosters got big enough to eat, we would catch a couple for every Sunday dinner, and that year we also caught hundreds of "broilers" to be sent to market. But the laying hens had to be locked up indoors in the winter or they would freeze to death. About half of the hens would roost in the chicken coop every night, but the others would start roosting in trees during the summer. Every Fall, when the first snow storm hit, dad would decide it was time to lock the chickens up for the winter. The only way to catch all the chickens was to wait until dark when the chickens went to roost, and then sneak up on them and grab them and carry them to the chicken coop. So one very cold stormy night, with a mix of snow and rain blowing hard in our faces, dad, Mickey, and I set about the task of capturing 200 plus chickens roosting in many trees around the farm yard. Sometimes we could reach them from the ground, and we would grab their legs and

put them in a sack. For some of them we had to climb the tree to reach them, and for some we used a long pole with a wire hook on the end to slip around a leg of the hen and pull it out of the tree. It took about three hours or more to catch almost all of the hens and lock them in the chicken coop. A couple of them escaped and disappeared in the snow and darkness. By the time we finished, I was soaking wet, with scratches and scrapes from the trees and the chickens, and completely worn out. I always wondered why dad didn't do this on a nice pleasant Fall evening rather than waiting for a storm! I guess winter always took him by surprise.

Butchering Time

That Fall we also had the usual butchering of a steer. Usually I would be in school when the butchering took place, but this year I was there to help. Dad selected the steer that he thought would bring the least amount of money at the stock yards; we herded it into the barn, tied a halter around its head, and brought it outside of the barn, under the hoist that was used to lift hay into the hay mow. Then Billy Hanson shot the steer in the head a couple of times. After it fell they tied the hoist rope to its hind legs and used the tractor to pull the steer up in the air by its hind legs. Then they cut open its throat so the blood would drain out. When most of the blood was out, they started with the butchering. They cut open the belly from top to bottom and removed all the intestines and internal organs, followed by removing the entire hide from the remaining carcass. Now they were ready to cut it into quarters, which dad took to the butcher in Battle Lake who cut it into various roasts, ribs, stew meat and hamburger and put it into the freezer locker that dad had rented at the creamery. This was our primary supply of meat for the winter, along with one hog and many chickens.

At Christmas that year I got a very special gift. Santa Claus was no longer bringing me presents, but mom and dad gave me a Brownie

box camera that used number 127 film. It was a very small (and very inexpensive) camera, but it was the one thing I really wanted for Christmas. I immediately started taking pictures. I loved taking pictures. The biggest problem was getting any money to buy film and to get the pictures developed, so my photography was carefully rationed.



Above is one of the few of my photos that have survived.
It shows a typical snow scene on our farm.

Saving My Sisters

I saved the lives of Valeria and Phyllis that winter. The three of us almost always walked to school, about a half mile across our field to Broberg's farm, and then about another half mile to the school house. It was open prairie all the way, where the winds could become very strong, and there was no shelter of any kind. One morning in January the three of us set off for school. The temperature was about 20 below zero. This was not unusual. If it had been 35 below, then dad might have taken us to school, but it was only about 20 below so we could walk; a sixth grader, a fourth grader and a first grader. As we climbed the hill from our house, up to the open prairie, we discovered that the wind was quite strong, and it seemed to be getting worse. The snow was blowing and drifting and getting deep in places where we

usually walked. It seemed to be much colder than 20 below, and the deep snow made it slow walking.

After we had walked about two-thirds of the way across our field, Valeria said she was tired and she just laid down in the snow. She said she wasn't going any farther. I pulled her up and told her she would freeze to death if she didn't keep going fast, but she wouldn't walk. Then Phyllis said she was tired and wanted to rest and take a nap. I had heard about people getting so cold that they just went to sleep and never woke up again, and I decided that this was happening to my sisters. I concluded that it was closer to go back home than to continue on to school, so I decided to go back as fast as we could. I got my sisters up and yelled at them to walk and run if they could, we were going back home. I was pulling them along as fast as they would go. We made it almost back to the granary at the top of the hill, only a couple of hundred yards from the house, when Valeria wouldn't walk anymore, and laid down in the snow. I left her and pulled Phyllis to the house, and then dad and I went back and got Valeria.

Both of them had frost bite on their cheeks, toes and fingers, but it was not serious. After an hour or so of slowly warming up, they were back to normal. I don't recall that they ever thanked me for saving their lives, but I didn't expect any thanks, and I'm sure that they didn't understand that they would have died if I had not been there.

As Spring came, I had another opportunity to save my sisters. The three of us were walking home from school, and we walked through our cow pasture for the final quarter of a mile or so, which was one of our usual routes home. As we were about half way across the pasture, one of the cows started pawing the dirt like a mad bull and then she charged at us. And most of our cows had long horns, so they could be very dangerous. I had never seen a cow act like that before; I was used to cows running away from me when I chased them. I knew that we couldn't outrun this cow, so I picked up a stick and ran toward the

cow, waving the stick and yelling as loud as I could; at the last second she turned and ran away. I quickly got my sisters out of the pasture and we made our way home. At home I learned that one of the cows had hemorrhaged while calving, and had bled to death. Apparently the sight or smell of all that blood or the death of the cow had caused the other cows to become very agitated and aggressive. We were very lucky that we were not gored. I guess someone should have warned us to stay out of the pasture.

I had a bad toothache that Spring. Normally, dad would just get his pliers and pull any tooth that was hurting, but this was a big tooth toward the back of my mouth so they decided to take me to a dentist. It was the first and only time I was ever to a dentist while I lived at home. After inspecting the tooth, the dentist pulled out his largest shiny pliers and proceeded to try to pull the tooth. He yanked and twisted and turned and strained for what seemed like an hour, but the tooth would not budge. Finally he gave up, and said he couldn't do it. Maybe I should see a specialist. Mom and dad took me home. Eventually the tooth stopped hurting and the swelling subsided. Mom and dad had a limited understanding of dental care. We seldom brushed our teeth, although occasionally mom would decide that we needed to brush our teeth, sharing some old tooth brush and using a dab of baking soda. We never went to see a dentist for checkups. Both dad and mom had lost all of their teeth already, and I guess they assumed this was normal.

The Storm

Summer came again, and it was warm, but the summer of 1950 was not good. Wally was now gone away to work also, so it was just Mickey and me at home to help with farming, and we both had more work to do. After getting all Spring planting done, Mickey and I were given the job of loading the huge manure pile into the manure spreader and spreading it on the summer fallow fields. Much of this

manure pile had been there for several years; the pile was large when we bought the place, and it had been reduced only slightly over the past couple of years. The pile was about 12 feet high and was as long as the barn, about 70 feet, and about 25 feet wide; it was enormous. Our job was to completely remove this huge mound of manure. Every day we would work on it from right after morning chores until we had to start evening chores. After about two weeks of pitching manure, we had the pile almost gone. It was getting late in the afternoon of June 15 when we finished loading the last load of manure. Mickey and I joked that we had moved so much manure away from the barn that the barn might fall down.

It had been very hot the past couple of days, and June 15 was a particularly hot day. We had noticed that dark clouds were gathering on the western horizon as we loaded the last couple of loads of manure, and now it was looking like a major thunder storm was about to blow in. I ran up to the chicken coop to water and feed the chickens and gather eggs before the storm hit, and Mickey put the milk cows in the barn to get ready for evening milking. As I finished gathering the eggs, the wind started blowing and the rain began. I started toward the house. At the same time, dad had arrived from the field and parked the tractor in the machine shed just on the other side of the granary from the chicken coop. We both started running down the hill to the house. We were running against the wind, and the wind got so strong that we were almost crawling against the wind by the time we reached the house. As we got to the porch, we turned around and saw the machine shed take off straight up into the air like a helicopter, and then it sailed off east and out of sight.

The wind blew stronger and the rain started coming down in sheets so thick that we couldn't see anything. Mom said we should go to the cellar in case the house blew down. Dad said no, we would not go into the cellar, because he knew of someone who had died in a cellar when the house fell in on them, but he did tell mom and the girls to go into

the old log part of the house that he thought would be the most sturdy. Dad, Mickey and I stayed on the porch and watched. Suddenly we heard a faint crashing sound through the roar of the storm and then one of the cows came running from the barn toward the house like she had been shot out of a cannon. A little while later the rain let up a bit and dad said that he thought the barn was gone; he couldn't see it through the rain. But the storm continued for another fifteen minutes or more, until it finally died down to a gray drizzle. We ventured outside.

The barn was indeed blown down. It didn't blow away, it just folded over like a crushed cardboard box. The big silo was also down. Big trees were uprooted all around the yard. Debris was scattered everywhere. Then we remembered that Mickey had put the cows in the barn for milking. Fortunately we were only milking three cows at the time, because most of them were dry in the summer. We ran to the barn to see whether it was possible to save any of the cows. We quickly discovered that one of the cows had somehow escaped from her stanchion which was firmly locked around her neck and had apparently hurtled herself over barriers to try to escape. We found her trapped under low hanging debris, but mainly unhurt. We were being very careful searching in the barn, because it might still collapse further and crush us.

We found a second cow already dead; she had been crushed where she stood as the weight of the barn came down on her back. She was one of our best Holstein cows. The third cow was still alive but trapped under all the timbers of the upper floor and roof of the barn. Her neck was still in the stanchion, which had been squeezed almost shut under the weight of the building. It didn't seem possible that she could still breathe. She must have been lying down when the barn fell, which minimized the impact on her. Dad debated whether to try to rescue her or put her out of her misery. Probably because he had no humane way of killing her, he decided we would try to get her out from under all that rubble.

By now, strangers were starting to drive into our yard, park their cars and stare at the rubble. We were told by some of these strangers that they had watched funnel clouds come from the west, travel right across Clitherall Lake and continue on east. They came to see what damage had been done. They said that Broberg's barn and other buildings were gone, and that Cleve Johnson's barn was down. Their farms were just east of our place. Within a half hour or so, hundreds of strangers and neighbors had arrived at our farm. Most just gawked; some helped us try to rescue the cow; and many just got in the way. We worked with saws and bars and hammers and mauls and whatever tools were available to cut away all the timber above the trapped cow, and finally we had her free. But she was not able to stand on her own. We got ropes and canvas under her and several men were able to lift her out of the hole and move her away from the debris. A veterinarian checked her and concluded that she probably had internal injuries, but no obvious broken bones.

We learned that Cleve Johnson had not been as lucky. We had lost only one cow, and possibly another. He lost fifteen prized Jersey cows that were in his barn, when the wind tore off the top of the barn and dropped tons of hay onto the cows, suffocating all of them. Sven Broberg lost only a couple of cows when the top half of his barn blew away.

The next morning I awoke and asked Mickey if the barn had blown down. I thought maybe I had been having a nightmare. He said it either was blown down or he had been having the same nightmare. We looked out our bedroom window in the gray, wet dawn, and saw that we were not dreaming. As dad surveyed the damage that day, he found that things were worse than he initially thought, because a large portion of the crops were ruined also, either flooded or blown away. Many chickens also were missing, apparently blown away in the wind. Sven Broberg found one of our oil cans that had been in the machine shed, embedded in a tree, nearly a mile from our house.

Pieces of the machine shed and barn were strewn over the fields for over a half mile.

The next few days we worked to pick up scattered debris in the fields and then we started taking the barn apart, board by board. Dad wanted to save as much of the lumber as possible to use in a new barn. He borrowed some big nail pullers and put Mickey and me to work pulling nails out of boards and timbers from sections of the collapsed barn. We worked all day long pulling the barn apart, day after day. We gradually collected unbroken boards and put them into stacks to be reused. Dad had been meeting with the insurance man to see how much the insurance would pay, so he could start building a new barn. We needed to have a barn before winter.

Ten days after the barn blew down, Cleve Johnson came by to see how much damage we had suffered. He was terribly upset about his cows, and then he said he didn't know if it was even worth rebuilding the barn, because he had just heard on the radio that the communists from North Korea had invaded South Korea, and we could be in a nuclear war soon and we could all be blasted to bits or killed by radiation. This was the first time I was aware of the threat of nuclear bombs. I was wishing that Cleve had kept this news to himself; we already had enough bad news.

Despite that threat of nuclear holocaust, dad decided to build a new barn, and to build it on the south place, rather than rebuild where we were, because the south place had a nicer flat area for a barn, and the house there was a little bigger. He concluded that he should use this as an opportunity to move to the nicer place. So we immediately started working on the south place so it would be ready by winter. Dad hired a builder to help build a new barn, and he leveled a spot for the new barn. We started cleaning the chicken manure and feathers and dirt out of the house on the south place, which had been used as a chicken house that Spring. We scrubbed, painted, wall papered, put down linoleum, and fixed windows.

The Painter

After I had finished pulling thousands of nails and stacking the salvageable boards from the old barn, I was given the job of scraping and painting the outside of the house on the south place. I worked every spare moment I had, and I also had to help dad and Mickey with haying. We didn't have any barn to put the hay in, so we had to stack it in the field and outside the pasture fence near where the new barn would be.

By my 12th birthday on the 17th of July, I had almost finished painting the outside of the house. By then the new barn was already being built. The builders were now raising the rafters and putting on the roof. I helped nail on siding boards on the inside of the barn walls. The barn was smaller than the old barn, but it had room for about 12 milk cows, a big calf pen, and a pig pen. And upstairs was a hay mow with a new pine floor and a big barn door to bring hay in on the steel track attached to the peak of the barn.

When the barn was almost finished in mid-August, dad decided he should have a barn dance before starting to use the barn.. He remembered playing music at barn dances in North Dakota when he was young, and he thought a barn dance would be good way to raise some money to help pay for the barn. He wanted to have the dance there soon, so he could put some hay in the hay mow before winter. So he built a special stairway up to the hay mow, where the dancing would be; he hired a dance band; he put notices in the two local newspapers; he put up some posters on store windows in Clitherall; and he personally invited everyone he knew.

No Dancing for Me

I was all excited about going to the barn dance. I had never seen a dance of any kind, and now I would have a chance to see people dance in the barn that I had helped build. I was looking forward to the coming Saturday night when the big dance was scheduled. The house on the south place was not yet ready to move into, so we were still living on the north place. On Saturday afternoon, mom told me that I

would be in charge of baby sitting my sisters that evening, because dad, mom and Mickey would be at the barn dance, and they would be late. I begged mom to let me go to the dance. Why couldn't the girls come to; I could watch them there. Or maybe Mickey and I could take turns watching the girls. Mom said no; they needed Mickey to help work at the dance, and my sisters and I were too young to be at the dance.

I was outraged; I was devastated; I was never going to speak to my parents again. I left the house and started walking across the pasture toward Clitherall. I would run away from home. I was tired of being treated like a slave. I got no appreciation for all the work I did. I was expected to work like a man, but otherwise I was treated like a child. I could go live somewhere else. Where should I go? I didn't have any money. Maybe I could hitchhike. After walking for a couple of miles I was getting discouraged about where I could go; where would I sleep tonight? Where would I get something to eat? After awhile I decided to go back home; I would run away from home later. I needed to try to get some money and decide where I should go.

That evening after I got my sisters to bed, I stood outside the house and listened to the noise coming from the barn dance a half mile away. I could faintly hear the music, and I could hear a lot of loud laughter and shouting. Finally I went to bed, feeling very, very sorry for myself.

The following Monday dad told me to get a big bucket and start picking up all the empty beer bottles and soda pop bottles that were strewn all over the yard around the new barn. I picked up hundreds of bottles; they were in the field, and in the woods, and in the weeds, and behind the house, and everywhere. What a party it must have been. I kept telling myself that I needed to focus on how I was going to run away. Maybe I could sell some of these bottles and get some money. Maybe I could get enough money to take a train to Watford City and live with my cousins. I decided to forget about my dream of becoming a big-time farmer some day.

When I had finished picking up all the bottles I could find, dad told me to start painting the barn. He wanted it painted white, and he had several five-gallon cans of paint for me to use. I spent the next three weeks, all day long, all week long, painting the barn white, from top to bottom, on all four sides. I climbed the ladder all the way up to the peak of the barn, carrying a bucket of paint and a big brush, and I brushed the paint on the siding. Paint would drip on my clothes and my hands and my hair as I reached high above my head to paint the roof overhang. Everyday I got up, did the chores, ate breakfast, and then painted all day long. But I was too young to go to the barn dance. And now I didn't even have time to think about running away.



This is a photo of the new barn, taken several years later. The lean-tos on each side of the barn were not part of the original barn. Notice the open door on the second floor. This was the door dad made for people to get into the hay mow for the barn dance.

Moving South

Before school started again, we moved to the south place. We moved all the cows and calves and chickens and pigs and machinery and furniture and people. And my dog Shep, of course. The house here was really not much better than the north place. It had only two rooms downstairs, although those two rooms were larger than the rooms on the north place, and a porch which we had enclosed. One room was used as the kitchen; the other room was the living room, with the heater. The enclosed porch was used as the wash room and the entry way. Upstairs, there was a bedroom over the kitchen, where mom, dad and the twins slept, a smaller bedroom over part of the living room, where Valeria, Phyllis and Eileen slept, and a little space at the top of the stairs, just large enough for a double bed, which is where Mickey and I were supposed to sleep. Wow! Isn't this great? Everyone gets to walk through this hallway that passes for our bedroom on the way to their bedroom! Now that is real privacy. Real first class. Why do my bedrooms keep getting worse every time we move?



This is a photo of the house on the south place.

That year I looked forward to going back to school. It was an escape from work and my parents. I was in seventh grade, and Duane Koep was my only classmate. Valeria was in fifth grade and Phyllis was in second grade. The south place was a little bit closer to the school house; just under one mile, and we could walk along the old rutted road that ran straight west from the school and separated our north place and south place. Unfortunately, Arlene Johnson was no longer our teacher; she got married and moved away. I missed her. The new teacher was an ugly old lady of about 50 who seemed to me to be a little stupid, and lazy. She also didn't smell very good, and often looked like she needed sleep badly. She often didn't have assignments for us to do, and sometimes she wouldn't even correct the work we did. She told me to read any books that interested me in the school library. But the collection of books was very small, and not many of them interested me. We had no books at home, except the bible, and mom and dad never encouraged me to read. Although I was getting good grades, I was afraid that I was not learning much.

And just because I was in school again didn't excuse me from all farm work. I had to stay home to help dig and pick the potatoes that Fall, and to help haul silage from the field to the silage pit that dad had dug because we didn't have a silo built yet.

Mickey went off to Morris again in October, in his third year there. So I had the bed to myself most of the time, except when Wally or Norry were visiting. Wally and Norry were both worried that they would be drafted into the Army to go fight in Korea. They both decided that they would enlist in the Air Force rather than being drafted by the Army. So Wally enlisted and went into the Air Force in November of 1950, and Norry left right after Christmas. Mom was very worried about them, and would cry when they called on the telephone to tell her that they were still alive. They called from foreign places like Texas and Louisiana and California, that were far away, with very strange living practices and seldom any snow.

With Mickey at Morris, and Wally and Norry gone to the Air Force, I was the only remaining farm slave. I had to get up early in the morning to help dad with chores before walking to school. I had to take care of the chickens and the pigs, and feed the cows and calves. Dad milked the cows. When I got home from school, I had to let the cows out of the barn to get water, clean the manure out of the gutter, feed the cows their ground feed, silage and hay, feed and water the calves, pigs and chickens, gather the eggs, carry water to the house, and a couple times a week I had to clean and crate the eggs to take to market. Dad milked the cows again in the evening. I was usually very cold while doing these winter chores. It was cold in the chicken coop. It was cold in the hay mow. It was very cold outdoors in the silage pile, and it was extremely cold in the pump house where any spilled water would freeze almost instantly.

That winter I “inherited” a pair of skis. I should say that we called them skis, but they were really just two boards with a slight upward curl on one end, and with a leather strap nailed in about the middle of the skis to slip my overshoe in. Wally had found or bought these skis somewhere, and I used them after he joined the Air Force. Sometimes I skied to school on them, but they didn’t work very well. It was almost impossible to control them with the little strap over my overshoes, and if any snow or ice built up under my overshoe it was impossible to keep from just sliding right off the skis. If the snow was very deep and soft I would use the skis to help pack down a path to school that we all could walk in, and if the snow was hard and cold, I could slide along on top of the snow with some success. I tried skiing down hill with them a few times, but it was a hopeless case. The only positive thing to say about those skis was that they were so slow that I could never get going fast enough to hurt myself if I ran into something or fell down. They were slow motion skis.

More Farm Work

Summer did come again. I finished seventh grade, and would soon be thirteen years old. I was growing fast now, and my legs ached often. Mom called them growing pains. I had additional farming duties this summer because I was getting to be almost as big as Mickey, and could do more of the heavy work, like pitching hay and shoveling grain. I had to ride in the hay rack and stack the hay in the rack as the hay loader picked up the hay and dumped it into the rack. This was very hard work because I had to keep my balance on the moving hay rack while moving large fork loads of hay around the rack to make a stable load. It also was very dusty work, and I would get covered with hay dust, all over my body.

The summer of 1951, mom, dad and the girls went to Watford City for about a week to visit relatives, and Mickey and I had to stay home to take care of the farm. I had to cultivate the corn fields, and Mickey was supposed to do summer fallowing, and we both had to finish bringing in hay from one of the hay fields on the north place. I did my work. I did the chores and then cultivated corn all day. I had to cultivate a big field on the rented land by the lake, just north of the north place, and another field on the south place. Meanwhile Mickey was not doing the summer fallowing, and I couldn't get him to help me bring in the hay from the hay field. It required two people to load the hay, one on the tractor, and one stacking the hay in the hay rack, so I couldn't do it by myself, and the hay was starting to decay laying out there in the field.

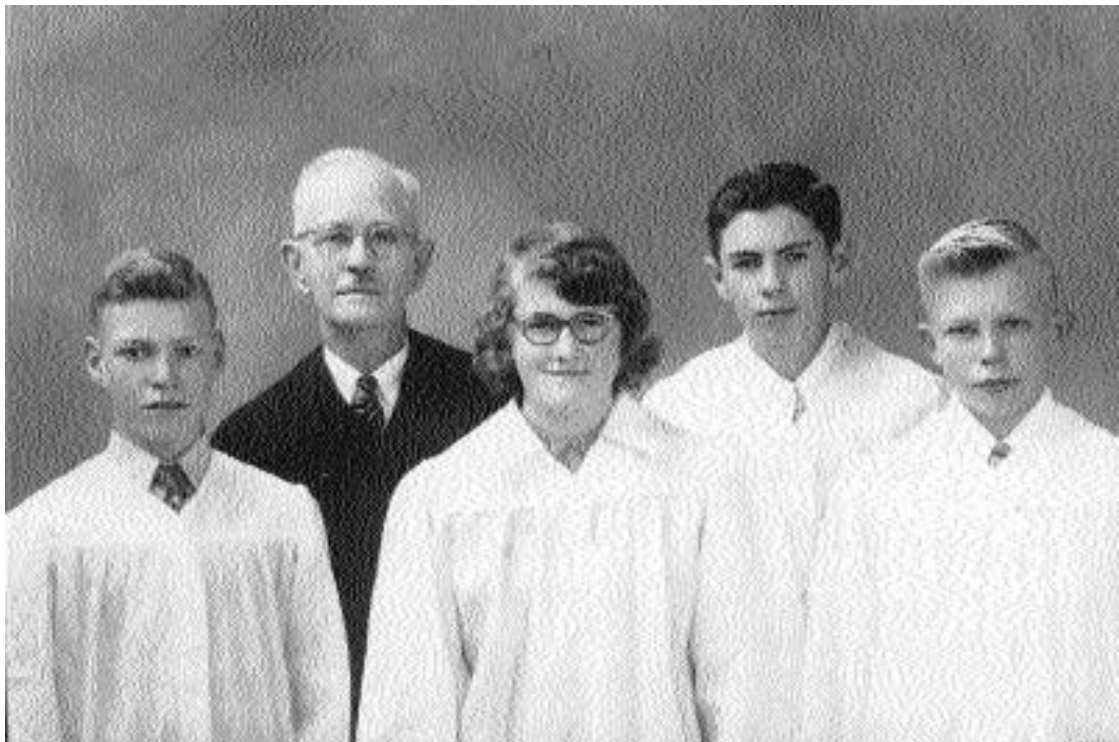
Mickey was busy on his own project. He decided he was going to build a power lawn mower. We had never had a lawn mower on the farm; dad would just mow the area around the house with the hay mower a couple times a year, and rake up the hay for the cattle. But Mickey had somehow found an old push reel mower, and we had an old Briggs and Stratton gasoline engine that still ran, and he was

trying to mount that engine on the old push mower. He worked from morning til night on his project; he got the engine mounted on a platform attached over the reel, but he was having problems getting a pulley attached to one wheel of the mower so he could use a belt from the motor to turn the mower wheel. Every day I warned Mickey that he would get in big trouble if we didn't get the hay in the barn. But he was still busily working on the mower when dad, mom and the girls returned from Watford City, and the hay was still in the field and the summer fallowing had not been touched. It was not a pretty scene. Dad used words that I had never heard before, and he tried to catch Mickey and give him a whipping, but Mickey was now 17 years old and was just as big as dad, so dad finally gave up and seemed to be contented with verbally abusing Mickey for several days.

That summer I got to drive the pickup around the farm, to haul grain and other chores. I was now thirteen and big enough to reach the pedals and still see out the windshield. I was practicing driving whenever I could, because I would be able to get my drivers license in two years, when I turned fifteen. The pickup was somewhat unusual. It had once upon a time been a 1929 Chevrolet car, but many years earlier it had been in an accident in which it rolled over down a steep embankment, and the body was broken into little pieces. So dad had taken off the old car body and replaced it with the cab from an International truck which he had found somewhere, and built a wooden bed with high side boards behind the cab. He then used this mongrel to haul grain and just about anything else. Over the years he had replaced the transmission with a truck transmission, so it had five forward gears and two reverse gears. It worked fine around the farm, but it was a potential death trap on the highway.

Every Saturday morning that summer I had to go to Confirmation classes at the Nidaros Lutheran church, because mom expected me to be confirmed in the Lutheran faith, along with other kids my age. And Clayton Paulson was going to be confirmed and he was no better than

I. There were four students in the class, Clayton, Larry Auny, Joyce Fletcher, and I. Reverend Framstad was the teacher. We had to learn about Martin Luther and why the Lutheran Church was better than other churches, particularly the Catholic Church. The Lutheran Church was best because it was not under the domination of the Pope; each Lutheran Congregation ran its own business, built its churches and hired the pastor, unlike the Catholics who were controlled by the Pope. I also was expected to learn about and understand the Trinity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. That never made any sense to me. I understood the idea of God, and the idea of Jesus being the Son of God, but where did this Holy Ghost come from? And what was his or her role? In spite of my failure to connect with the Holy Ghost, I was officially confirmed one Sunday morning in early September.



The photo is of my Confirmation class. From left to right are: Larry Auny, Reverend Framstad, Joyce Fletcher, me, and Clayton Paulson.

Do we look Angelic or what?

Smartest Kid in My Class

In September, I went back to the little one-room school on the prairie. I was in the eighth grade; my last year here. Next year I would go away to Morris. I was looking forward to getting away from home and going to a real school. Valeria was in the sixth grade; Phyllis was in the third grade; and Eileen started first grade. I was alone in the eighth grade because the Koeps had moved a couple of miles away and were going to a different school. I was now the smartest and the dumbest kid in my class. We had some new kids in the school. The Albergs had bought Lynn Lundquist's farm and resort, and they had two boys, Russell in third grade with Phyllis, and Gaylord in first grade with Eileen. Also, dad had rented out the house on the north place to a family from Fergus Falls who had a whole bunch of kids, and three or four of them were in our school.

After getting to know these renters I realized that there were people even poorer than we were. Those kids had worse clothes and shoes than we did. Sometimes they didn't even have any food to bring to school for their lunch, and the kids were all very skinny, like they never had enough to eat. Their mother worked in Fergus Falls and drove back and forth to work every day. The father didn't have a job. He stayed home and looked after the kids. Dad thought he was a lazy bum; he believed that no self-respecting man would stay home while his wife went off to work every day.

In late September, dad tripped on a stair step as he was going downstairs one morning, and he tore some ligaments in his foot. At first he thought he just sprained it and it would get better soon, but it got worse and he couldn't walk. The doctor said he had to stay off the foot to let the ligaments heal, and it may take several weeks before he could walk again. He was hobbling around on crutches and couldn't do any farm work. So dad told Mickey that he would not be able to go back to Morris; he would need to stay and take care of the farm until

the foot was healed. Mickey was very mad; it was his senior year in high school. The senior year is always the best year in high school, and he couldn't go?? But he had no choice; dad would not pay for him to go; he had to stay and milk the cows and haul hay and shovel snow and keep things going on the farm.

The Longest Winter

The foot did not heal all winter long. The doctors said he had poor circulation which kept it from healing. At one point they thought they may need to amputate the foot when it turned all purple and blue and green. Dad sat in a chair by the heater in the living room, with his foot propped up on a stool, all day long, month after month, all winter long, except when he would slowly hobble on crutches down to the cellar to use the toilet or up the stairs to bed at night. As he sat there, unable to do anything, he started trying to read. He had never completed fourth grade in school, and he was able to read only the most common and simple words. He started reading some of my sisters' early readers, and then he started struggling through some magazine stories, and then he started reading condensed stories in Reader's Digest. By Spring, he was able to read with some ease and speed. He had taught himself to read. But Mickey missed his senior year of high school.

The winter of 1951-52 was particularly bad. The snow started early and continued all winter long. We had snow drifts that nearly covered some of the farm buildings. We had to dig steps down into the snow to get into the barn and the chicken coop. Our roads were blocked for several weeks in January and February and again in March. Our neighbor, Teman Rasmussen had a snow blower that attached to his tractor. He tried to keep the road open past our place, but his snow blower broke down about mid-January. We walked to school almost every day, because dad could not drive the car with his bad foot even when the roads were open. The county snow plow would come

through and open the road about once every ten days, but it would soon either blow full of snow again, or a new blizzard would hit and block the road again.

Toward the end of January, all of my sisters became very sick with bad colds or flu or bronchitis, or something, and they were not getting better after a couple of weeks. Mom was worried that they would get pneumonia and die, so she called the doctor in Henning and begged him to come to the farm to treat the girls. She didn't tell him that he probably would get stuck in the snow before he got to our place. So the doctor agreed to come; they expected him by about 3:00 in the afternoon. About 5:00 I saw him trudging up the driveway, carrying his satchel. He was a very unhappy man. His car got stuck on our township road, almost a mile from our house, and he was not close to any farm house so he decided he might as well walk to our place. It was already quite dark by the time he got to our house. I led him into the house and he immediately started yelling at mom for not telling him that the road was blocked with snow. But then dad came hobbling into the kitchen on his crutches, and the doctor quieted down. He attended to all my sisters, gave them some shots and pills, and apologized to mom. Mickey and I got our snow shovels and walked with the doctor back to his car and helped him get back out to the main road.

It was a tough winter for mom. She had dad in that little house constantly all winter long. They were getting on each other's nerves. And she almost never could get out to go to town or to visit neighbors because of all the snow, and she was reluctant to drive the car even on newly plowed roads. One day I overheard mom and dad arguing (it was impossible not to hear) about their financial situation. Mom was saying that they should have stayed in North Dakota; after all these years in Minnesota they still didn't have any money, and her brother and sister and their families in Watford were doing very well. Dad was furious; he said mom should be thankful that they had been able

to support such a nice family of nine children; she should feel lucky that we were all alive and healthy; she should stop complaining and do her duties as a wife and mother. Dad really hated it when mom pointed out that Uncle Perrin was making a lot of money in the plumbing and construction business in Watford, and that dad's brother Hank had enough money to spend the winters in Arizona.

Now that I was the only student in my grade, I could move along in my course work as fast as I was able; there was no need to wait for Duane to catch up. So by the end of January, I had completed all of the assigned work for the eighth grade. The teacher didn't know what to do now. She asked the Superintendent of Otter Tail County schools what she should do with me. Could I just graduate early, or what? The Superintendent came to visit our school and told her to give me reading assignments from books that the Superintendent had brought for me. So the rest of the school year I just read books in school, and thought I was very smart. I also decided to participate in the spelling bee that the County sponsored. The best speller from each school was invited to attend the spelling competition, which was held in Vining this year. Since I was the only eighth grader, and there were no seventh graders, I had little trouble qualifying as the best speller in my school. The teacher helped me prepare for the spelling bee. She would read a word to me, and I would spell the word, and she would tell me if I made a mistake. The teacher thought I was brilliant because she couldn't spell most of those words herself.

So off I went to Vining for the big competition. I didn't win, but I didn't embarrass myself. I finished at least among the top half of the spellers. But it was a real eye opening experience. First I discovered that there were many kids out there my age who seemed to be as smart or smarter than I. Second, I discovered girls. For the first time in my life I realized that there were beautiful girls in the world, and that just looking at them made my body do strange things. There were two particularly exciting girls in the spelling competition, and I

thought I was in love with both of them. I talked with them and I found out their names and where they lived, and where they went to school. The most exciting girl, her name was Janice Cox, was in the eighth grade like me. She had dark hair, big brown eyes, a very pretty smile, and she was tall and slim. She told me she would be going to Henning High School next year. The other girl, Karen Froslee, was in the seventh grade, and she was a petite brunette with a very pretty face; she went to school in Vining. I mailed Valentine's cards to both of them, the very next day, even though it was already the 17th of February. I felt a little guilty about sending a Valentine card to both of them; maybe I should have chosen just one; maybe I was being too greedy. I never received a response from either of them.

In late winter I came down with a bad cold, with a cough that wouldn't go away. Every day I would come home from school and take more cough syrup to try to provide some relief. One day I came home and immediately went to the medicine cabinet for cough syrup. I was coughing as I reached for the bottle without looking; I poured a large spoonful and swallowed it in one gulp. Then I realized something was terribly wrong; my throat was on fire; there was a horrible taste in my mouth; I looked at the bottle. I had just swallowed a large spoon full of liniment. I couldn't talk; I went to mom with the bottle, pointing to my mouth and the bottle. Just then there was a horrible noise, bump, bump, bump, bump, bump, followed by screams. One of my sisters had just fallen head over heels down the stairs and lay in a heap at the bottom. Mom, dad and my sisters all ran to see if she were still alive, carry her to the couch and comfort her. Meanwhile I was standing there unable to speak, and concluded I would get no help from anyone there. I went to the icebox, grabbed the milk pitcher and drank a quart or more of milk. I started burping liniment. I got my voice back; the burning subsided. I burped liniment for days.

When the snow finally melted that Spring, I learned how to ride a bicycle. Michael Johnson was four years younger than me, but he was

the next oldest boy in the school now that the Koeys were gone, so he and I played games together during recess, and I was sort of an older brother to him. He was the only child of Cleve and Myrtle Johnson. He would ask me lots of questions about life that I would do my best to answer. I had considerable information about life, most of which I had learned from my brothers. I thought I knew most of the important things, like why adults got married and how babies were made, and what high school was like, and how to kiss girls. Michael lived only about a quarter of a mile from school, right on the County highway, and in warm weather he would ride his bicycle to school. I guess to help cement our relationship, Michael offered to let me use his bicycle to learn to ride. I practiced during recess every school day for a few weeks until I could ride without too much danger of killing myself or destroying the bicycle. I had nothing to give to Michael in return, except brotherly advice and information.

I had continued to grow rapidly all that year, and by the time school was out I was almost six feet tall. I was skinny as a rail, but I was about three inches taller than dad or any of my brothers. I liked being tall, but it was a disadvantage on the farm; it just made dad and Mickey think I could now do more farm work because I was so big. And I did get stuck doing more farm work. I worked all day, almost every day, all summer long, doing plowing, cultivating, haying, swathing grain, as well as taking care of the chickens, pigs, geese, and cattle.

My sisters, on the other hand, were not required to do any farm work. They had to help mom in the house, with dishes and washing clothes and cleaning house, but they never had to take care of chickens or feed the cows or pitch manure or carry water. They were helpless, hopeless house girls. Some of the neighbor girls had to work for their fathers on the farm, feeding the cattle, driving the tractor and other chores, but my sisters were exempt from farm work for some unknown reason.

This photo of me with Mickey leaning on my shoulder shows that I had grown taller than Mickey, but weighed only about 130 pounds.



That Spring I was reading through some 4-H pamphlets and learned that the County 4-H office had started a program to promote soil conservation in the County, and that as part of the program they were inviting 4-H members to develop soil conservation plans for their parents' farm or a neighbor's farm, and submit the plan to the County Office. The submissions would be judged, and the winner would receive a trophy and other prizes. I decided I would develop a plan and submit it to the County. I knew we had some serious erosion problems from water run-off, and we also had wind erosion in the Spring and Fall when fields were bare, because we had almost no trees. So I developed a plan to plant trees along the west and north sides of the farm, and along some of the fence lines, to provide wind breaks. And I planned to protect our sloping fields from water erosion by planting them into pasture and hay land, with special earth barriers to slow the flow of runoff water in the steepest places. I described my plan and drew maps of the farm showing the location of my planned actions. Then I mailed it off to the County Agent.

After haying was done that summer, I got a break from work for a couple of days, because mom wanted me to go to Bible school at the Nideros Lutheran church, and she convinced dad to excuse me from farm work for about six hours each day. So some of my sisters and I were taken to the church by mom on Monday morning late in June to start Bible school. I considered this to be a nice reprieve from farm work. The church basement was cool and pleasant on a hot summer day, and it sure beat pitching hay and breathing hay dust all day long.



This is a photo of Nidaros Lutheran Church, surrounded by the cemetery.

The first day the teachers were a little late getting organized so all of us older kids were outside in the grave yard, and we decided to play hide and seek among the tomb stones. Several of us were hiding behind large grave markers, when I noticed that a new boy who looked about my age was sneaking up on other kids and pushing them out from behind the tomb stones so they could be seen and called “out”. I decided that I had to put a stop to this. I thought I was the biggest and toughest kid in the school and it was my duty to deal with bullies like this kid seemed to be. So I confronted him, and before I knew what had happened, he had knocked me to the ground and had my arms pinned behind my back, and I couldn’t move. I was

shocked. I had never encountered anyone of my age who was stronger than me. And this kid was a lot stronger than me.

After saying “uncle” he let me up, and he introduced himself, and we decided that we could be friends. His name was Jim Christopherson. His older sister was going to be one of the teachers at the Bible School, and he had to come along because he was not allowed to stay home alone. So we went into the basement, and were assigned to tables, based on age groups, to start our lessons. Jim, Clayton and I and three other kids were at one table. Jim’s sister was our teacher. Jim and I sat on opposite ends of the long table, and we discovered that our legs were so long that we could touch each other’s feet under the table. We started a game of seeing who could pull the table in their direction. With our feet planted against each other, we would grab the table legs and pull. The table would slowly slide in one direction, and then back the other direction. The students sitting on each side of the table were getting annoyed that the table kept moving back and forth in front of them, but they were afraid to complain. We continued this game off and on during the day, as we were supposed to be studying the bible and writing about what we had read in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Shortly before the day was over, Jim and I went back to our table-pulling contest, but this time we overdid it, and the table split right in half, and fell onto the laps of the students sitting on each side. Jim warned them not to say anything to his sister; just hold the table up and make it look normal. When the bell rang for the end of the day, Jim and I left as fast as we could, as the table crashed to the floor.

Jim didn’t come back to Bible school anymore. His sister said he was too much of a disruption. Several years later, Jim played professional football for the Minnesota Vikings. He got his start tackling me in the Nidaros Lutheran Church cemetery.

Now that I was fourteen years old, I was given the duty of chopping the heads off roosters whenever mom needed one or two for dinner. I had performed this duty several times in prior years, but now it was

almost a weekly affair. First I had to catch a nice plump, young rooster which would be eating in the yard somewhere. I would use a pole with a hook on the end to grab the desired rooster by one leg and pull it to me. Then I would grab both legs in my left hand and lay its head on the chopping block; with my right hand I would pick up the ax and make a quick, clean chop through the neck right into the block of wood. With the head off I would quickly throw the rooster down in the grass so it wouldn't splatter blood all over me. The rooster would get on its feet and run for several seconds before it dropped and stopped moving as it lost most of its blood. Most Sunday dinners required two such roosters. After removing the heads, I would dip the roosters in boiling hot water and then pull out all their feathers. Mom would then take over to prepare the birds for frying.

Mickey Leaves Home

It was the start of grain harvest time, and I was swathing grain while dad ran the combine to thrash the grain. Mickey drove the pickup to haul the grain from the combine to the granary and unload it into the grain elevator which carried the grain up into the upstairs grain bins. One day as I came in from swathing a field, to have our usual mid-day dinner, mom came running outdoors and screamed at me to come to the house quickly because dad and Mickey were killing each other. I ran to the house with mom, asking "what am I supposed to do about it?" Mom said that I should make them stop fighting. Me? Sure.

I found the culprits upstairs where Mickey and I slept. I found Mickey had dad in a half-Nelson grip, and dad was unable to move. Mickey's nose was bleeding badly and dripping blood all over dad and the floor, and dad had a red mark across his bald head. I tried to remain calm and asked both of them to stop fighting, before someone got seriously hurt! (And I was afraid it would be me.) Mickey said he would release dad if dad promised not to hit him any more. After a few more unsuccessful struggles to escape, dad agreed to Mickey's terms and Mickey released him. Dad immediately turned around and took a big swing at Mickey to hit him in the head with his fist!! But

Mickey was too fast for him and grabbed dad's arm, and again he twisted dad's arm behind his back and this time Mickey twisted it even harder until dad was in considerable pain. Meanwhile, mom was screaming at me to do something. As a neutral observer and diplomat (and someone who didn't want to get physically involved with those two idiots), I suggested to dad that he was not fighting fair, and if he didn't agree to stop trying to hit Mickey, I would have to take Mickey's side in this matter!! After a few more vain struggles and more arm twisting by Mickey, dad agreed to stop fighting, but he told Mickey that he could go ahead and leave, but "if you leave now I never want to see your ugly face again as long as I live."

Dad also made the comment that if he were younger he would have beat Mickey to a pulp. What a sore loser!! I learned from mom and Mickey that this fight was the result of some "bonehead stunt" on Mickey's part which caused dad to have to stop combining grain and wait for Mickey to get back with the pickup so dad could unload grain from the combine into the pickup. Dad apparently starting cussing out Mickey, and Mickey said he had taken all the abuse he was going to take from dad, and he was leaving home, right then. Mickey went to the house and started packing his few belongings, and asked mom to drive him to town so he could catch a bus. He was going to Watford City. Dad followed Mickey to the house and told him he was not allowed to leave, and "get back out there and get to work". Mickey told him No, and dad hit him in the nose, and other places, until Mickey was able to pin dad, which is where I came in.

One Slave Left

So Mickey was gone. And then there was one. I was the only slave left. I decided right then, that when I was ready to leave home, I wasn't going to tell dad in advance. He would find out only after I was long gone! Here we were in the middle of grain harvest, and I have suddenly been promoted to chief slave. So now I could swath the grain and haul the grain from the combine to the granary and unload

the grain, which I hated. Unloading grain was a very dusty and dirty job, particularly when I had to go up into the granary and shovel the grain around to the sides of the bins in order to fill them up. It would get so dusty in there that I could barely see or breath. But I figured I had to put up with this for only about two months and I would be off to Morris for my freshman year of high school.

But I figured wrong. I was soon informed by mom that dad had decided that I would go to our local high school in Battle Lake. The high school had decided to start a new bus route that would go right past our farm because there were five of us in the area who were starting high school this year, Sharon, Clayton, Elaine, Duane and me, all the kids I had gone to school with off and on since first grade. We could all ride to school on the same bus. And I would be home to help poor daddy with the chores in the morning and after work and on weekends. I told mom I didn't want to go to Battle Lake; I was going to Morris just like my three older brothers. But I knew that it was a hopeless case, and I was not going to take a chance of getting punched in the nose. The day after labor day I was down at the end of the driveway at 7:15 a.m. to catch the school bus to my first day of high school in Battle Lake. Whatever happened to that idea of mine that I was the favorite child?

What a shock. I was one of over fifty freshmen, and there were over 150 kids in the high school. And I knew only about ten of them, including some I remembered from second grade. I had courses in English, General Science, Algebra, Business, Agriculture, and Physical Education. I quickly discovered that I was not the smartest kid in class anymore, and some of the kids had learned a lot more before they came to high school. The agriculture class was the only one where I was among the top students that year. I got B + in Business, B in Algebra, B- in General Science, and C+ in English. I discovered that the English grammar I had learned at home and in the first eight grades was apparently almost entirely incorrect! And I was having

great difficulty even understanding my errors, because it seemed to me that almost everyone except the English teacher spoke the same way I did. We all said “I done it”, and “I ain’t got nothing”, and “we seen them”, and numerous other common Midwest phrases.

My lowest grades (all Cs) were in Physical Education. I was basically “retarded” when it came to almost any Physical Education activity. There were a couple of other farm boys who were almost as retarded as I, but I think I was the worst. I knew nothing about football; I had never even seen a football, and had never watched a football game. I knew nothing about basketball; I could just as well have been from Mars. I had a smattering of knowledge of baseball as a result of playing a little softball in grade school, but most of what I thought I knew was wrong, and I had never held a baseball glove or baseball before. I knew nothing about volleyball, or badminton, or wrestling, or tumbling or any other game we were expected to participate in during our Physical Education classes. The only PhysEd activities I could do without looking completely silly were running and jumping in track. I was not very fast, but I did well in long distance runs because I had more stamina and was willing to endure the pain of long runs. When track season came in the Spring, I was one of the milers on the track team, but I never finished among the top three that year.

There was one aspect of Physical Education that I enjoyed; the showers. I could get a nice hot shower every school day. I didn’t need to take a bath in the galvanized wash tub anymore. Some days I would be late for my next class because I would stay in the hot shower too long after PhysEd class.

I joined the high school chorus, because I could sing reasonably well, and it didn’t cost anything. The kids who knew how to play instruments were in the band, but that required money for an instrument and music lessons. Clayton and Elaine were in the band, because they had learned to play instruments at home. Although dad was a musician who played several instruments, he never thought it

was a good use of his time or money to teach any of his kids how to play anything.

One October weekend Mickey came back home from Watford City for a visit. Buzz drove his father's car and brought Mickey. Dad didn't make him go away; I guess dad had resigned himself to Mickey being old enough to make his own decisions. On Saturday night, Mickey and Buzz invited me to go with them to Fergus for a movie, and Mickey also invited Clayton Paulson to go along. Surprisingly, Mrs. Paulson agreed. We went to a movie, and then stopped at a drive-in food place to get something to eat, and Mickey and Buzz were hoping to find some girls. After eating, we "cruised" around town for an hour or so, looking for girls. Finally we went home; it was after midnight before we got Clayton back home, and his mother was fit to be tied. She was furious that we had kept her little Clayton out so late, and I bet she swore that she would never let Clayton go anywhere with any Hystad again. Mickey just laughed about it, because he and Buzz were leaving on Sunday to go back to Watford.

Starting My Dairy Herd

One January day in 1953, I received a letter from the County 4-H office in Fergus, informing me that I had been selected to receive a Holstein heifer calf as part of the 4-H program to help young farmers start their own dairy herds of purebred Holsteins. I was very excited and proud, although I understood that one of the reasons I was selected was because my parents had no money. I was proud that the 4-H adults thought I was responsible enough to take care of a heifer. I was informed that I would receive the heifer when a heifer calf was born from one of the cows that had been given to 4-H members in previous years, and I would need to make a commitment to give back to the program the first heifer calf born to my heifer. A few weeks later I was informed that a heifer calf was available, and we should come to pick it up at a farm near Fergus Falls.

So a few days later I took the day off from school and dad drove me to Fergus to meet with the 4-H people, sign the necessary papers, and then go to the farm to get the heifer. We didn't have a decent pickup truck that was safe to drive on the road as far as Fergus, so dad drove the 1939 Chevrolet car, which was now our "second" car. We brought along some canvas and gunny sacks to cover the back seat, and we planned to put the calf in the back seat to bring it home. I could tell that the 4-H County Agent thought it was very odd to carry a calf inside a car, but at least it confirmed that we were poor folks. We drove to the farm, and I met the 4-Her who was giving up his first heifer calf, and I thanked him. The calf was only a few days old, and still very small and a little wobbly. I picked up the calf in my arms and put it into the back seat of the car. Then I had to hang on to it all the way home to keep it from trying to stand up. It was a very cold winter day, and my calf stayed nice and warm in the car with dad and me.

King of Conservation

A few days after we picked up my new heifer calf, I received the news that the soil conservation plan I had submitted last summer had won the top prize, and I would be honored at a special honors banquet for 4-H members and adult leaders to be held in Fergus in a few weeks. One cold evening in February, dad drove me to Fergus to attend the banquet. We were seated at large tables in a high school gymnasium, and were served dinner. Then there were speeches and awards presented to members and leaders; finally, they announced the competition for soil conservation planning, and they called me to come up to receive the prize. They gave me a large trophy with my name engraved on it, and an envelope with a check for \$20. Wow! I was making waves now. My genius was starting to be recognized! I was on my way to becoming a famous farmer. I would build the best herd of Holsteins in the state. People would come from miles around to see the prize-winning soil conservation efforts on my very large and beautiful farm. A few weeks later I learned that the Future

Farmers of America club at Battle Lake, which I had joined earlier that year, was accepting applications to receive a sow pig, under the same kind of program as the Holstein heifer program. The selected recipient would receive a weaned female purebred pig, and then would return a female pig to the program, from the pig's first litter, to be passed on to another FFA member. I decided to apply for a pig.

Spring came again, and I had to help dad with Spring planting whenever I wasn't in school. I helped with plowing or disking or dragging to prepare fields for seeding, when I got home from school and on weekends. I also was given the job of milking the cows every evening so dad could spend more time in the fields doing planting. When school was over for the year, I worked all the time helping dad on the farm, planting corn, cultivating corn, loading and spreading manure, mowing hay, loading hay, digging the summer fallow fields, swathing grain, hauling grain, plowing, until school started again. I also had to milk the cows both morning and evening while school was out.

Now that I was the only slave working on the farm, and was more involved with all aspects of the farm operation, I became more aware of dad's weaknesses as a farmer. It seemed to me that he couldn't decide what he wanted to grow on the farm, and he seemed to be trying something new almost every year, and not sticking with anything. He tried dairy cattle for awhile and then one day he came home with a Hereford bull; he had decided to do beef cattle. But the result was big skinny cattle that were built like Holsteins but had white faces like Herefords; the cattle weren't good for either milk or beef. He tried capon chickens and then gave up on them; he tried hogs, and gave up on them; he tried soybeans and gave up on them; he tried to raise seed corn, and gave up on that. Sven Broberg on the next farm raised a huge flock of turkeys every summer and milked a large herd of cattle all winter and was doing very well financially, without any slaves. Cleve Johnson on the next farm over had a large herd of Jersey cows and he also worked at a job off the farm, and they

were doing very well financially without any slaves. But dad couldn't seem to make money at farming, even with lots of free labor.

It also occurred to me that dad was a lot like Mickey (or the other way around). He would get distracted on some "bonehead" scheme instead of sticking to something and making it work. He tried to be a salesman for Cargill seed corn; he tried to get into the earth moving business with a little "tumble-bug" dirt scraper that he pulled behind the tractor; he tried to do custom combining for other farmers; but none of these worked out. He seemed to spend lots of time dreaming about some other business rather than focusing on farming. And he completely rejected the idea of ever working for anyone else as an employee in his spare time to earn extra money. From October through mid-April he had relatively little to do around the farm, and he might have been able to work in town as a mechanic or something, but he wouldn't even consider that.

Roasting in the Sun

I worked all summer long without a shirt, whenever the sun was out. I was trying to get the world's darkest tan. My tan got darker and darker, and by mid-August my back was almost black. We had never heard of melanoma. I would go down to the lake to take a bath whenever I was particularly dirty from haying or shoveling grain, or if I was planning to go anywhere where teenage girls might be present.

On July 17, I turned 15 years old, and I could now get my driver's license. I had been driving tractors and the pickup and the old 39 Chevy around the farm for years, and I had completed the drivers education course at high school that Spring. So I got my license a few days after my birthday. Mom and dad would let me drive the Chevy into Clitherall to buy things, and sometimes mom would let me drive when we went to Sunday School.

That August I was elected President of the Nidaros Township 4-H Club, at our monthly meeting that was held at Paulson's place. Sharon Bergsten, who still thought I was her boyfriend, nominated me for the position, and almost everyone voted for me. Clayton didn't vote for me because he wanted to be President himself. After the meeting we played games outside like we always did after 4-H meetings in the summer, and Sharon pulled me away from the crowd and behind some bushes and told me that I needed to sneak off with her into the apple orchard so we could kiss and hug without anyone seeing us. I consented because I might enjoy it, and I really should properly thank her for her support in helping to get me elected. Sharon was a pleasant girl, but she was almost as tall as I, and probably weighed more, and I think she was as strong as I. She worked for her dad on the farm just like a boy, and she had the muscles to prove it.

Mom undertook a new venture that summer. She discovered that there was a pickle factory near Henning that would buy all the cucumbers she could grow. She wanted to make some money herself so she could have some spending money without begging dad. She convinced dad to let her have about three acres of crop land just north of the granary, and she planted hundreds of cucumber hills. I had to help her cultivate and hoe all those little plants, and pretty soon the vines had completely covered the entire field. Mom, Valeria and Phyllis picked cucumbers every day, because the pickle factory wanted them small. Every day they would pick thousands of cucumbers and put them in sacks and mom would take them to the factory. Some days I helped pick when dad didn't need me for "real" farm work. Everyday for a few weeks, mom would take a couple hundred pounds of cucumbers to the factory and bring home a couple of dollars.

Uncle Vance, Auntie Alice and their kids came to visit us that summer. Their oldest child, a red-head named Sally, was about the same age as

Phyllis, and then there was a boy named Junior who was a couple of years younger. My sisters played with Vance's kids, and they wanted to play outside and explore the farm. They decided to play hide and seek in the corn field just south of the house. The corn was already at least six feet tall, and it was like a jungle for little kids. Some of my sisters and cousins got lost in the corn field that day; they couldn't find their way out, even though the field was only about a quarter of a mile across. I heard kids screaming and crying in the corn field, and I had to go rescue them again.

Mickey joined the Air Force for four years, that summer. He had lived in Watford for about a year before deciding to follow his two older brothers into the Air Force. Mom was very relieved when President Eisenhower announced an armistice agreement ending the fighting in Korea, in July.

In September of 1953 I began my Sophomore year at Battle Lake High School. It was easier this year. Things were not all new, and I was doing well in all my courses except PhysEd, where I was still retarded. I took all the available science and math courses, including Chemistry and Geometry. I also joined the school chorus, singing bass. And I was on a livestock judging team as part of Agriculture class. Clayton, Roscoe Evavold and I had formed a judging team and we won the livestock judging competition at the school, beating out teams from Senior and Junior classes. We judged dairy cows, beef cows, sheep, and hogs; the purpose was to rank the animals from best to worst based on meat production capability, milk production capability, breeding capability, likely longevity, and overall health. At first the three of us learned how to judge by reading books, but after we won the local competition our Ag teacher, Fergi Ferguson, started giving us special instruction. He would take us to dairy farms and beef farms and sheep farms and pig farms to practice judging the animals.

Judging Champs

Because we were the best judges at Battle Lake school, we went to the Otter Tail County competition in Fergus, where we won the competition. A few weeks later we went to the Regional Judging competition in Breckenridge, where we won a trip to the State competition in St. Paul. Fergi drove the three of us to St. Paul, for the two day competition. We drove down a day early and had time to see a little of the twin cities. This was my first time to any place bigger than Fergus, and I was amazed that so many people existed. How did they build those tall buildings? Why did they build them so tall? Who lives or works in those buildings? What do all these people do to make a living? Why do all the drivers take off so fast when the light turns green and then slam on their brakes at the next red light?

We saw a movie that first night, in a big theater, with a big screen. My first movie in a real theater, but the movie was not memorable. I was more interested in looking at all the people in the theater; all the good looking teenage girls, with blond hair, and wearing lipstick, bobby socks and sandals. I felt like a hick from the sticks. I was.

The next day we went to the State Fair Grounds where we judged dozens of dairy cows and calves; beef cows, steers and calves; ewes and feeder lambs; and brooder sows and feeder pigs. We didn't take first place in the state judging competition, but we did win blue ribbons and we got to see the twin cities.

Later that year, I was informed by Fergi that I had been selected to receive a female pig under the FFA program, and I would have to return a female pig in a year or so after my pig had its first litter. In the Spring, after the pigs had been weaned, I picked up my pig. I built a special house for it, and cared for it very diligently. Dad was annoyed that I had built a separate house for my pig; he thought I could use the old dilapidated shack that he had used for his pigs. I

said that this was a purebred and I was going to make sure it got treated like a purebred. I now had the beginnings of my purebred hog farm to go along with my Holstein herd. I figured that I would have a large herd of hogs within a few years, because my pig would have its first litter in about a year, and I should get five or six females from that, of which I could keep all but one, and the following year, when I finished high school I might have five or six sows having litters, and the year after that I could have 20 to 30 sows having litters, if I could make enough money selling the male pigs to pay for the food for the sows. Since I was a top judge of hogs, I could make sure I selected the best sows for breeding and find the best boars for artificial insemination. I had big plans for a pig population explosion.

I was very busy, doing all my usual farm chores, milking the cows, taking care of my heifer and pig, helping mom with her garden and cucumbers, and helping dad with plowing, planting, haying, manure spreading, and more. I was teaching my heifer to be a show animal. I taught her to be lead with a halter, including when to start, when to stop, and how to place her feet to look the best. I washed her, brushed her, and shined her hoofs. She was now a little over a year old, and would be ready for competition this summer. I also taught my pig to be a show pig. I taught her to follow my commands with a cane; to turn right, turn left, stop, and go. I washed and brushed her, and even applied some powder to make her smell sweet.

Enjoying Life

The last week of June, the town of Battle Lake held Dairy Days, with dairy cattle competitions, dairy products for sale, and crowning of a Dairy Princess. I entered my heifer in the Yearling Competition, representing the Nidaros 4-H Club. Clifford Ukleberg came with his truck to pick up my heifer and take it to town, along with some of his Holsteins that his son Harold was entering in the competition; Harold also was a member of our 4-H club, and his parents were the main

leaders of the Club. My heifer won top honors in her class. As I led her around the ring, I could hear the announcer telling the audience that this heifer was of excellent breeding and an example of the quality livestock being provided by the County 4-H program to youngsters like Carlyle Hystad to start top quality dairy herds around the County. In earlier years I had entered some of dad's cross-breed yearlings in County competitions and had never received anything better than a white ribbon. So this was a proud and happy day.

The day got better a little later when Marlys LaValley stopped by the pen where the calves were held, and chatted with me for a long time, then she invited me to join her for some ice cream at one of the food stands. Marlys was the most beautiful girl in the world. I liked her a lot when we were in second grade together at Clitherall school, but then I went back to the country school and she moved to Battle Lake, and I never saw her again until high school, and by then she had all her snobby town friends who didn't like having a country boy like me around. But now Marlys was not surrounded by her town friends, and she was being very nice to me. She was the most beautiful girl in the world. She had golden blonde hair, bright blue eyes, perfect pouty lips, lovely peaches and cream skin, and a petite Marilyn Monroe body, athletic but very feminine. I was in heaven. I had just won a blue ribbon and now I was having a pleasant, fun conversation with the most beautiful girl in the world. Marlys told me that she was sorry that she had been sort of unfriendly the last two years at school, but it was because of her friends, and maybe we would be able to do some things together in our Junior and Senior years. Yes!! Yes!! I'm in love, I'm in love, I'm in love with the most beautiful girl in the world.

But meanwhile I had to go back to work on the farm. Hauling manure, summer fallowing, finishing haying, milking cows, taking care of the chickens, and taking special care of my heifer and pig. About the middle of July, I was requested to attend a 4-H Leadership Camp in Ada, Minnesota, for three days of meetings and instruction and

getting to know other 4-H leaders, because I was President of the Nidaros Club. Mom drove me to Fergus on Friday, where other 4-H leaders from the County were taken by bus to the camp. I recall that some of the campers complained about the lack of indoor plumbing at the camp; for me it was just like home. The meetings were not memorable, but during the first day a girl from Fergus Falls introduced herself to me and began following me around and inviting me to do things with her. Her name was Natalie. She was almost a year older than I, and would be in her Senior year in high school in September. She told me all about herself; that she was President of her 4-H club; that she lived on a farm very close to Fergus; that she had been going steady with an older boy from Fergus for the past two years but he went away to college and now she had no steady boy friend.

By the last day of the Camp, Natalie seldom left my side, and was telling me that she wanted to be my girl. She was embarrassing me, because she was clinging to me like a wet shirt, and I barely knew her. Some of the other guys started teasing me about Natalie, and some of the other girls started saying nasty things to Natalie, saying that she was not a good girl, and worse. But that didn't deter Natalie; she refused to leave my side, and insisted on sitting next to me on the bus ride back to Fergus, where she gave me a big wet kisses and said she wanted me to come see her next Saturday night at the Drive-In burger place where she worked; she got off work at 9:00.

Going Steady?

The next few days I was torn as to whether I should go see Natalie. She was sort of cute, and had a nice figure, and we had a lot of common interests, and maybe she would be interesting to be with on a date. But I was really interested in Marlys LaValley, and she seemed to be interested in me, and if I went out with Natalie, maybe Marlys would find out and get mad. And I had never been on a date, and had

no idea what people were supposed to do on a date, and I had no money to buy anything or even enough money to go to a movie. By Saturday evening I decided to go see Natalie at the drive-in; I would just stop by to talk. It wouldn't be a date. Mom and dad said I could take the 39 Chevy to go to Battle Lake to see a movie; I didn't tell them I was planning to go to Fergus. I drove to Fergus and went to the drive-in. Natalie was working as a car-hop, and she told me where to park, and then she brought me free food and drinks. I heard her tell other teenagers at the drive-in that I was her boyfriend, and she introduced the other car-hops to me, telling them that I was her boyfriend. At 9:00 she jumped into my car and asked if I would take her home. I said I would, if she would tell me how to get there. She told me which streets to take, and then we headed out into the country, where she told me to drive down a little dirt road until we came to a lake shore, and she told me where to park. I noticed that there were a few other cars parked in the area. She informed me that this was a lover's parking place; she used to come here often with her previous boyfriend.

Natalie then proceeded to show me what I should do when I am parked with a high school senior in a lovers lane on a dark night. So this is what dating is all about! I had no idea. I thought people maybe just went to a movie or something. After a half hour or so, Natalie insisted that I take her class ring; we were now going steady. I protested that I had just met her, and maybe she was rushing things a bit, and what if I lost the ring, and maybe we should wait until we had a few more dates. But she was insistent, and did almost everything she could think of to convince me to take her ring. I was starting to get worried that it was getting late and I better get back home before dad came looking for me. Natalie insisted that I agree that we were going steady, before she would let me take her home. I agreed, so I could get home. I was blackmailed into going steady on the first date of my life!!

Grain harvest time had started, and I was busy swathing grain, and if it was not dry enough to swath, I would summer fallow. As I sat on the tractor going around and around the oat field, or back and forth on the summer fallow, I was debating with myself: should I really go steady with Natalie, or should I tell her that she is only one of my girl friends, or just tell Natalie that I can't be her boyfriend. It was not my idea to even have a date with Natalie; I had just reacted to her pursuit. But she is interesting and she is teaching me a great deal about things that I guess I should know sooner or later. But she may want to go steady and then get married before I even finish high school, or something, and I am not ready to get married and I probably wouldn't want to marry her in any case. One of the Sophomore girls in my class last year had to get married to a boy in the Junior class because she was going to have a baby, and I certainly didn't want that to happen to me. But Natalie is quite exciting and I like all the attention she gives me. But she is sort of like Sharon, and I don't want to be Sharon's boyfriend either. And I really want to be Marlys' boyfriend. I wouldn't mind marrying Marlys anytime she wanted.

By the end of the week I had decided that I would return Natalie's ring to her and tell her that we can't go steady. If she wants to be an occasional girl friend I might be interested, until Marlys agrees to marry me. But I won't be her steady boyfriend. And I am not going to let Natalie tempt me into a relationship that I don't want. So on Saturday evening I drove back to Fergus and the drive-in. Natalie was working, and she immediately came to my car and gave me a kiss and shouted to everyone that her boyfriend had arrived. She brought food and drinks for me again, and then got in my car when she finished work. She directed me back to the same parking spot by the lake. I told Natalie that I had decided that we shouldn't go steady; I was too young, I was only sixteen, and we didn't know each other well enough, and it would be better for both of us if we were just friends, and I lived too far away, and we would never see each other during the winter, and maybe she would prefer if I just took her home right

now. Natalie acted like she didn't hear me, and went to work to convince me to change my mind; she seemed confident that I could not resist her, and she was almost right. But when we got to her house an hour later I handed her ring to her and asked her to take it, and I promised that I would still come to see her next Saturday night if she would just take back the ring. She would not take the ring, and quickly went into her house and closed the door.

The following Monday I wrote a letter to Natalie, explaining why I couldn't go steady with her, and why I was mailing her ring to her. I apologized and thanked her and said we could still be friends. I put the ring in a box, and drove to the post office in Clitherall and mailed the letter and ring to Natalie.

The next Saturday evening I again drove to Fergus and the drive-in. Natalie was working, but she wouldn't come over to my car. Another car-hop came to wait on me. I asked her to have Natalie come over, but she said Natalie didn't want to speak to me. I waited for awhile, thinking that she would give in and come to see me, but she didn't. I didn't have money to buy anything at the drive-in, so I drove away and went back home.

Fair Time

In mid-August, the Otter Tail County Fair started, and I had several entries for my 4-H Club. I entered my Holstein heifer, and my pig. I entered some potatoes I had grown specifically for the fair. And I entered the 4-H Project Demonstration program where I would give a demonstration on soil conservation, based on my prize-winning plan. The 4-H Club hired a trucker to pick up all the 4-H animals and bring them to the Fair in Fergus, and I was soon there with my heifer in one of the dairy barns and my pig in the hog barn. My heifer won another blue ribbon; my pig won her first blue ribbon; and my soil conservation demonstration won the grand championship prize,

which meant that I was to go to the Minnesota State Fair to present my demonstration there.

I had to work hard to help dad finish grain harvesting so I could go to the State Fair. Toward the end of August, the Ukkelbergs picked me up and drove Harold and me to Fergus where we boarded a bus full of 4-H kids going to the State Fair for four days. After a four hour ride, we arrived in St. Paul, and we all were assigned bunk beds in the 4-H dormitory building, and were given meal tickets to get meals in the cafeteria. We had to be in our bunks by 11:00 p.m., but otherwise we were free to do whatever we wished, and of course I had to practice for my soil conservation demonstration which was scheduled for the third day. I went with other Otter Tail County kids to explore the huge fair grounds. There were many barns full of animals; there were acres of fancy new farm machinery exhibits; there was a very large carnival grounds, with rides and freak houses and all sorts of games designed to take money from kids; and there were horse shows and musical entertainment in the large covered arena. And there were cute girls everywhere. This was living. I liked being a farmer.

The State Fair ended and I had to go back to school, for my Junior year. High school was getting easier and better, and I was looking forward to seeing more of Marlys, and maybe I would be able to use the car sometimes to go on dates with her. Marlys sat next to me in English class and she helped me with my English home work sometimes. We sat next to each other in Chemistry class, and I helped her with her Chemistry home work. Chemistry was my favorite class; the teacher was very nice and helpful and made chemistry interesting.

Dad was talking about the Communists taking over the country any day. He had been reading in the news that Senator Joseph McCarthy had identified hundreds of communists in high positions in the government, in Hollywood and all over the country, and dad seemed to be convinced that we were in grave danger of an invasion by Russia, with the help of all the communists in America. I doubted that

the Russians would ever make it all the way to Minnesota; they probably would prefer those warmer places like California and Texas and Florida.

Mom insisted that I continue to attend church, and now that I was confirmed I was a member of Luther League which was for teenagers and young adults who had been confirmed. Luther League met once a month on Sunday evenings, mainly as a sort of social gathering, but we also were expected to plan events and help raise money for church activities and overseas missions. I went to the September meeting, which was when they elected new officers for the coming year. Someone nominated me to be President; someone else nominated Clayton to be President. So the members voted to see whether Clayton or Carlyle would be President. Of course I won, by just two votes. I guess Mrs. Paulson was upset, and mom was proud. I didn't really want to be President, but I sure liked winning against Clayton.

In October, Wally was discharged from the Air Force after nearly four years. He came home with his wife Ginger, who was from Louisiana. Wally was now trying to decide what to do. He thought he would go to college on the GI bill, and he needed to decide which college. Meanwhile Wally and Ginger rented an apartment in Henning to live until he could start college.

Disaster Strikes

In late October mom told me that dad had decided to sell the farms.

He was going to take over a restaurant in Henning, and we would be moving there as soon as he could sell the cattle and machinery, and get the restaurant ready. She said that dad and Wally were already working on getting the restaurant ready. I begged mom to tell dad that she refused to go. I begged her to stop him. But she said the decision had been made. It was time to get out of farming, and maybe dad would have better luck at something else.

This can't be happening to me. What about my heifer? My pig? My future dairy and hog farm? My soil conservation plans? My friendship with Marlys? He can't do that. Doesn't he know that this will ruin my life? He didn't even discuss it with me! He didn't even tell me he was planning to destroy my future! Does he hate me? Or maybe he just doesn't know I exist?

For a few days I refused to believe what was happening. I was praying that something would happen to stop it. I was praying that dad would be killed in a car accident, or that the tractor would crush him, or that he would have a fatal heart attack. Anything so we could stay on the farm. I could run the farm without him. I could do a better job, and make more money, and support mom and my sisters.

Maybe I could stay here with whoever buys the farms from dad, and work as a farm hand, and keep my heifer and pig. Maybe Sven Broberg or Cleve Johnson would hire me as a farm hand and let me keep my heifer and pig. I would save my money and buy my own farm some day.

But after a week or so, reality set in. I came home from school one day and my dog Shep was not around to meet me at the bus. I asked mom if she had seen Shep around. She told me that dad had decided that the dog couldn't come with us to Henning, so he had Billy Hanson come and shoot Shep; he was very old and would have died soon anyway, so it was best to do it this way.

Why doesn't he just have Billy come and shoot me too? I'm not going to be able to adjust to living in Henning. Put me out of my misery. It was clear that dad was not going to change his mind. The farms were going to be sold. We were moving to Henning, and there was not anything I could do about it. I had to tell the County 4-H office to come and get my heifer. I had to tell the FFA to come and get my pig. I had to tell the 4-H Club that I was moving and could no longer be

their President. I had to tell the Luther League that I was moving and could no longer be their President. And I had to tell Marllys and my other friends at Battle Lake that I was moving away. I was very depressed and very angry. I refused to talk to either mom or dad, or even eat meals with them. For a few days I would take the 39 Chevy to high school in the morning without even asking, and I would not come home until late in the evening. I didn't milk the cows, or feed the chickens or carry water, or any of my other chores. I was on strike.

When I was ten years old, I was wishing that I could live in Watford City, like my cousins, and enjoy the nice life that they had in town. But now I had no interest in moving to town. I wanted to be a farmer.

On Saturday, dad told me I had to come with him to Henning to help fix up the restaurant. I had to help paint, and I might need to take some days off from school next week to help him prepare for the farm auction that he had scheduled for the following Saturday. Rather than get punched in the nose, I went with dad to Henning on Saturday. On the way there, dad told me I was being very selfish; I was only thinking about my own interests, not about the rest of the family; I was upsetting my mother; I should be happy that we had this new opportunity, and we all would be better off, and have more money. I should be thankful for all the things he and mom had done for me. I should be thankful that I had grown up healthy and smart and strong. I had no reason to be unhappy.

I remember thinking that this was the first time in my life that dad had ever spoken directly to me except to tell me to do some work. He didn't ask me for my thoughts; he had no interest in my opinions. I also thought that he had no idea at all what was going on in my life. He was a complete stranger; a nasty, mean stranger who had complete control over my life. I did not say a word to this stranger.

The following Saturday was auction day. Most of our neighbors were there, and many people I didn't know. The auctioneers went from one

pile of junk to another, selling everything to the highest bidder. Most of the farm machinery was old and out-of-date, and much of it sold for only a few dollars. Some items got no bids at all. After selling all the junk, they moved to the junky livestock, and every chicken, cow, calf and goose was sold. Most of dad's cattle were weird, accidental cross breeds of dairy and beef cattle, and they weren't very good for dairy and they weren't good for beef. They were a sorry lot, and the bids were low. It suddenly occurred to me that dad had been a really inept farmer, and I was embarrassed that this was all we had to show for those fifteen years of farming in Minnesota. I'm sure dad would have commented that he had nine healthy kids to show for his years in Minnesota.

Then the auctioneer took bids on the farms themselves. There was only one bid, from Mr. Rix, who had a small farm a few miles east of us, and dad thought it was too low so he didn't sell it then; he negotiated a sales price with Mr. Rix later. My heifer and pig were already gone before the auction.

After all the livestock had been taken away, we loaded up our few remaining items of furniture and clothes and moved to Henning. My life was over. My future did not exist. I began focusing on getting through high school and then escaping from this family forever.

Moving to Town

The building we moved into in Henning was a large brick building with a restaurant on the main floor, hotel rooms on the second floor, and a full basement with a hotel laundry room, storage area, and a game room. A sign out front said: Corner Café. We moved into some of the hotel rooms. Mom and dad and the twins moved into a large room at the back of the hotel, over the kitchen and across from one of the two bathrooms. I was given one of the "single" hotel rooms across the hallway, near the back stairs. My room was about six feet wide

and eight feet long, but it had a window, and it was private, and I could lock my door. The remaining three sisters were assigned to the large room at the very front of the hotel, which apparently had been a doctor's or dentist's office at some time in the past. There was another bathroom near the front of the hotel. In addition to the rooms we used, there were about eight other rooms, some doubles and some singles, available to rent to overnight hotel guests. We were to share the bathrooms with any overnight guests.



This photo is of the Corner Café building, taken several years after we lived there. The lower level of the building was the restaurant.

The upper level was the hotel and our bedrooms.

The restaurant on the main floor had several booths along one wall and another row of booths down the middle of the room. On the other side of the room was the long bar, with stools. Behind the bar was a counter with cabinets above for displaying pies and other desserts, and lower cabinets for dishes. Near the front door was a soda fountain bar, a candy counter, and the cash register. At the back of the restaurant seating area were two swinging doors into the kitchen, where there was a large baking oven, a grill, and several burners, food preparation and serving counters, the dish washing tubs and drying

area, and a center island with pots and pans hanging above. Stairs led from the kitchen up to the hotel level, and down to the basement. There was a fire escape ladder coming down on the outside of the building off the kitchen from the hotel level to the ground in the back alley behind the building.

Dad informed me that the restaurant would be open from six in the morning to eleven at night, every day, except on Sunday when we would open at eight in the morning and close at ten in the evening. My job would be to work during my lunch break from school, and again when I got home from school until closing time. I would wait tables, wash dishes, mop floors, help clean hotel rooms, and whatever else needed to be done.

The next day I walked the three blocks to the Henning High School and enrolled. The Principal said he would try to get me into classes similar to the ones I had been taking in Battle Lake, and he got me enrolled in Chemistry, Solid Geometry, English, and Social Studies. I said I did not want to take Agriculture anymore. So he put me in an Advanced Algebra class instead. Fine. Whatever. I didn't care.

The Principal said that the basketball coach would be happy to see a tall new addition to the school, but I told him that I was retarded when it came to sports, so I would not be joining the basketball team.

At lunch time I went back to the restaurant, and helped take lunch orders from the high school students who had come there for lunch. This was very embarrassing, because I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know what was on the menu; I didn't know how to carry things without spilling them; and I hated being in the spotlight in front of all these high school students I didn't know. After school, I came back to work, washing dishes, cleaning the floor, and helping the cook prepare for the supper rush. Then I waited tables during supper, and then washed more dishes. Some high school students

came by to introduce themselves to me, and welcome me to the school. Pauline Nyberg, who lived a couple of blocks up the street, Ann Salmon, who lived just across the street, and Bruce Holmgren, whose father ran the tavern at the other end of the block. They were all Juniors like me; they did their best to make me feel comfortable.

Work Slow-Down

But I was not buying into this restaurant work. Some days I would not come to the restaurant at lunch time to work; I would eat lunch at school, or not at all. Some evenings I would sneak out the back door when I was supposed to be working, and go to the pool hall or to Bruce's place or up to the high school to watch a basketball game. Some nights I wouldn't come back to my room until everything was dark at the restaurant and hotel. To me, that building represented nothing good, except a place to sleep at night. It was a prison, and I was a prisoner who would escape as much as I could. I didn't care if dad made money or not; I didn't care if he didn't have enough help. There was nothing in it for me. Make my sisters work; they can wait on tables; they can wash dishes; they can scrub floors. I resign as slave.

By Christmas time, I was getting more comfortable waiting tables, and I had settled into my new classes. My Chemistry teacher thought I was some sort of genius because I had already studied the stuff he was doing in his class. I really liked my English teacher, who was the first English teacher I had who was able to make me enjoy literature. Even the Advanced Algebra class was O.K, although the teacher was also the basketball coach and he frequently made comments that it was too bad that I wasn't a basketball player.

A girl in my class named Marlys Bellmore mentioned one day that her birthday was in July. I said so was mine; July 17th. She said hers also was the 17th. No kidding. I said I was born in Breckenridge; so was

she! Wow! Oh, I remember you; you were that brat in my room who was crying all the time!! I watched when they changed your diapers. That evening I told mom about Marlys born in Breckenridge the same day as I. Mom said she remembered Mrs. Bellmore; she was in the same room in the hospital. Marlys said her mother remembered Mrs. Hystad. So Marlys started calling me “brother” and I started calling her “sister”. She was a nice sister, but not girl friend material.

All my brothers came home for Christmas that year. Norry had just been discharged from the Air Force, and came to visit, bringing his wife Lennie and their daughter Pam. Wally and Ginger were there. And Mickey came home on furlough before being shipped to Japan for a tour of duty there. That was the last time all nine of us kids were home for Christmas. It was a strange Christmas. We had plenty of rooms for everyone, so unlike the farm, and we had indoor plumbing, but we didn’t have a family kitchen or a living room or any other family gathering place. We were just a bunch of non-paying hotel guests, and we ate our Christmas eve supper and our Christmas dinner in different booths in the restaurant. I am quite sure Santa Claus didn’t come that year; he couldn’t find us at the farm, and he didn’t know these strange people living in a hotel in Henning.

Getting Religion (or a Girlfriend)?

In January, I was enticed into going to the Lutheran Church in Henning. An attractive blonde girl who lived just a block down the street from the Corner Café invited me to come with her to church. Shirley was the daughter of the woman who ran the beauty parlor in town, and although she was two years younger than I, she was quite mature. I went with Shirley to church and to some evening bible study classes, and then she convinced me to join the church choir with her, which required choir practice one evening a week as well as wearing robes and sitting in the choir section of the church each Sunday. Shirley’s mother wouldn’t let her go out on dates, but we

spent one or two evenings, and a few hours on Sunday, together at church functions. Not quite the same as my experience with Natalie. I felt good about going to church; I was being a good boy, and I felt like I was part of the community, not just dangling out there by myself. I also welcomed the opportunity to get away from the restaurant. Dad didn't want me taking time off work to go to church, but even dad couldn't win on that issue; mom insisted that dad let me off work to go to church. Maybe I should become a Minister or a Missionary!!

In February, I volunteered to be in the Junior class play, and I would sneak away from the restaurant many evenings to go to play practice. I enjoyed acting, and I enjoyed the social time with the other kids. I got to know John Thoreson, who lived on a farm near Henning and was able to stay in town after school. John soon became one of my best friends. He had grown up on the farm, and knew all about farm work, and he was intent on getting away from the farm as soon as he could; he talked about going to college so he could do something other than farming. John helped me to start thinking a little about what I might do with my life, rather than be a farmer, but I was still pretty much rejecting any alternatives. Norry and Wally had both started college that January. Norry at the University of Minnesota, and Wally at Bemidji State College. Norry was definite that he wanted to be a lawyer, and Wally thought he might want to be a lawyer. But I had no interest in being a lawyer. Maybe I'd be an actor. Maybe I'd be an engineer, and build things. Or maybe I'd just have fun and be a bum.

I still missed Marlys LaValley and some of my other friends from Battle Lake, and I had no chance to visit with any of them. I couldn't use dad's car to go to visit them. Other than my pristine relationship with Shirley at church, I had not met any girls at Henning who I was interested in, and who were interested in me. There were a couple of girls who were cute and smart, but they were going steady with seniors. But a cute girl named Joann Leaders sat next to me in one of my classes, and she was very

friendly. She was going steady with a senior named Mickey Froslee, who had lots of money and drove a fancy new pickup truck. One day Joann told me that she was available to go out with other guys; she was still going out with Mickey, but she would like to go out with me. So we made a date to go to a basketball game in Deer Creek, just five miles down the road, the next Friday night. The following evening, Bruce and I were out in front of the pool hall talking when Mickey Froslee drove up and parked in front of us. He got out of the pickup, came over to me, and said: "I'll kill you if you even think about going out with Joann." I was bigger than Mickey, and wasn't afraid of him beating me up, but he probably had guns, and I wasn't sure he wouldn't use them, so I said: "I'll go out with her if she wants to, and you aren't going to stop me, you runt", (I wish). Mickey didn't like that answer, but he just repeated his warning and roared away in his pickup, spinning his wheels and sliding sideways on the thick layer of packed snow and ice that covered the street.

How did Mickey know about my date with Joann? I guess Joann must have told him. Maybe she was just trying to make him jealous. Maybe she was just using me. I decided I would not become part of an infamous lovers triangle. I told Joann about Mickey's threat, and that I thought it would be best if we just forgot about a date. So far, my experience with girls was not good; Natalie insisted that I go steady; Shirley could see me only in church; and now Joann is trying to get me killed. I think Joann broke up with Mickey a couple of months later, and started dating someone from Battle Lake who was three years older. Mickey did not kill him.

In March, dad had a mild heart attack. Maybe my prayers had been answered, but too late to save the farm! He had to stay in bed for a few days, and the doctor ordered him to work only limited hours for the next several weeks. He also was told to change his diet, and was given some blood thinning medicine. Mom asked me to help more at the restaurant. I said I would help her, but I had no interest in helping

dad. A few days later, dad got me alone in the kitchen and told me that I had caused his heart attack. I had failed to carry my weight around here; I had forced him to work long hours; I had made it necessary to hire another part-time person; I was the reason the restaurant was not making money. (At least he didn't punch me in the nose; I guess he had learned that punching his sons was not very effective. Or maybe it was because I was three inches taller and weighed 20 pounds more than he.)

Back to Slavery

He was giving me a choice. I could leave now and never come back. Or I could start carrying my weight around here. If I wanted to stay, I was to get up and open up the kitchen for the cook at 5:45 every morning, and then open the restaurant to customers at 6:00, and wait on all customers until I had to leave for school; then I would be there to wait on tables during lunch break; and I would be back after school and work through the supper rush, until about 7:00. I wouldn't have to work in the evenings. I could have the evenings off to do my school things. But if I failed to open the restaurant in the morning, I was out of here. Dad was obviously surprised when I said I would need time to think about it. I decided I could tolerate being a slave for another year, so I could get through high school. I told dad that I would accept his schedule. The next morning I was up at 5:30, and started my new routine. It was becoming more apparent that this restaurant and hotel business was not going to be any more successful than farming. Part of the problem was that there were four restaurants and two hotels in this small town. There simply was not enough business to support that many restaurants, and there was enough hotel business to support only about two rooms, not two hotels. And dad had the largest building and the most expensive operation. The previous owner had failed, so how did dad think he could make money here? But that was not my problem. I just had to get through one more year.

Although I was working more hours at the restaurant, I was free in the evenings for play practice, or to go to church events with Shirley, or to go to basketball games, or just hang out with my friends. We had a movie theater in town, and one of my friends worked as the projectionist there, and I would go visit him in the projection booth and sometimes watch the movies for free. I would give him free sodas and ice cream at the café in exchange.

As the weather got warmer, the roller skating rink out on the shore of East Battle Lake reopened for the summer season, and several of my friends were hoping to go there the next Friday night, but they didn't have a ride and they asked me if might be able to get my father's car for the evening. I said I would try. I asked mom, and she said she thought it would be fine, and she would talk with dad. The next day she told me that dad said I couldn't have the car. Mom didn't know why, but dad had decided, and that was it. I concluded that dad was punishing me. I had been driving the car for almost two years. I had never had any accidents or caused any problems. There was no reason for not letting me have the car. He was just punishing me. It never entered my mind that he might be concerned about the safety of me driving a bunch of kids to a party.

I went to my room and screamed in total frustration and anger. Why was I born into this family? Why don't I just leave now? I was laying there on my bed staring into space and trying to decide what to do. Then I noticed that I was staring at that large trophy I had won for my soil conservation plan, and that made me even madder. It reminded me of all that I had lost. I grabbed the trophy, broke it into pieces, and threw it in the trash can. And I promised myself that I would never ask to borrow dad's car again.

A couple of days later, mom asked me how my trophy had been broken. I told her I broke it intentionally. I was pretending it was dad as I was breaking it into little pieces. Mom cried. She said I should have been proud of that trophy; it was an important accomplishment.

I told her that everything I had done on the farm was all a waste of time; that trophy was meaningless now. Mom cried some more.

Lacking Motivation

Margaret Halvorson was the Social Sciences teacher and also my advisor. One day that Spring she asked me into her office. She asked me how I was adjusting to Henning. I explained that it had been very difficult for me to move here and to give up all my plans and projects, and I had not been able to find a new goal or direction. Then she said: "Carlyle, your grades are not as good as they should be; you do not seem to be applying yourself. I have seen all of your records and test scores and I know you have the potential to have the highest grades in this school. It would be a shame to let all that intelligence go to waste. I'll be happy to meet with you whenever you want to discuss options for your future. You should be planning to go to college, and I hope you will work to improve your grades so you can go on to college."

I thanked her, and said I would try to do better. After leaving her office, I didn't know whether she was just fibbing me about being able to get the best grades in school in order to motivate me, or maybe she was right. Maybe I should try to focus on a new life; a new goal; a new reason for studying and getting good grades. But nothing seemed to excite me. In fact, I was so unexcited about my school work that I skipped school a few balmy Spring afternoons to go fishing with friends. I got my "sister" Marlys Bellmore to forge excuse slips for me, and sign my mother's name. But one Friday afternoon, too many of us disappeared after lunch and the Principal became suspicious. He called the parents of all of those missing, and he discovered that my mother knew nothing about any excuse slip, and that several other mothers also had not excused their sons. So on Monday morning several of us were summoned to the Principal's office and told that we were being given detention. We would be required to stay after school for an hour every day for a week, as punishment. The Principal didn't realize that this was not punishment for me; he was just saving me from work at the restaurant.

I did join the track team that Spring, and ran the mile. I competed in several track meets with other schools, and usually finished in the top three, winning a ribbon. I considered trying out for the baseball team, but after watching the team practice I knew I could not compete with any of them. I couldn't catch a ball; I couldn't hit; and I certainly couldn't pitch.

The Junior-Senior prom was coming up soon, and many of my friends had invited girls to go with them. None of my friends was going steady, but we decided it would be nice to dress up and go to the prom. I didn't have a girl friend, so I spent some time trying to figure out who I could ask. Shirley's mother wouldn't let her go; my "sister" Marlys wasn't available. I decided to ask Phyllis Hoyhtya. She was a farm girl in my class; she was very quiet and shy, but she was pretty, and smart, and had a nice slim figure, and no one had invited her yet. She accepted my invitation. A friend of mine loaned me his car to drive out to Phyllis' farm to pick her up. She was all dressed up in a formal gown; she looked beautiful. We spent the evening together at the high school, doing all the prom activities. I even tried to dance with her, although I didn't know how to dance. She didn't seem to mind. I drove her back home again shortly after midnight. I walked her to the door and thanked her for the evening, and left. We didn't even have a kiss on the cheek. Well, she sure is different from Natalie.

My Junior year came to an end, and I was facing a long summer of working at the Corner Café. For the first time in my life I was not looking forward to summer. But then I got lucky. A few days after the end of school, Eugene Volden, who was in my class and lived a few blocks from us in Henning, gave me a call and asked if I would be interested in going to work for his father's company. His father owned a construction firm that built grain elevators, and they were just starting a new project out in Williston, North Dakota, which was only about 50 miles from Watford City. Eugene's father wanted Eugene to go work on the Williston project that summer, and Eugene wanted someone his age to go with him and sort of be his buddy for the summer.

They would pay \$1.00 per hour, and we would usually work about 60 hours per week, weather permitting. My primary job would be to saw lumber and pound nails.

Getting Away for the Summer

I told Eugene I would like to go, but I would need to talk with my parents. I doubted that dad would let me go, and I knew that Mr. Volden would not take me if my father objected. So I went to mom and told her the situation. I told her that this was an opportunity for me to learn about the construction business; an opportunity to get involved with something other than farming. And I could make some money so I could pay all my own school and clothes expenses next year. I also told her that if dad said no, I would leave anyway; I would go find a job somewhere and not come back.

The next morning, mom said I could go. She said dad had agreed not to object. I could tell that dad was angry with me, but I didn't care. I was getting out of there for the summer. Two days later I took my little bag and jumped into a Volden Construction Company pickup with Eugene and another employee, and we were off to Williston.

In Williston, Eugene and I shared a little room in a boarding house that Volden had rented for us. We had a bathroom down the hall. We were about three blocks from the construction site, and each morning we were up at 6:00, had a quick breakfast; bought a bag lunch to take to work; and were to work by 7:00 a.m. We were building a wooden grain elevator, which would be over 120 feet tall when finished. It was built by stacking planks, laid flat one on top of another, held in place with 16 penny spikes. At the very bottom, the walls were 2" by 12" planks laid flat; as we got up to about 20 feet the plank size was reduced to 2" by 10", and another 20 feet they were reduced to 2" by 8", and then to 2" by 6", and finally to 2" by 4". Normally the high school kids on such a job were assigned to carrying lumber and doing other chores for the carpenters, but because Eugene was the boss' son, he and I were immediately assigned as carpenters. We were trained for the first couple of days, and then worked on our own, under the general supervision of the chief carpenter.

Our job was to saw planks to the correct length and then nail them in place with the 16 penny spikes, using a heavy hatchet hammer. All corners were alternately overlapped, as well as all junctions with the inside dividing walls for the grain bins. This way all the exterior and interior walls gradually climbed higher and higher, 1 1/2 inches at a time. Every day or so we would need to raise all the scaffolding as we slowly moved up into the sky. For ten hours a day, six days a week, we sawed and hammered. By the end of the first day, Eugene and I both had big blisters all over our right hand; by the end of the second day, we had blisters on top of the blisters. By the end of the first week, the calluses were forming and the pain was subsiding.

During the first couple of weeks Eugene and I usually were so tired after work that we would just eat supper and go to bed. But we gradually built up our stamina and we started to spend an hour or two exploring the town of Williston after supper. We went to some movies, met twin sisters at a drive-in diner who showed us around town, went to a carnival, and started to feel like real residents. We even visited two of my cousins who lived in Williston; Donna Quinnell, who was the daughter of one of dad's dead sisters; and Alva and her husband and kids; Alva was the daughter of Hank Hystad, dad's brother. Some nights or on rainy days when we couldn't work, we would just read a book. Both of us were saving almost all of our earnings. We spent very little on food, and almost nothing on entertainment.

We drove back to Henning for the July 4th weekend; it took almost a full day to drive home; we were there two full days, and then drove back the fourth day. Dad didn't make me work in the restaurant those two days I was home. I just goofed off with friends in town.

We returned to Williston and the elevator. By the end of July we had reached 100 feet, which was the top of the grain bins. Then we built a floor on top of this structure. And on top of all this we built a 20 foot high frame structure which would hold the machinery to move grain into the various bins, and large fans to control dust. As we started building the frame structure at the top, the work became much more dangerous and frightening, because we had to clamber around on the

thin shaky frame walls which we stood up on top of the bin structure. From the top of these walls it was 20 feet down to the new machinery floor, and 120 feet down to the ground. One day the construction chief asked for volunteers to go up to the top of the 20 foot frame wall to nail the final bracing on the walls. Eugene and I volunteered. We climbed up the long ladders, one of us in each corner of the wall. We had to climb onto the top of the 2"by 6" wall frame and slide along this wall, with our feet dangling below, to nail the final braces in place. Looking down to the ground, the cars below looked like match boxes. One little slip here and I was dead; no safety nets; no safety belts; no safety nothing. We both survived, but I decided I would not volunteer for that duty again.

This is the grain elevator we built in Williston, when it was at about two-thirds of its final height.



We were nearly finished with the machinery building at the top; just the roof left. Then metal sheeting would be applied to the entire outside of the elevator. After work that day, Eugene and I were talking with one of the employees with the company who owned and operated the grain elevators in Williston. He had watched us up there 120 feet in the air. He asked us how long we had been doing this work. We said this was our first job, we were just doing it this summer before going back to school. He asked where we were going to college; we said we were still in high school; had just turned 17 a couple of weeks before. He wouldn't believe us.

That weekend we had both Saturday and Sunday off from work because we were waiting for some key pieces of construction material to arrive. So I suggested to Eugene that we hitch hike to Watford City to see my cousins; I figured that they would give us a ride back on Sunday evening. So we started out, and quickly got a ride toward Watford, but the driver only went as far as the northern part of McKenzie County, just across the Missouri River. And we waited and waited but no more cars stopped for us. Finally I decided we could walk to my Uncle Hank's ranch which I thought was not too far from where we were. We walked and walked and walked for over two hours. There were no cars on the road, and no houses in sight. It looked like we had stumbled into Death Valley. Finally a car stopped for us. I told the driver we were trying to get to Henry Hystad's place. The driver said we were in luck because she was on her way to the school to pick up her kids and Dallas Hystad's wife should be there to pick up her kids. So we went to the school and met Dallas' wife, who took us to Hank's place. Hank and Emma were very nice to us, and gave us a place to sleep for the night, and invited relatives over to see us. Dallas and Phyllis came, and Ellery and his wife Doris, and Donna stopped by. They had a little impromptu picnic for us.

The next morning they gave us breakfast, and then Ellery asked me if I would like to come to work for him for the rest of the summer. He

needed some help during harvest season. He would provide room and board and pay me \$40 a week; he argued that this would give me about the same take home pay as I was making now on the elevator. I discussed it with Eugene, and he said it would be all right with him if I wanted to do it, and they only had about two weeks of work left on the elevator for me anyway, so that could be a good deal for me. So I agreed to come to work for Ellery. But first I said we wanted someone to take us into Watford so we could visit our cousins there, and I would have one of my cousins drive us back to Williston to take Eugene back and so I could get my things.

Its All Relative

On Monday morning I started work for Ellery. They had given me a cot in an old shed near the house, that they called the bunk house. It had no bathroom, but it had a cold water shower out back, along with an outhouse. Here I was back on the farm, and back on a Hystad farm. For a couple of days I was thinking that maybe I would just stay here, and finish high school in Watford. But then I learned that Ellery was much too closely related to dad. I was now his slave. He expected me up at 5:00 to milk cows, by hand; he didn't even have a milking machine. Right after a skimpy breakfast I was out to work in the fields, shocking grain. I couldn't believe it; shocking grain? We had given up shocking grain years ago, and here he was still shocking grain and using a threshing machine rather than a combine. And if it rained, I was out fixing fences, watching carefully for rattle snakes all the time. And at the end of the day, I had to milk the cows again, before a supper that was never very good. After supper, I was to help wash the dishes and then take out the slop bucket and dump it. I also noticed that Ellery was doing almost no work. He sat around the house in the morning while I milked the cows, and then he took a long nap after the mid-day dinner, and then he was back sitting in the kitchen while I milked the cows in the evening. What have I gotten myself into? Well, its only a month before school starts, and I will go

back to Henning. I'm not going to volunteer to be Ellery's slave, even for \$40 a week.

The following Saturday afternoon, I asked Ellery if I could spend the night in Watford; I would be home Sunday evening. He said that would be all right, as long as I could get myself there. I called Buzz and he came out and picked me up. That evening I went with Buzz to a beer party in the Theodore Roosevelt National Park in the Badlands. There were 20 or more guys and girls there, mostly seniors in high school and college kids, including Buzz who would soon be starting his second year in college, and Clifford and Clinton, who would be starting their first year in college. It was a fun party; I drank almost a full beer; there was good food; singing; conversations; and some smooching with the girls.

I was introduced to Joanne Dodge, who was my age. She was tall, very slim, athletic, had very nice lips, and she had the top grades in her high school class. She was not with anyone at the party; her steady boyfriend was away in Wyoming working. Are all the attractive girls in the world already going steady? I was interested in Joanne, and she was interested in me, and we soon wondered away from the crowd a bit, and did a little experimental kissing. In the middle of a long kiss, some guy yelled right in my ear, telling me to get away from Joanne; she was taken, and if I didn't leave her alone he was going to get Roger to beat me up. Joanne informed me that this pip squeak was a cousin of her boyfriend, and that Roger was a big bruiser who was here at the party tonight.

I soon found myself face-to-face with Roger, who said he was going to beat me up. It was quite obvious that Roger had consumed more than a couple of beers and he could barely walk. He took a swing at me; I ducked; and then Roger started screaming. He had thrown his shoulder out of joint when he swung at me and missed, and now he was in great pain. Buzz helped him snap the shoulder back in place,

and Roger lost interest in fighting, even though the pip squeak was still urging him on. It occurred to me that maybe women were not really worth all this fighting and threats. Or maybe I just needed to stick with girls like Phyllis who had no boyfriends.

My First Car

The next day, Sunday, Buzz introduced me to some more of his friends, including Darryl Hagen. Darryl had a 1935 Ford Coupe for sale. I drove it around the block, and it seemed to run fine. It had a good paint job; no rust; plush carpet on the floor; red interior lights; and a radio. He was asking \$60.00. If I had my own car, I could drive into town from Ellery's whenever I wished; I might even arrange a date with Joanne. I offered \$50. Sold. I had just purchased my first automobile. Wow!

That evening I drove my 35 Ford back to Ellery's place. I discovered that the car had one major flaw; the brakes were very unreliable, and even at their best they were not good. They were mechanical brakes, with rods running directly from the brake pedal to the rear wheels. The rods would bend unpredictably, and sometimes they would bend so much that there would be no braking leverage at all. I quickly learned to stop the car by down shifting and then shutting off the ignition, using the engine to brake the car.

That week I was back to milking cows, cutting grain, shocking grain, and patching barbed wire fences, as well as washing dishes. Ellery continued his leisurely life style. One day after dinner, I spent about a half hour tightening up the brake rods on my car, hoping they would be a little more reliable. On Saturday evening, after milking the cows, I headed back to Watford. My cousins and I went to a party in Watford, and I spent some time with Joanne again. She invited me to come swimming with her out in the country on Sunday. So the next day I followed Joanne's directions to a place in the country. She first

took me to a picnic with some of her friends, and then she asked me to drive her to the swimming hole where we could go swimming. I said I didn't have a swim suit with me; she said she didn't either; we could go skinny dipping.

When we arrived at the swimming hole, which was really a dirty cattle watering pond, we found several people there already. So we couldn't go skinny dipping. We drove around for awhile until she found a place where she said she would like to park. She started being very romantic and loving, and then she said she was getting too warm and she had to take off some of her clothes. I was getting a little uncomfortable because it was a bright sunny day and we were parked right out on the prairie; anyone could see us for miles around. There is no place to hide out there in Western North Dakota. Joanne suggested that I must be getting too warm and should take off some of my clothes, but I said I was just fine. She finally decided it was time for her to go back to visit her friends. Maybe Shirley or Phyllis were more my type.

I was back at the ranch Sunday night, and up bright and early Monday morning to milk the cows and do my other chores. After I finished the chores, I went to the bunk house to get something. Ellery followed me in. He said that he needed to talk with me. He said he was very disappointed in my work. I had been away two Sundays in a row; I had failed to take out the slop bucket some days; and I had worked on my car on his time. Therefore, he had no choice but to let me go. He would pay me for two weeks, but he was deducting for the time I spent working on my car, and he was deducting \$5.00 for 15 gallons of gas that I used. I said I didn't use any of his gas. He said I must have taken gas out of his tank because I had driven the car so much. He handed me the money. I threw my belongings in a bag, walked around him, got in my car, and left. What a first class pile of manure; ashamed to have him as a cousin; embarrassed that his name was Hystad. And I never spoke to Ellery again.

Enjoying Watford

It was now the middle of August, and I had no job. But I did have several hundred dollars saved. What should I do? I could go back to Henning, or I could just goof off in Watford for two weeks before I had to go back to school. I headed for Watford. I went to see Buzz first. He was working for his dad, Perrin Thompson, building a new basement for a customer. Perrin had a construction company and a plumbing company. I told Buzz and Perrin that I had just been fired by Ellery because I didn't work on Sunday and didn't take out the slop bucket. Perrin said: "You can go to work for me right now and I'll pay you \$1.50 an hour, and you don't have to work on Sunday or carry out any slop buckets." I went to work immediately helping them build a basement. We set up forms for pouring concrete; it took a couple of days to prepare all the forms, and then we mixed the concrete and filled the forms. When we finished that project we started on another house, building another basement. I worked the last two weeks of that summer for Uncle Perrin and made \$180. I stayed at Perrin's house, in the basement bedroom with Buzz, and ate many of my meals at their house. It was a very good two weeks financially. It sure makes a big difference which relatives you work for!

But I needed to leave. Back to Henning for my Senior year. Why didn't I just stay in Watford? I could live with Uncle Perrin and Aunt Alice. But I knew that mom would be very upset if I didn't come back, and I didn't want to be a burden on Alice and Perrin. I decided it was not safe to drive my 35 Ford all the way to Minnesota; I'd probably kill myself or others. So I left my car with my cousin Shirley (Buzz's sister) and her husband Duane. I told Duane he could use the car or sell it if he wanted. I took the train back to Minnesota; back to my "volunteer" job at the restaurant.

Chief Waiter and Dish Washer

Up at 5:30 a.m. to open the restaurant. Wait on grumpy old men coming in for breakfast; fortunately most of them ordered the same thing every morning. Our restaurant was the only place open so early in the morning, so many of the business men in town would come in for breakfast or at least a cup of coffee before going to work. After making and serving several pots of coffee, and serving up various combinations of eggs, bacon, sausage, toast, doughnuts, French toast and even leftover pie, I rushed off to school. Still looking for a girl friend in Henning. Still not interested in school work. Still no plans for the future.

The minister at the Lutheran Church saw me on the street and welcomed me back and asked me to come back to join the choir. I said I would, but I didn't. I thought about religion carefully; I tried to resurrect that good feeling of belonging, that good feeling of being taken care of by an all-powerful force. But I could not. I didn't need it or want it. I was through with church. I hadn't concluded there was no God, but I knew I didn't believe most of what was said by the minister in his sermons. I was convinced that the church was not able to help me, and I was not able to help the church.

Eugene Volden persuaded me to join the football team; he thought I would enjoy it and that I would make a good pass receiver. So I reluctantly volunteered to join the team. The coach was happy to have a big, tall player, until he discovered that I knew absolutely nothing about football. I went through all the football drills, blocking, tackling, high-stepping through tires, pushing a blocking sled, running laps; I was in good shape physically, but I didn't understand anything in the play book, and I usually made all the wrong moves on the field. The coaches never spent any time explaining game strategy; they apparently assumed we all knew those things. The coach soon gave up on me as a possible receiver, and told me I would play defensive

end. My job was to prevent anyone from running around my end of the line, and to tackle the quarterback in passing situations; that was the extent of my coaching. I thought that sounded easy, but I quickly discovered that I seldom knew who had the ball and was often tackling the wrong person. I was still retarded at sports.

No Gift From Dad

I was still looking for a girl friend; someone more exciting than Phyllis; and my sports retardation didn't help. I decided I needed a car; maybe that would interest some attractive girls. Dad had abandoned the old 39 Chevy at the farm when we moved to Henning, and I asked him if I could have it if I could get it running. He said fine. A friend gave me a ride to the old farm, with a can of gas, and I got the Chevy started, and drove it slowly back to Henning, on tires that were bald and nearly flat. I bought new tires, put in new plugs, points, condenser and filters, replaced the water pump, and got it licensed. Dad had once painted the car an ugly gray color, with a big paint brush, and it looked like it had been painted with a broom. But I had wheels; very ugly and old wheels, and I was one of only a few Seniors with their own car.

But then dad noticed that the car was running. He said I owed him \$100 for it. What? You said I could have it if I fixed it up! He said: it's my car; if you want it you can pay me \$100 and I'll give you the title, or I can sell it to someone else. Dad, you are really a nice guy! I'm so lucky to have you for a father. Sign the title over to me and I'll give you the \$100.

Every morning for the next three months I took four quarters out of the cash register while I was working in the restaurant; I would get back my \$100. Some days I would take eight or ten quarters, if I needed a little extra that day; I got back my \$100 plus interest! I was careful not to take very much any one day, so it wouldn't be obvious.

Dad didn't have a system to detect embezzlement! Wonder who else was snitching money from the till.

Restless and Reckless

That Fall I became friends with Ronnie "Tub" Johnson; he had graduated the prior Spring, and was working at odd jobs around town trying to decide what to do with his life. He had a sporty 39 Ford coupe, and had devoted much of his time since graduation to discovering where to find girls. He had discovered several dance halls, skating rinks, and beer taverns that never checked IDs. Two or three times a week Tub and I would go check out one or more of these night spots, in Parkers Prairie, about 12 miles southeast; in Milona, about 15 miles east; in New York Mills, about 15 miles north; in Wadena, about 12 miles northeast; and in Ashby, about 15 miles southwest; wherever there was a party and beer. We would drive either his old 39 Ford or my old 39 Chevy over the narrow, snow covered roads to these neighboring towns, and most return trips would be made under the influence of alcohol. It's a wonder we didn't kill ourselves. We met many girls, but none who I considered to be good enough for me; those I was interested in were going steady with big mean guys. I dated a few girls once or twice, but always lost interest in them.

With all my driving to neighboring towns, my old gray Chevy was taking a beating, and one day the transmission stopped working properly; I couldn't shift into reverse at all, and could only drive in first and second gear. Major problem. John Thoreson had been trying to get me to buy a 39 Chevy from him (it was his father's car), and I decided to buy it so I could use spare parts from one car to keep the other one running. \$75.00 cash. Now I owned three cars for which I had paid a total of \$225, and none of them was any good. John's car was in better condition than my old gray 39, so I worked on fixing up that car whenever I had any spare time, until it ran quite well and it

looked as good as a 17 year old car in Minnesota can look. It was painted black, and it shined; all lights worked; the radio worked; it had all of its hub caps (after a long search); padded carpet on the floors; and I even got the heater to work, which was rather important in a Minnesota winter. I had become the chief source of transportation for the high school seniors in town, but I still didn't have a girl friend. John Thoreson, Bruce, John Brogard, Merlyn, Myron, Richard, Pauline, Tweedy, Lucille, Marlys (sister) and others were frequent passengers in one of my old beat up cars

As the year progressed, Bruce Holmgren and John Thoreson would join Tub and me frequently on our explorations into foreign lands. It was not unusual for me to get to bed at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning, and then up again at 5:30 to open the restaurant and wait on grumpy old men. I was getting to be as grumpy as the old men. To catch up on my sleep, I would frequently go to sleep in Social Studies class, which was right after lunch. This got to be almost a regular occurrence. I would walk into class, take my seat, lay my head on my arms on the desk and go to sleep. The teacher, Ma Halvorson, gave up on trying to keep me awake; and I still got As or Bs in the class. One day, I came into class and I wasn't tired. I started noticing who was sitting around me, and started talking with some of them, and flirting with one of the girls nearby. I was disrupting the class. Ma Halvorson said: "Carlyle, would you just put your head down and go to sleep as usual, so the rest of us can work." Oh, yeah. What a put down. Very embarrassing. What a great student I've become!

Getting My Act Together

I started focusing on my school work a little more. I wrote some good stories for my English composition class, and volunteered for the speech competition; I started getting A in geometry and algebra classes; and I even stayed awake in Mrs. Halvorson's class most days. But I found school boring most of the time. Only the English teacher,

Mr. Scribner, had the ability to make the class interesting and to motivate me. He got me interested in reading good books, writing, and speech. But I still didn't have any focus. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life.

I was selected for a lead role in the Senior Class Play. And I became a member of the Men's Quartet when the regular bass singer became ill shortly before the major regional competition. The Quartet was a big hit at the regional competition, and we were called back for encores several times. The only problem was that the four of us had practiced only two songs together, so all we could do with the encores was repeat one of the songs we had already done, including "When the Saints Come Marching In". We were very good with those two songs. And there was a very attractive red-headed girl in the audience from Parkers Prairie who obviously was very interested in the bass singer; me.

I also was selected for the district competition in Speech. I wrote and delivered a speech on driving and automobile safety; this was before highway safety was a popular issue. I presented the speech to English class first, and then to the Henning student body, and then to a PTA meeting of parents, and then at the district speech competition. The red-headed girl from Parkers Prairie was also at the speech competition, and she made a point of attending the session when I gave my speech. We talked afterwards, and made a date to go to a movie the next weekend. Lovely girl; a senior who was planning to go to college next year; very nice smile; slim, athletic, intelligent.

I picked her up in my black 39 Chevy; it was not the best car for making a good impression on a date; how do you look successful in a 17 year old car? We had a good time at the movie and at the ice cream parlor after the movie. And then she told me that she was wearing the ring of a guy who was away at college and that he was expecting her to marry him in a year or so, but she would like to go out with me again. Damn! Are all the pretty and intelligent girls in the world already taken? Or am I just unlucky? I said I would call her soon. The

next week I discovered that she was also dating a sleazy guy from Henning whose father had money and this sleazy guy had picked up my red-headed sweetheart in his father's big, new Cadillac. I didn't call her again.

One of the advantages of working at the Corner Café was the jukebox we had in the restaurant. I had access to the key so I could play any songs I wanted, for free. The records were updated on a regular basis and it carried most of the popular songs of the time, with lots of pop, R&B doo wop, and rock, and very few country tunes. Elvis was hitting the big time, along with Bill Haley and the Comets, Chuck Berry, and Jerry Lee Lewis. And there were The Platters, The Penguins, The Coasters, The Drifters, The Moonglows and a host of other black groups with doo wop hits.

Some of the top tunes those two years were: "Rock Around the Clock", by Bill Haley & the Comets, "Maybellene" by Chuck Berry, "Sincerely" by the Moonglows, "The Great Pretender", "My Prayer" and "Only You (and You Alone)" by The Platters, "Earth Angel", by The Penguins, "Blueberry Hill" by Fats Domino, "Sixteen Tons" by Tennessee Ernie Ford, "Don't be Cruel" and "Heartbreak Hotel" by Elvis, "The Green Door" by Jim Lowe, "Blue Suede Shoes" by Carl Perkins, "Glow Worm" by the Mills Brothers, "Be-Bop-A-Lula" by Gene Vincent, and "Mr. Sandman" by the Chordettes. "Unchained Melody" was one of my favorites, which I sang to a few of my girlfriends (which is probably why I only had a few dates with them). And I loved "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White". Another significant advantage of working in the restaurant was my access to leftover banana cream pie, lemon pie, banana splits, chocolate fudge sundaes, and other goodies.

John and I would spend time many evenings playing pool in one of the two pool halls in town, and Bruce would join us sometimes. Bruce liked to discuss politics with me. The 1956 elections were coming up

soon, and it looked like it would be Adlai Stevenson running against Eisenhower again for President. Bruce thought he was a Democrat, because his father was a Democrat, and of course he supported Stevenson. And I thought I might be a Republican, because dad was a Republican. Bruce knew all the classic arguments as to why Democrats were better than Republicans, like Republicans cause depressions, and only help the rich, and don't care about farmers or laborers. I had heard dad talk about why Democrats were bad; they started wars and they coddled lazy workers and let labor unions run amok. But I hadn't heard any good reasons why dad was a Republican; I only knew that he hated Roosevelt and Truman, and liked Ike, but it was not clear to me why dad hated a party that supported working class people. Did he consider himself to be rich? I personally had little interest in politics. It seemed to have no impact on my life.

During this year I seldom had any interaction with my sisters. I knew they were around, but I seldom saw them, and almost never talked with any of them. On rare occasions I would see one of my sisters at the school and it would remind me that they were living here in Henning also. We never ate meals together; we had no family meeting place; we didn't do anything together. My interactions with mom and dad were mainly about work, during lunch hour and after school.

In March, the track coach talked with all of the track students about the need to start getting in condition for Spring competition. I would be running in the long distance competitions again. I started running in the gym, or on the outdoor track whenever the weather permitted. Then one day the coach stopped me in the hall and asked me to come to his office. He told me that he had been told by a reliable source that I was smoking cigarettes, and that was not acceptable. I was furious. I had never smoked; I was one of the few senior guys who didn't smoke at all; I was adamantly opposed to smoking, and I told him so. He didn't believe me. He said if he had any further reports that I was smoking I would be off the track

team. I said: you don't need to bother; I'm off your track team as of right now. And that was the end of my illustrious sports career.

Enrolling in College

John Thoreson and I continued to discuss plans for college. We decided we would both go to Concordia College. John's mother wanted him to go to this Lutheran college in Moorhead, and I didn't have any strong reasons not to go there, so we agreed on Concordia. One day in early May, John and I drove up to Moorhead and registered at Concordia for the next Fall. We also applied for financial aid, but we didn't get any assurance about receiving aid. John knew that his parents would help pay his costs, and I knew my dad would not pay a cent for me. So now I had to figure out how to get the money. I suggested that we both go out to Watford as soon as school is out to get jobs and save a lot of money for college. I figured if I could get a job like I had with Uncle Perrin last summer, at \$1.50 an hour, I should be able to save enough so I could make it through the year by working part time at some job at the college or maybe work in a restaurant in Moorhead.

On the way back from Moorhead, my black 39 Chevy started making a loud noise in the engine. The mechanic at the garage said I probably needed new crankshaft bearings, which would be very expensive. I needed a car that could get John and me to Watford, but I couldn't afford any major engine repair. My savings from last summer were almost gone. A few days later I negotiated a deal with the body shop owner just behind the restaurant to trade him my two 39 Chevys plus \$40, for his 41 Chevy. The 41 ran well, and the body was in good condition; the only problem was it used a quart of oil about every 75 miles. I made an arrangement with the garage mechanic to save used motor oil for me to use in my car.

I talked with Mom about my plans. I told her I would be leaving for Watford right after school was out so I could earn money to go to college. The next day, dad informed me that I couldn't leave when

school was out; he needed me to work in the restaurant. He said the restaurant was not making money, largely because I wasn't working enough; and he also suspected that I had been taking money from the till!! Who, me? He might need to declare bankruptcy. I was to stay there and work until he got things straightened out financially. I didn't appreciate being blamed for his mismanagement of the business. I suspected that he would never get things straightened out financially, and I didn't feel I owed him a thing. He didn't seem to have any interest in my plans for college, or my financial situation; my plans were not important. Oh sure, dad. No problem. I'll stay and be your slave for the rest of my life if you want! To avoid getting a punch in the nose, I didn't argue with him.

In Trouble With the Law

A week before graduation day. We seniors had completed most of our exams, and were going through the final formalities and ceremonies and good byes. John, Pauline, Tweedy and I were in my 41 Chevy after school one day, and as we drove by the high school, Pauline or Tweedy started honking my car horn to celebrate our graduation. We all felt it was worth celebrating. Pauline and Tweedy were happy they made it through high school; I was happy that my days of slavery were almost over. Friday evening before graduation, John and I and some senior girls went to a dance near Deer Creek and had a good time. Coming home, John drove my car because I was tired and maybe had too many beers. As we came into Henning, John made a couple of U turns at each end of main street, squealing the tires a bit on each turn, and then he turned onto a side street where his car was parked, got in his car and went home. I drove my car to my usual parking place on the side of the Corner Café. As I got out of the car, the town cop drove up next to me and stopped. His name was George Dickout, (and you can imagine that us high school kids had some fun with that name). George was not very bright; and usually he was afraid to stop anyone to give them a ticket. He informed me that he was giving me a ticket for reckless driving for making those two U turns. I said I wasn't driving. He didn't believe me,

and because I argued with him, he said he was also giving me a ticket for excessive horn honking two days earlier up by the high school. Huh!! Dad told me later that he thought Dickout gave me those tickets because dad had cussed him out about some incident out in front of the café a couple of weeks earlier.

The next Monday, I had to appear before the Judge in Fergus Falls. I pled guilty to excessive horn honking, noting that I was not the one honking, and that we were only celebrating our graduation. I pled not guilty to the charge of reckless driving. The judge fined me \$10 for the horn honking offense and suspended my driver's license for 10 days. He set a trial date on the reckless driving charge for two weeks later.

This was bad news. John and I were planning to leave for Watford on Saturday, the day after graduation, and I needed my license; and I didn't want to wait around for a trial. John said he would have his father talk to Dickout and tell him that John was the one driving the car, and that Dickout should drop the charge; John said his dad and Dickout were old friends.

On Tuesday, I had red spots over much of my body, and the doctor said I had measles; a mild case, but I was still contagious and should stay at home a couple of days. But I refused to miss any of the senior class activities or the graduation, and fortunately dad agreed that I shouldn't wait tables in the restaurant for a few days while I was contagious. A few other graduates also got measles at the same time, and we all agreed we would go to graduation anyway. That same day, I heard that Bruce Holmgren had been in a serious auto accident. He was in serious condition in a hospital in Alexandria. Probably because I couldn't drive that week, he had borrowed his dad's car and gone to Parkers Prairie by himself, met a girl and was driving her home when he went off the road. Probably had been drinking too much.

On Wednesday, I was informed that the reckless driving charge had been dropped by Dickout after talking with John's dad. John and I went

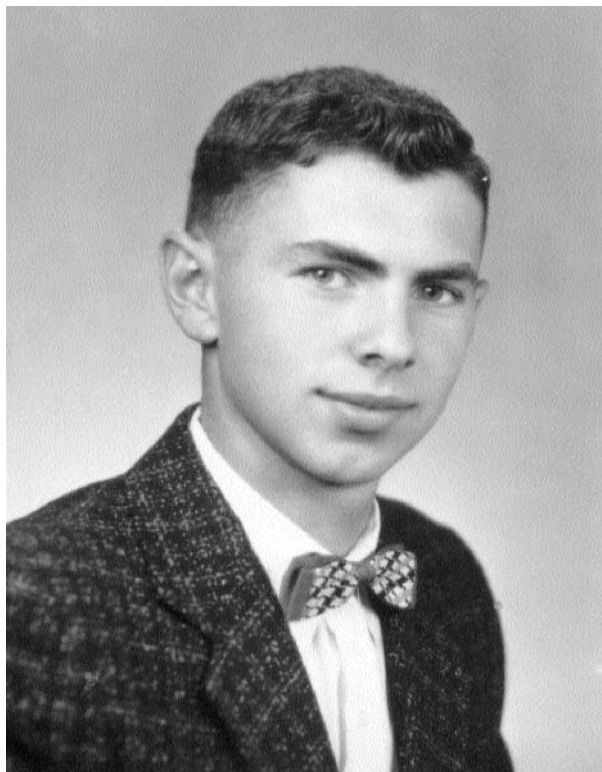
to see Bruce in the hospital. He was in bad shape, but able to talk. Said he had one arm around the girl and took his eyes off the road to try to kiss her when he ran off the road and that's all he remembers. He will miss graduation. Poor Bruce; he wasn't a very good driver even using both hands.

On Thursday, dad told me that he was going to Fergus on business; I asked to ride along, because I wanted to see if I could get the judge to give me my driver's license back early. I went to the judge's office and explained that I was graduating tomorrow, and I was planning to leave for North Dakota on Saturday, and if I were delayed it would hurt my chances of saving enough money for college. The judge was sympathetic, opened a desk drawer, pulled out my driver's license and handed it to me, with the admonition that I should not drive in Henning until I am leaving town on Saturday; Dickout will stop you if he sees you driving.

Free At Last; Free At Last

On Friday, we had our graduation ceremony, and I was now free to leave. I realized I had really come to like many of my fellow students at Henning, and they had welcomed and accepted this outsider as one of their own. It had been a good two years there. I would miss my friends and Henning, for at least a few days. But I wouldn't miss dumb Dickout.

This is my high school graduation photo.



Friday evening I decided to drive to a dance hall with several friends, to celebrate. I drove down main street in Henning, right past old Dickout sitting in his cop car on main street. I waved at him as I passed. His red light and siren went on immediately, and I obediently pulled over. Pulled out my driver's license, and informed him that the judge had returned the license early because the judge didn't believe Dickout's charge about excessive horn honking. Dickout was very disappointed, but he believed me. I drove off to the dance hall. Still didn't meet any girls of interest, but one quite drunk young woman wanted me to come with her outside; said she had a camper out there, with a bed. I declined. Went home, and wrote a short note to mom: "I'm leaving early in the morning to drive to Watford to get a job. I'll write. Love, Carlyle."

Saturday morning, at 4:30, I tip toed down the hallway, out the back door, down the fire escape, and into my car, with two bags containing all my belongings. I was not going to have a fist fight with dad. I drove out of town. I had escaped my slavery. I was finally running away from home. I was a free man. I don't know who opened up the restaurant that morning.

I drove to John's place, where he was waiting for me. His parents thanked me for taking John along to get a good job. His mother gave us bags of food and some water for the trip. We waved goodbye and headed west on US 210.

I had about \$20 in my pocket and 12 quarts of oil in the trunk. I was all set to begin the rest of my life.

To be continued

Coming next: Finding a Career - Getting an Education; 1956 - 1962