Reflections of the Past

By Iven Willenborg Weber

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This collection of essays is an attempt to let my children and grandchildren know “where I came from” and to remember their heritage is something to be proud of.

I dedicate these writings to my husband Les, and all my children, of whom I am very proud. Hopefully their lives will be as full as mine - the good things far outnumbering the unpleasant.

A thank you to all the caring people who have helped me make my life what it is. And a special thanks to Jim and Terri who encouraged and prodded me to finish my writings and then were instrumental in putting them in book form.

NOTE: Do not be confused by the order in which these articles appear. They are not in chronological order. As I recalled something, I wrote it.

Iven

CHAPTER 1

My Parents And My Childhood

Ben and Molly's 65th Wedding Aniv. 1976

My mother's (Molly Gerken) mother died a few days after she was born, so an elderly aunt came to help out my grandfather Wm. Gerken. She was the 6th child, so it was quite a houseful of little ones. I understand that my Grandfather then married a young women from Germany "who felt so sorry for the nice man with all those little children." He promised he would one day take her back to her homeland, a promise he kept 25-30 years later.

Molly went to a country school house not far from their farm if they could take a short cut through the woods. She used to tell about the time there was a torrential rain, causing a little stream to overflow its banks. She could not get across their usual place, so her older brother Rudolph took off his shoes, had her carry them, rolled up his trousers and put her on his shoulders and carefully stepped on the rocks

he was familiar with, as the high water came roaring down. He got her safely to the other side. Molly said their parents were very upset with them, as one slip would surely have meant drowning. When Molly was old enough to receive her first Communion she was sent to Dyersville to board with her cousins, the Kunkels. That year was the end of her formal education, because she was needed to take care of her younger brothers and sisters while the grown-ups were preoccupied with building a new barn.

My parents started farming at New Hampton, Iowa, where my older brother was born. Then because he could make a good profit, Dad sold and moved to southwest Minnesota near Lismore, where I was born. Again he sold and moved to Adrian, Minnesota where my two sisters Dula and Dell Rose were born. Then another brother Roger, was born, but because of a difficult birth was a cripple for the rest of his life. All births were home deliveries, and when I was “old enough” (shortly before I was married) Mother told me the umbilical cord was wrapped around the baby’s neck making it almost impossible to deliver. Roger needed a lot of care, and cried a lot, so my parents sent me to Dyersville, Iowa to stay with her family. Elmer could run errands and assist in the care of the baby, so he was needed. Dula was not potty trained, and Dell was still in diapers, so Iven had to go. I was 4 years old at that time, and spent nearly a year with my grandparents, 2 unmarried aunts and 2 unmarried uncles. It was a wonderful time for me.

Aunt Theckla who I called Aunt Peg, nicknamed me Dotsy, and often called me that until the time of her death in 1984. One day Aunt Olive opened a seldom used drawer and there was a nest of tiny new born mice. I was enthralled, she was horrified.

When my uncles where to tired too “play” with me, they would give me some salt and tell me to go outside and catch a bird. They told me the secret was to sneak up very quietly behind a bird, and put salt on it’s tail. Then it would be easy to catch. How tired I became as I ran and ran after those robins!

While I was with Gramp and Gram, my mother came to visit and my uncles told me to say the little poem they had taught me. So very proudly I recited:

“My father shot a tin can,

My father shot a bear,

My father shot him in the ass

And never touched a hare.”

Needless to say, my Mother nearly fainted, and was furious with her two younger brothers, who thought it was very funny. It must have made quite an impression on me as its over 76 years later, and I still remember it.

I also remember one Easter morning a nest of the most beautiful colored eggs on the dining room table. They were in a silver bowl with a graceful handle on it, and toward one side of the handle was a little silver squirrel. At that time I was interested only in the eggs, now I wonder what became of the unique and beautiful bowl.

Iven 4 years old.
The summer she stayed with her grandparents(Gerkens).

Molly Gerken Willenborg

CHAPTER 2

Some Things My Father Remembered, and Told Me

My father and mother (Ben and Molly Willenborg) were married in Dyersville, Iowa on February 17, 1911. Ben was born on a farm near a little hamlet called Petersburg, Iowa, one of 10 children. His education consisted of 8 years at country school. Ben spoke fondly of one teacher, a Mr. Kramer, who taught them basics - practical things they were likely to encounter in life as a farmer. When he was old enough he worked with a crew that followed the harvest, beginning in eastern Iowa and as far west as Le Mars and Remsen, Iowa. He told us they slept in the barns at the places they worked, and would bathe after dark in a creek if one was nearby, or in a horse watering trough. At one place near the end of the season it was getting so cold in the barn they asked if other provisions could be made. The master of

the house told the young men they could have one room in the house, but they would have to carry clean straw in, and put it on the floor, as a place to sleep.

Ben often told this story of threshing at a farm. Several young men were dismantling a straw stack, which consisted of bundles of straw tied by a twine, then piled up until a good size stack was made. When the last bundle was picked up, a rat scurried out and up the inside of one of the man's pant legs. Needless to say, he did a "fancy dance" and much leg slapping to the amusement and laughter of the others. My dad (Ben) could still heartily laugh about this until the time of his death at age 99.

Ben also recalled that when he was working for a farmer a church was being built in Petersburg. He was sent with a shovel to go by horseback to the church where he helped dig for the foundation of the bell tower. That church, of Saint Peter and Paul was built in 1904.

When Ben was very young a new barn was built on their farm, and his father wanted it very secure and warm, so was solidly built. Ben was very concerned about a cat that had just had a litter of kittens. Previously he had observed that the mother cat often went out of the old barn to find food, and then return to the kittens. Ben talked to his mother about it and one day when the father was gone, or in the fields, he and his mother cut a hole in the side of the barn not easily visible. It was never mentioned to his father. The

cat was shown the hole, and soon adjusted to it. Needless to say, Ben always had a tender spot in his heart for his caring mother. In 1983, when Ben was 98 years old, a Willenborg family reunion was held at Petersburg, so some of the grandchildren took Grampa Ben to the old "home place" and went to the barn where the hole was still accessible to the cats.

Ben also hired out to other farmers, one a Mr. Goedken who was a cousin of my mother, Molly. Mother and Dad met at a wedding, and had to pursue their courtship by horse and buggy. Dad was always proud of having a good team and a nice buggy, as the young men vied with one another for the best looking transportation. He told that at one party, a couple of young men thought it would be funny to switch all the whips in the buggies prior to leaving. Imagine the confusion with 15 or 20 young men trying to find their own whip with perhaps only a few dim lanterns or matches for light.

Ben Willenborg 83 years old

CHAPTER 3

School

We were sent to the parochial school in Dyersville, Ia, about 2 1/2 miles from home. My older brother Elmer drove the horse and buggy which was our transportation.

At that time much was made of First Fridays. Everyone was expected to go to confession and communion on the first Friday of each month, and nine consecutive months would practically insure you a place in heaven. One Friday my brother and I were going to early Mass, when the horse lifted his tail and his excrement was sprayed all over us. I remember how I cried that my good dress was ruined. Mother felt bad that we “broke” our 1st Fridays and would have to start over. It so happened that the horse had too much fresh grass and had developed diarrhea. When Elmer couldn’t go on to high school, I had to drive the horse, and

during the noon hour recess I always ran to my uncle's barn and fed the horse.

Elmer was a much better student than I and wanted to go on to school, but it was during the depression and money was scarce. Dad had money borrowed from his sister and brother-in-law and they said it was too costly and unnecessary for Elmer to go on to school. He could learn all he needed to know about farming by staying home and working! During the winter E.V. went to "winter school" for a few months, conducted by an order of Brothers. I still feel bad that he didn't have the same opportunity I did, but am glad to say that on his own, he has become a very well read and knowledgeable person.

When I was 14 years old I learned to drive a car - no drivers license required - so the horse was put to pasture and I drove my 2 younger sisters and younger brother by auto.

One afternoon as my sister and I were on our way home from school one of the neighbors cattle broke through a fence and wandered out on the road. I was driving and slowed the car down as much as possible, honked the honked the horn, hoping the cows would let me pass. They should have understood that I wanted to get through, so barely moving, I nudged the cow that was right in front of the car. I barely touched her and the front bumper fell off! When we opened the car door the cattle scattered and we picked up the bumper and laid it in the ditch. When we got

home, I had to tell Dad what had happened. He was not very happy with me! So I had to go with him to where the bumper had been laid. He picked it up, and after examining it, said it was so badly rusted it would soon have fallen off by itself. Was I ever relieved!

The parochial school was co-ed through the 5th grade. Then the boys were sent to the near by Brothers School, and the girls continued in the same buildings, taught by Franciscan nuns.

I think my grade school was rather uneventful, but I recall a group of us planning to stage a strike against our teacher who was giving us too much homework. In our civics class we had just learned about strikes, but our mistake was to make all the plans just below an open window where our teacher overheard all our plans. Needless to say, we didn't get very far!

High school was more fun, but the teachers did all they could to keep the girls from becoming interested in the boys at the nearby school. Of course there was some dating, but the Junior-Senior Prom was a rather awkward affair. Perhaps the biggest thrill was getting our first formal.

Sister Leonella was a very timid nun, and we tested here patience to the limit. One morning two classmates turned the pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln upside down. They hung above her desk, so naturally the

entire class giggled until she became red faced an exasperated. Another day, when she wanted to call our attention to something special, she pressed her desk bell, but there was no sound. She hit it harder and harder and finally turned it over, to discover someone had stuffed it with tissue paper. Harmless pranks for sure, but we thought we were very daring.

In 1932 our class of 17 was the last graduating class of St. Francis Academy. After that, changes were made and it became co-ed. I enjoyed the all girls high school, and was a good student, hoping to go to college, but there was no money! I had brochures from several colleges and felt sure I could work my way through the State University. In writing a letter to her brother, Archbishop Rudolph Gerken, my mother mentioned what I was hoping to do. He responded by saying “no niece of his should go to the University of Iowa, as it was a “den of iniquity”. That put a stop to all my hopes for college.

After all our children were out of school and college, I took a class at Loras College, and loved it! Had we not by this time been wintering in Florida I would have taken more classes. However, I am so grateful our children have all had the opportunity to go to high school and college, and some beyond.

After Thoughts

My first reader was printed in both German and English. This was shortly after World War I, and feelings toward Germany were hostile, so German was banned, requiring all school books to be printed in English only. I wonder if that had not been abolished, would I be bi-lingual now?

I have no idea who taught me this, but as a youngster of 4 or 5, about the time of the end of World War I, I recited this poem.

"Kaiser Bill[1] went up the hill
To get a look at France.
Kaiser Bill came down the hill
With a bullet in his pants."

1. Kaiser Bill referred to Kaiser Wilhelm, who was in power in Germany at that time

Iven Willenborg at 17

CHAPTER 4

Uncle Leo

My mother's brother Leo had just finished his seminary studies and was soon to be ordained a priest. Plans were being made for that big day, and I was to be his little bride. At that time newly ordained priests often had a very young girl dressed like a miniature bride take part in the ceremony. I think it signified the young priest's marriage or commitment to the church. I have no recollection of that First Mass, but do remember being in the program after the banquet.

I was four years old and went to school for several days with a cousin who was in the first grade. There, a nun, Sister Matilda, taught me a poem in German. I had to practice the poem on the stage of a large empty auditorium - so when the day arrived everything was quite different. I walked to center stage, and just stood there and looked out at the crowd. From off stage the nun finally prompted me

with the first word or two. Off I went, reciting the poem I had memorized. The crowd went wild, and clapped and clapped. I can't remember leaving the stage, but recall two of the waitresses locked their arms to make a seat for me and carried me around the block.

So when Les teases me that I was a child bride, I can say "you are so right."

When Uncle Leo was stationed in Dyersville as assistant to Father Warming, my sister Dula and I were in first and second grade. At morning recess Uncle Leo would often come to the playground and take us to Geordts, a small grocery store just a few buildings away. They always had a bushel of nice, big, red apples, shine them on his trousers, then give them to us and told us to get back to school, while he stayed to visit with Mr. Geordt. One day he didn't come to the playground so we just walked over to the store, picked up an apple and went back to school. Mr. Geordt told Uncle Leo what we had done. Of course we were told that our Uncle Leo always paid for the apples after we had gone back to school. So that was our first lesson on stealing. Needless to say, it never happened again.

Uncle Leo was not a well man, and a few years after his ordination became sick and had to be hospitalized in Waterloo, Iowa. As I had been his "little bride", my mother allowed me to go with her to visit him there. After talking to him for a bit, he asked me to go into the next room and visit a man in there. To my surprise, he was black, the first negro I had ever seen. He was friendly, had a big smile,

and reached out his hand toward me, so I put my little hand in his, and said I hoped he would get better. Then I went back to Uncle Leo's room and told him about the black man. For being nice to a stranger, and not being afraid, Uncle Leo awarded me with a holy picture and a quarter. That was the last time I saw Uncle Leo, as he passed away July 10, 1923, four years after he was ordained.

Iven as Uncle Leo’s “Little Bride”

CHAPTER 5

Archbishop Gerken (Uncle Rudy)

Mother had another brother who became an Archbishop. One summer when visiting with his family at the old Dyersville homestead, they had a family reunion. I remember there were a lot of uncles and aunts, and many many cousins. Uncle Rudolph had placed his miter on a table in the seldom used living room. A few of us young cousins ventured into that room, and I put the miter, so richly embroidered with gold braid etc. on my head. There were two brocaded strips hanging down the back, 12 inches or there about. One of my cousins took one in each hand and we proceeded to play horse. Hearing the laughter my Aunt Olive investigated. She was extremely upset, and made us put it back on the table, told us never ever to touch it again, and then "get outside and play." I can't help but wonder if Uncle Rudolph had come into the room, would he have

become angry, would he have enjoyed it, or even perhaps joined us.

Uncle Rudolph was ordained in 1917. He was then sent, as a missionary, to Ranger, Texas, if I recall correctly. By 1927 he was made Bishop in the Amarillo, Texas diocese. At some time during his ministry he was able to renovate an old college which became a seminary for many young men from Mexico aspiring to the priesthood. Persecution of Christians was running rampant at that time, so it became a refuge for these men, who then went back to Mexico to work with their people. In 1933 he was named Archbishop of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

My uncle was a kind and caring man. I recall that he had his elderly stepmother come to live with him where he cared for her until her death. Ten years later Uncle Rudolph died at the age of 46. During his short priesthood he accomplished a lot, and is remembered for working with the people, even donning overalls to help with some building projects.

In 1947 Les and I took a trip to Texas and New Mexico, so stopped at the cathedral in Santa Fe where he is buried beneath the floor in the sanctuary. The priest in charge at that time invited us into the rectory and was a gracious host. He told of often being called out at night to go to some Indian's place. The Indians were notorious for drinking a lot, so he never knew if it was to settle a brawl or minister

to a dying parishioner. As a result he carried both the sacred oils and a revolver! The Indians had little money, yet they wanted to show their appreciation, so often give the priests a piece of handmade sterling silver jewelry. Father then opened a desk drawer and asked me to pick out one for myself. A box full of beautiful rings and I could take my pick! I tried on one after another, and selected a lovely ring with turquoise stone. Inside, Father inscribed, Sante Fe 2-2-74. I still wear the ring and cherish it.

CHAPTER 6

Home Healthcare

We always brought eggs in to our Grandpa and Grandma Willenbergs on our way to school. This particular morning my brother told me to take them to our Aunt and Uncle who lived with them at the time. My brother waited for me in the horse drawn buggy on the street. As usual, I went to the back door, and no one was in the closed porch or kitchen, yet, I could hear voices. So I went to the partly open door to the dining room. As soon as Aunt Adelaide saw me, she very hurriedly pushed me back into the kitchen and was told to run along. However, I did get a glimpse of what was going on in the dining room. The table was completely covered with a white cloth. On the table was a body covered with a sheet, which I later found out was my Grandfather. Standing beside him was a man I didn't know, and one or two other people, I couldn't see well, which were probable my uncle and Grandmother. I

was pushed back so quick I really didn't get to see much - but years later I was told that Grandpa had prostrate surgery at home, because he was afraid of hospitals. I have no idea how old he was at that time, but he lived to be 75 years old.

CHAPTER 7

The Depression Of 1928 - 1935

As I've said before, we may have been poor, but we didn't know it. Everyone was in the same shape and money was scarce everywhere.

We had a quite comfortable house to live in, and plenty to eat, as the farm produced plenty of milk, meat, eggs and vegetables. Every summer Mother and Dad invited some of our cousins from Dyersville to come, one at a time, for a week or two so they could have all the food and milk they wanted. It was one less mouth for their parents to feed. We enjoyed having our "city" cousins who seemed so much more sophisticated than we, and we in turn taught them about life in the country.

One episode stands out in my memory. Mother and Dad both went to town and we were told not to ride the mules

while they were gone. Well, that was too much to ask, as it was such a beautiful sunny day and we went riding anyway. We took turns, often two of us at a time, and when Dell Rose and George Ament were galloping across the field the cinch broke, and both riders fell to the ground. Dell Rose complained of her arm hurting, so Dula and I rubbed it considerably, and exercised it by pumping it up and down, all the while threatening her with near death if she told Mother and Dad. We put the mules out to pasture, put away the gear, and pretended nothing happened. The folks came home, and in due time supper was served. Dula, Dell and I sat on a bench behind the table, with Dell between us. When something was said about what we had done in the afternoon, we either kicked her or jabbed her in the side as a reminder not to tell. Well, Dell couldn't eat, she was feeling so miserable, and our parents sensed that something was wrong. In exasperation my mother finally put her fork done, and in no uncertain terms said "That is enough, what is wrong?" With that Dell started to cry and the charade was over. Between sobs, she told about falling off the mule, so mother took one look at the arm and realized it was broken. It was after office hours, but Mother contacted the doctor and said they would be right in to see him. When they had come back, her arm had been set and she had to wear a cast for some time. Needless to say, Dula and I were very subdued gals and did all we could so as not to incite Mother's wrath.

We heard stories about distant relatives in Chicago having a very hard time during the depression. The father and adult son both had lost their jobs, and day after day pounded the streets in search of work. Often they ate in the soup lines provided by the Salvation Army. Some times they became so weary of the endless search they just stayed home and slept. Mrs. Elwanger said she was glad they could sleep, for then they were not hungry, and it gave her a chance to cut cardboard to fit in the men's shoes covering the thin soles or holes they had worn in their shoes while walking the streets.

In those days we were not given an allowance, so had to depend on the generosity or amount of change our parents had. One particularly distasteful job was cleaning the chicken house. All nests had to be emptied and clean straw put in, followed by cleaning the floor of chicken excrement, feathers etc. It was not only foul smelling, but also very dusty. Then the water troughs were emptied, rinsed out and refilled. This job could take a couple of hours, for which we were paid 25 cents.

We did not have the variety of clothes we enjoy now. As children we had our "Sunday" outfit, and most other clothing was made by our mother, or a 'hand me down' from cousins, older brother or sister. As we grew older, our wardrobe improved. I remember my mother changing a basic black dress of mine three or four times. It was nice that she was so clever with a needle. Another thing I recall is that

our bed sheets and pillow cases were made from white flour sacks. It must have taken about six sacks to make one sheet. The heavy flat seams were not very comfortable, but we got used to them.

I can't recall if we got a daily newspaper or not for a long time. But we received a couple of farm magazines, the St. Anthony's Messenger and the diocesan paper besides the weekly Dyersville paper. The bookcase held quite a few books, one a medical book where mother had pasted the pages together that showed medical drawings of nude men and women, and a drawing of a baby in a womb. How different now!

CHAPTER 8

How Les and I Met In 1933

Les and I met at a house party on a farm several miles form my home. Les was invited by the hosts because he always ground feed for them, I went with a young man from the neighborhood. In those days it was the custom to clear out a large room in the house, often a bedroom or better yet, if the barn was empty of hay, that was used. Usually someone in the surrounding territory was musically inclined, so dance music was provided by a violinist and an accordion player. Makeshift benches of planks were arranged around the room, something sprinkled of the floor to make it slick, and the dancing began.

Often several of the men became involved in a card game, usually for money. That is where Les spent most of the evening at the Reynold Becker party. Once he looked in on the dancers and I wondered who the handsome young man

was, hoping he would ask me to dance. The evening wore on, and just before the final piece “Good Night Ladies,” Les made another appearance and asked me to dance. Then he asked me for a date for the following week. So we began our courtship.

Homebrew and whiskey were available - someplace in the background. Every so often a few of the men would leave for a hit and come back - the dancing getting livelier and livelier! We young gals soon knew who to avoid. Square dancing was often done with much vigor and foot stomping. I recall being asked by different married men to be their partner, as it was a fun dance, and their wives were pregnant, therefore too strenuous for them. If we had a good (square dance) “caller,” and a good partner the gal could follow easily. Lunch was always served; sandwiches and an endless amount of cake and coffee - no sit down lunch, fancy plates etc. - just dig in and eat!

Les and Iven

CHAPTER 9

Clothing

Winters were harsh, summers were hot. Since we went to school by horse and buggy, our Mother made us wear long underwear. By the time I was in the 6th or 7th grade I hated it, so in the morning when I got to school, I went to the restroom, and rolled the long underwear above my knees. Then just before going home I reversed the process. At the time we wore the same underwear for several days, or perhaps a week. By the end of the week the legs of the underwear were stretched so big the buldge above my knees was enormous! How vain I must have been!

When I was in high school(1929-30) there was a fad that girls wore boy's overcoats. As my brother had outgrown his coat, Mother was estatic that she didn't have to buy me a new coat. At that time girls did not wear jackets. My problem was that the other girls wore the boys coat one season,

but I had to wear the hand-me-down two years; how I hated it. Another teenage fad I recall, was the 4 buckle over-shoes(boots) we wore during the winter - over our shoes. The boys wore them buckled up - the gals left them all unbuckled, which certainly made an obnoxious noise as we walked.

I have a very fond memory of Dad taking me to Drexlers store in Dyersville, Ia. for a new pair of shoes. Mothers instructions were to get a nice sensible pair of black slippers that I could wear all year. It was spring, and I fell in love with a very light beige pair of slippers, and I coaxed and coaxed my father to let me have the light shoes, promising to take very good care of them etc. They cost the huge sum of $5.00, which was a lot at that time. My mother was not very pleased, but Dad just smiled and winked at me. He was extra special to me after that.

Women's hats were a very important part of their wardrobe and one day Mother took me with her to the Weidenbacher Milinary Store. There I found a red hat, the underside of the brim faced with a light tan fabric, that looked exceptionally well on me, so Mother bought it to go with a red spring coat, even though it was far too expensive. Perhaps she realized we had to "make do" in so many ways, indulging me would be a real treat. Oh how I loved her for doing that!

Mother made most of our clothes. Some from sacks in which chicken and hog feed came. Some came in very

pretty patterns. When Dad needed more feed, Mother would cut a small swatch from a bag in the design she liked best, and send it with him to the Feed Store. Then when she had enough material to make what ever we needed, she started sewing. It could be a dress, pajamas, a shirt, or a blouse - whatever! Scraps were made into hot pads, or if enough was left over it was braided into rugs. Of course rugs were made from a great variety of materials, all incorporated into a rug of the desired size.

CHAPTER 10

Roger

My brother Roger was born in 1918, the forth child of Molly and Ben Willenborg. All of us were home deliveries; the doctor would come to the home when birth was imminent. In previous pregnancies Mother delivered her babies without any trouble. Roger's was different - the umbilical cord was wrapped around his neck, making it extremely difficult to give birth in home surroundings. I was told he did not receive enough oxygen during the process, so was born crippled.

This must have been very hard on Mother and Dad, but they cared for this "special child" lovingly and constant. He was kept in a regulation size baby crib that could be wheeled from room to room. At meal time Mother sat along the end of the table, and pushed Roger's crib next to her. She prepared a plate of mashed foods, and fed him spoonful by

spoonful. His liquids were given to him in a baby bottle that had to be propped on a pillow at comfortable angle for him.

Roger had a beautiful face, dark eyes and hair, but a very deformed body, always in fetal position, and hands that bent inward. He was unable to speak, but could cry if he was uncomfortable. We all grew up helping to care for him - turning him so he wouldn't get bed sores, feeding him, changing his diapers, bathing him, etc. On nice summer days we would wheel him outdoors under a shade tree, and cover the crib with net, or sit beside him to keep flies and mosquitoes off of him. He loved to hear little children play around him and would try to watch their movements and laugh.

Occasionally he would go into convulsions and with doctor's permission and advice, Mother sedated him with ether. One time I recall she said how easy it would have been to just hold it over his face a little longer, and end it all for him. Was she tempted? I don't think so. Mother had too much integrity, and too much faith to do anything like that.

Our Mother kept him meticulously clean, dressed him in gowns similar to hospital gowns - generally white with a colored border around the neck and sleeves. The crib sheets matched - white with a colored border.

In those days our family was often invited to relatives for a Sunday dinner. As we could not take him along. we chil-

dren took turns staying home with him. Many times when it was my turn Les came and sat with me.

There is one regret my sisters and I have. At that time nothing was known about teaching such a child. Did he understand anything? Did he know our names? We never read to him, or showed him a picture of a dog, and say “this is a dog.” He just existed. With all the scientific help there is now, we wonder if he could have been helped.

Roger lived to be 17 years old, and died of pneumonia. Mother and Dad had four more children after Roger, two of them dying shortly after birth.

CHAPTER 11

My Brother Carl

Even after forty years, it is difficult for me to speak of Carl without tears and an overwhelming sadness. He was nine years younger than me, fun loving, and a great tease. Mother and dad moved to a farm near Independence, Iowa, several years after I was married, so it was a special occasion when we took our little children there to visit. Carl loved his role as uncle and showered lots of love and attention to our babies.

Carl finished high school at Independence, and went on to Junior College. It was at that time that the United States was at war, and patriotism ran high, so he and another friend enlisted in the Marines, postponing their education. I'm sure our parents were not too happy about that, but had to

admire his enthusiasm and patriotism. So, before he went to Boot Camp, Les and I took our three children to our parents home for Sunday dinner, and to say good-bye to Carl. At that time I was pregnant with our fourth child, Kathleen. Mother and I were upstairs looking at a new quilt, when Carl joined us. As we started down the open stairs, he grabbed me by the arms and said "your getting a piggy back ride" pulling me off my feet. He bounced, he laughed, he jiggled me, all the while Mother saying "Carl, put her down, you'll hurt her!" He not knowing I was pregnant said "She's tough - she can take it" until we reached the bottom of the stairs, both of us laughing and enjoying it. I'm sure Mother thought I'd miscarriage then and there! At that time it was "not proper" to announce a pregnancy until it showed, so Carl never knew he was giving his niece her first piggy back ride.

Within a few days Carl was sent to Camp Pendleton near San Diego, California, where the troops underwent very vigorous basic training. I took great delight in writing about the antics and progress of his niece and two nephews, Nancy, Paul and Phil, and of course, I eagerly looked forward to his letters.

Before long Dad had some health problems and had to go to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota for surgery, which left mother alone on the farm with the chores and animals. Most young men had gone to war so Mother applied to the Red Cross for an emergency leave for Carl to

help her through the crisis. Of course the Red Cross had to verify Dad's illness, and when they called the hospital was told that he was showing improvement and would recover. So he was not granted an emergency leave. Thanks to good neighbors, Mother got by. She sold the hogs that were not yet ready for market, which simplified the chores for her and their elderly neighbor, who often helped her.

By now the war was escalating in the South Pacific, and even the "leave" that all trainees were promised at the end of their boot camps were canceled. Carl phoned home to tell them he was shipping out, and to say good-bye. Can you imagine how they felt to know their youngest child was going off to a bloody war, and they had never seen him in uniform.

The dreadful wait began, letters were scarce - sometimes coming two or three at a time, and then weeks before they heard from him again. Everyone listened to the radio and avidly read the newspapers for news of the war, even though so much of it was censored.Carl was in the Marines nearly two years, when late one afternoon the dreaded yellow taxi pulled into their yard. Mother and Dad were sitting on their porch steps watching the sunset when the driver of the cab, got out, and presented them with the telegram. Without ado, he drove off, leaving them alone to read the terrible news, "your son Carl, killed in action on Saipan, June 16, 1944". With no priest, no military official, no friend, no neighbor to help them, they sat on the steps with

their arms around each other, and sobbed their hearts out. I don't know how long they remained there, but Dad finally composed himself enough to make the long distance call to my older brother. In that call he broke down so badly, he was unable to tell my brother to notify me, so after a bit, he had to make a second call to give me the news. Kathleen was ten months old.

Several weeks later my parents received a letter from Carl's commanding officer, telling what a good and brave Marine he had been. He was a leader in his division, and on the day of the death, was one of several Marines that had left their ship and were swimming toward the island of Saipan to secure the Island for the rest of the troop. Japanese snipers, camouflaged in trees opened fire on the defenseless Marines in the water. Carl was killed instantly, and his body recovered. Because things were so hectic in the South Pacific at that time, Carl's body was buried in the Punch Bowl in Hawaii. After the war was over, our government offered to return his body to the United States, but my parents had been through so much, and were getting along in years, they decided to leave his body at peace among so many of his war time buddies. He has a nice marker there, in one of the most beautiful and well cared for cemeteries in the world, and another marker on the family plot at the Dyersville, Iowa cemetery, bears the plaque "Carl Willenborg, born 3-8-1924, died in the service of his country at Saipan 6-16-1944. Buried in Hawaii".

I have been to Hawaii several times, and have placed leis of tropical flowers on his grave, and took pictures to take to my parents.

Mother died at the age of ninety two. Dad lived to be ninety nine years old, and never got over the loss of his son. Many times when I visited him at the Nursing Home we would talk about Carl, tears washing both of our faces.

CHAPTER 12

Shopping

When I was growing up there were no huge department stores or malls. Once or twice a week Mother and Dad would drive into the town of Dyersville and buy the staples at the small privately owned grocery or department store. As I recall we payed our bill monthly - charging our groceries at Drexlers. When the bill was paid Mr. Drexler would always give Dad a bag of corn candy for his children. A couple of times a year they would drive 30 miles to Dubuque for spring or fall clothes or whatever. What a thrill when we were big enough to go along! And a big treat it was to get a Coney Island sandwich at noon.

Another source of supplies were the traveling salesman who sold all sorts of things from needles and thread to horse medicine. I remember vividly when the Raleighs or

Watson salesman would come, and Mother pored over their merchandise or books from which she could order.

The mail-order catalogs were a source of much entertainment, especially during the long winter evenings. Sears Roebuck, as it was then known, would send a thick catalog every spring and fall, as did Montgomery Ward and Speigles. We each selected what we needed and a huge order would be sent in, and then we anxiously awaited the package, hoping the sizes were correct, the color we wanted, etc. Mother did Christmas shopping by catalog, and hid the packages until the big day. I recall being home taking care of my younger brothers one day when the mailman delivered a package from Sears. Curious as I was, I opened it carefully and saw a green flannel blouse that I desperately wanted. Instinctively I knew it was my big Christmas gift, so I carefully rewrapped it, and pretended surprised when I got the gift.

Regarding grocery shopping, I must mention that we always took eggs to the grocery store which was credited to our bill. We had a special wooden case in which to carry them - 12 dozen at a time.

CHAPTER 13

Wash Day

Washday was a big ordeal, as nothing but a catastrophe could deter Mother from washing on Monday. We had a large black iron kettle approximately 3 feet in diameter and 2 1/2 or 3 feet high. It was suspended over a metal frame that had a door in it, and under the kettle a good fire was built to heat the water. This was in our basement near the washing machine. First of all, we filled the kettle, then got the fire going. Of coarse this was done early in the morning, as it took a long time to get such an amount of cold water to near boiling.

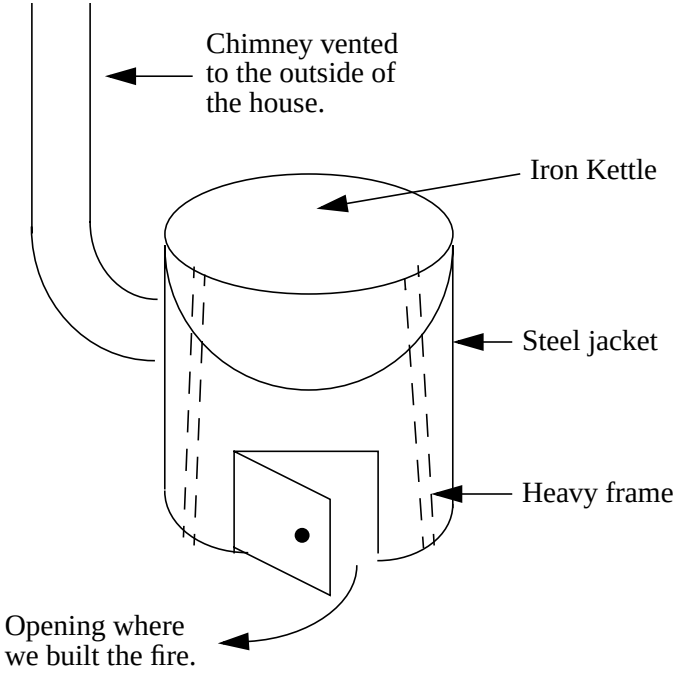
Soap was made during the quiet times of winter of salvaged grease, bacon drippings and lye. This was very strong and hard on the hands, but shaved by hand, very thinly, it produced good suds and white clothes.

The hot water was transferred from the kettle to the wash machine by a bucket-a job that required great caution because of the danger of getting burned. All clothes were washed in the same water, beginning with the white loads, to pastels, dark colored, and lastly the overalls and rugs. Stubborn stains were scrubbed on a corrugated scrub board. All of this had to be fed through a wringer from the hot water, into a first rinse of cold water, then into a second rinse of cold water to which some liquid bluing was added. Then articles that required starch were dipped into a solution that we prepared with a starch purchased from the store. Then it was finally ready to be hung outdoors on the clothes line. My Mother always insisted that we hung the rags, overalls, rugs etc. on the inside lines, and put the sheet and white clothes on the outer lines - to give a better impression on any people passing by. After it was dry, all starched articles had to be dampened and wrapped tightly, and let stand a while before ironing.

The first irons I recall were called sad irons. We had 3 that were heated on a wood and coal burning range, and were used one after the other, as they cooled. When the first iron had cooled too much to do a satisfactory job, the handle was removed and clamped on the next iron, and the other put back on the range to reheat. But with time came improvements. After the sad iron we got a gas iron. It had a small gas tank fastened to the iron, and a small pump was used to pressurize the white gas. It was lit by a match and worked very well. Next came the electric irons that could

spray or steam by the press of a button. The next change was the electric irons that could be adjusted to accommodate different materials, warm for rayons, etc., to hot for cottons and linens.

Les always said their wash days were harder, because where we had electricity to run the machine, his mother relied on "man power." The boys took turns at a lever that had to be pushed back and forth to power the wringer rollers. And his mother was so grateful to have that wonderful modern convenience. Prior to her washing machines she washed by hand. Wouldn't she enjoy seeing how easy it is today!



CHAPTER 14

Floods *1925 -1965*

When I was ten years old, living on our farm northwest of Dyersville, Iowa, our phone rang - one long, long insistent ring, (known as a general ring). That meant a disaster or emergency - so many other farmers were also receiving that same call. We lifted the receiver from the phone and heard the telephone operator say that the Maquokata River was over its banks and flooding several areas in Dyersville. We had relatives living there so were worried about them. Uncle John and Aunt Anna lived close to the river, so we knew they needed help. Mother and Dad packed several boxes of canned foods, potatoes from our root cellar, milk, eggs, etc. Dad and I went to town with a team and wagon with the provisions. When we got there the basement was almost completely filled with water. No one could go down as it was too dangerous. Aunt Anna was a dressmaker, so had boxes and boxes of colored thread. What a sight it was

when we opened the basement door and saw dozens of spools of colored thread, and fruit jars floating around along with some of Uncle John's lumber, folding chairs etc. We left the food, then stopped at our church to see what damage might be there. The Basilica itself is a high structure so was not damaged, but beneath it was a chapel where daily Mass was said for the school children. Dad and I could only go down one or two steps, because below that the water was doing a lot of damage. I'll never forget seeing the colorful "Station of the Cross" in beautiful wood frames floating around, along with some other church artifacts.

A few days later after the water had gone down, I went to Aunt Anna's again, this time to wash fruit jars. I was the only one there with small enough hands to get inside the jars. That was not as exciting.

That same flood caused a lot of damage in Cascade, taking the lives of several people. By the time we moved there 12 years later the dam had been removed which was the cause of the river flooding that town.

In 1965 we were living in Dubuque, well settled in our home and enjoying a good business. In spring the melting of the heavy snow north of us, plus some rain caused the Mississippi to rise rapidly, so soon there were warnings that the Mississippi was out of its banks. Up and down the river,

town after town was sandbagging their properties. Les had his help put sandbags around our business also, but every day the forecast was that the river was still rising to the point we knew sandbags could not hold back the mighty Mississippi. Water was coming into the building, so parts bins were all elevated, show room windows boarded up and desks put on top of sealed oil filled barrels. Yet the river kept rising! They were now using a boat to get in and outside the building. The cars had all been moved to the large parking lot at the K-Mart. Drawers, with their contents were removed from the desks, plus all records from the files were put in a boat, taken to higher land where they were transferred to cars and brought to our home on Fremont Ave. A temporary office was set up in our down stairs recreation room where personnel did the best they could.

One day, Les wearing rubber waders up to his arms, was walking around inside the building trying to salvage as much as he could. He leaned over a bit to reach something and water came pouring into his boot. He is 6 ft. tall, so you can realize how deep the water was in the show room, offices, parts room and shop area. And the water continued to rise. After a few days it receded, and Les had the foresight to borrow fire hoses from the city, and as the water went down, kept flushing the building with clean water. Other than an extreme amount of work, little damage was done. I recall being so worried about Les, as he worked hour after hour with a minimum of sleep. I would beg him to take a rest, and he would try, but after several minutes he

said he couldn't - there was too much to do. The Mississippi had reached a level of 26 ft. above flood level.

The city built a flood wall after that, which was a blessing, as 1993 was a year of many heavy rains, bringing floods to many Iowa towns and farm lands. Thanks to the foresight of our city we were spared the savagery of 1965.

CHAPTER 15

Butchering

With cold weather came butchering time. Hogs were killed with a rifle shot, or stunned by a heavy blow, then stuck with a sharp knife in the jugular vein, so the blood would drain out. The blood was saved to use later on. After the bleeding the hog was immersed in a large iron kettle of hot water. The kettle was outdoors with a fire under it. This enabled the butcher(my dad) to scrape the hair off the pig. It was then shackled by it's hind feet, and hoisted up in a building outdoors, cooled, slit and gutted, being careful to have it hung high enough so no dog could get at it.

The next day the pig was cut up. Hams and bacon were put in salt brine to cure before being smoked. The fat was trimmed from every piece and then fried out to make lard. The residue was called cracklings, which were used to make soap. Chops and pork steak was fried and put into crocks

and melted lard was poured over all. This kept well, tightly covered in a cool basement.

The meat trimmings were seasoned and used to make sausage. We had a sausage stuffer for that. The intestines had all been saved, cleaned and boiled to sterilize. The meat was finely ground, then put in the cylindrical stuffer that had a short pipe protruding on which to slide the intestines, or casings as they are now called. By pressing down on the ground meat it went into the casings and sausage was ready, either to be fried fresh or to be cured in the smoke house and kept for later use.

The head was cleaned and scraped. The scraps used to make head cheese, which was molded, sliced and fried. Pigs feet were either pickled or added to the head cheese.

The blood was used to make a blood sausage. Meat, seasonings, blood, and I think oatmeal or some filler to make it cohesive was used. This mixture was put into cloth bags about 5 inches wide by 12 inches long. When cold it became firm and to use, was sliced and fried in bacon drippings. I never cared for this delicacy, so can't recall it too accurately.

The smoke house referred to, was a small out building in which a smoldering fire was kept - hickory wood the most desired. The hams, bacon, and some sausage was hung on rods above the fire and kept there for two or three weeks. The continual smoking preserved and flavored the meat.

CHAPTER 16

Fathers Ingenuity

When I look back and think about what my father accomplished, I wonder what he would have done if he could have gone on to school beyond the eigth grade.

The farm buildings on the farm bought in Iowa were situated about half a mile from the road. So one of the first things he did was move the buildings. With the help of good neighbors, sturdy mules and horses, the men moved the buildings to a pretty hillside quite close to the road. I recall living in the house as it was very slowly moved. Sometimes it wasn't level and the dishes would slide to the edge of the table. A basement was dug and cemented, and the house put on it. We had a temporary “out house” until running water was installed.

Water come from a well and reservoir that Dad had

previously dug at the top of the hill.The height of the hill gave our water natural pressure. We were so proud of our running water and indoor facilities. We also had a small pump by the kitchen sink, so we could pump “soft” water from the cistern beneath part of the house.

Next came electricity! What a change from the kerosene and gas lamps. One evening just after we came home from school, I put a kitchen knife into an open socket to see what would happen. And happen it did! The knife shot right by my face and landed on the other side of the room. Now the sockets are no longer open, which of course is much safer.

The road going by our farm was well traveled. Every spring the county road crew would spread crushed lime on it, to keep it dry and passable. After a few years, Dad noticed that the passing traffic raised quite a bit of dust which naturally settled on our land. He also noticed that the crops were exceptionally good as far as the lime dust reached. So, early one spring Dad ordered a box car of crushed lime to be delivered to Dyersville, Iowa. He was notified when it arrived. He drove to town and emptied the lime along side of the track, to save the demurrage fee if he had left it in the box car. Then it was loaded one wagon load at a time, driven to our farm where it was unloaded at the edge of the field. From there it was loaded to a spreader, which he used to spread over the entire field. All of this by hand!

The neighbors laughed at him, and Dad took it good naturedly and just said “Wait and see”. Two years later, they were all spreading their fields with crushed lime.

After Gramp and Gram Willenborg were retired and living in Dyersville, they did quite a bit of volunteer and charity work. My dad gave many a day repairing the kneelers in the Basilica, and did odd repair jobs at the rectory and convent. At that time there were quite a few nuns living there, so once a week Mother made 4-5 pies and had Dad deliver them while still fresh and warm. They were difficult to handle, so he concocted a case in which to carry them. It was a box that stood vertical, was completely open on one side, and had four or five shelves in it. The pies could be stacked in the box, and a narrow board was inserted in a slit at both top and bottom, which locked the pies inside. A handle across the top made it easy to carry. I still have the “pie carrier” and keep magazines in it now. However, if ever I have to deliver a lot of pies someplace, I know I'll use it.

Gramp was a great believer in sturdy stair railings, and so as we children married, he insisted our homes have this safety feature, and if necessary he made them for us.

Toys were a pleasure for my father; he fixed many a broken wagon, tricycle, pull toy, etc.for his grandchildren. I recall one little toy of a rabbit beating a little drum to be pulled by a string. He thought it was a shame the child

could not see the action, so he designed a handle with the action toy in front, so the child could see and hear it as he pushed it in front of him.

The grandchildren always loved to go to Gramp and Grama Willenborg's house in Dyersville. In the basement Gramp put up a swing which squeaked with every move. They also had a box of toys there, many which he had repaired. And not to be left outdone, Gram always had cookies for the youngsters -- and anyone who dropped in.

CHAPTER 17

Why I Can't Swim

When growing up on the farm we were never close enough to water to learn how to swim. The closest creek was a mile from our home and with rains it became very fast and dangerous. We were not allowed to go there unattended and our parents were too busy to go with us. It was when I was around 12 years old we were invited to spend a day with our uncle, aunt and cousins at Alta Vista, Ia. They had a small creek flowing through their property. It was a beautiful, sunny, warm day, and our cousins wanted to go swimming. Having no suit was not a problem, I could borrow one from my cousin. A male cousin about a year or two older than I, took it upon himself to teach me to swim. I was very fond of him, so got in the water as instructed. Holding onto my suit in the back, he instructed me to paddle my feet, and stroke my arms properly. Viola! I was swimming! "Keep it up" he said, and swam away. Without

his reassuring hands on my back I panicked and went down - came up, and went down again, swallowing a lot of that dirty water in which cattle had been standing. I was taken to the shore where I coughed and coughed. And to this day I can recall how that water burned my lungs and throat.

Then years later, Les and I were married, had a couple children, and we decided that I should learn how to swim. Lessons were given at the YMCA, so twice a week we drove from Cascade to Dubuque for lessons. I was doing quite well, going across the pool without trouble, so the instructor said it was time for me to dive. I protested, but he said I had to - he would be right there to help me if needed. I was afraid, but jumped anyway. I went straight to the bottom of the pool, saw my instructor and grabbed him. Never, ever, could he have gotten away! He assisted me to the side and apologized, saying I was not ready to dive, and he was sorry he insisted on it. My problem was, I had not mastered the breathing technique, so was able to easily swim the width of the pool by holding my breath.

Again, many years later, several couples were on Wahlert's cruiser, which we had done several times. This time one or two couples prepared a picnic dinner, doing steaks on a grill, while the rest of us waded or swam the Mississippi. When the food was ready we were called to "come and get it." I had walked out into water a little above my waist, so turned to go back to shore, when to my dismay, every step I took, I was going deeper and deeper. "Quick Sand!" The

rest of the group were well on their way to the shore, and the only one close to me was always doing crazy or fun things, so I was afraid to call his name for fear he would splash water on my face, or ask me to race him toward shore. By this time the water was up to my chin, and I was stretching as tall as I could, so I called, “Bert, Bert, please help me, I’m in trouble.” God love him, he saw the panic in my face, came right over, put his arm around my waist and helped me to shore. I truly believe he saved my life. Everyone else was so absorbed by the good food, I don’t know if they would have missed me soon enough to look for me.

So that is why I do not swim - I am too afraid. However, I’m so glad that all the rest of our family are able to swim, and I think could save their own lives, and help others too.

CHAPTER 18

Homes We Have Lived In

1935

Newlyweds. We rented an apartment in a duplex {an old house, remodeled into two apartments in Worthington, Iowa. We had four rooms. A nice kitchen with an eating area, a tiny cold entrance that had a sink and pump where we could get rain water. Our drinking water was obtained from a well outdoors and was carried in by a bucket. We had no refrigerator, but a nice new stove. Our living room was small with only a few pieces of furniture. Two bedrooms were upstairs. Toilet facilities were shared with the other tenants - an outdoor two holer at the end of the garage.

1937

We wanted more privacy, so rented the old Lux home. There we had running water, a sink and a stool. We were

there three months when Les bought the agency in Cascade, Iowa, so we moved again. We had signed a years lease on the house, so now had to pay $35.00 a month for the balance of the year. Oh how I hated to send that check every month when there were so many things we needed.

1937
We moved into an apartment above the Dealership in Cascade - but it had no bathroom. Les sold a car to a plumber who didn't have enough money to completely pay for it, so a bargain was made. The plumber paid what he could, and installed a bathroom for the balance. Heaven!

Our accommodations were very comfortable, however, my washing machine had to be put in the basement beneath the garage - a long trek from the apartment. We had to do our laundry at night, because Les was occupied in the garage during the day, and I couldn't leave the baby alone in the apartment. Also, I didn't want to carry baskets of laundry through the area where the mechanics were working. The problem was solved when Les suggested I sort all the clothes upstairs, and he would take it to the basement and do the laundry - hanging the clothes to dry on the clothes lines down there. I fed the baby, bathed her, and put her to bed, before I tidied up the house.

1945
Bought the Devlin home in East Cascade. By now we had four children. We remodeled the lovely old brick home, so

had one bathroom and a powder room. Also a double garage. The nice yard was most appreciated.

1950

Built a brick home in West Cascade. It had four bedrooms, lovely living room with fireplace, dining room, recreation room in basement, two baths, and an attached double garage. We had a large yard for the children, and it was at this location we acquired two horses, Duke and Target. So our place became a mecca for all the neighborhood children where they played ball and rode horses.

1962

By this time, Les and his brother George bought the Lincoln-Mercury business, so it was another move. A brick home was built on a lovely tree lined street on a lot, adjoining the Country Club, in Dubuque, Iowa. It was a ranch style built on a terrace, so had a nice walk out on the lower floor. All this space enabled us to have a lovely living room, large family and dining room combination, kitchen, laundry room, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and one powder room on the upper level. With access to the back, we had two bedrooms, one bath, a large recreation room and two storage areas on the lower level. As this was built on a three acre lot we had lots of room for our children and all their friends.

1976

Now able to get away for a longer period of time we bought a condo at Seven Lakes in Ft. Meyers, Florida. We would spend from two to four months during the winter here. It was a very compact nice condo and golf course. We were comfortable with the living-dining area, two bedrooms, two baths, small porch, and an open carport. One morning shortly after Les got up a golf ball crashed through the window adjacent to his bed.

1983

Les and I were now able to go south for longer periods to get away from the cold in Iowa. So, we bought a larger condo in Brandywine, also in Ft. Meyers. Now have a spacious residence with living-dining room combination, three bedrooms, a Florida room, and an office. Also, a double garage with attic above all. It is a very comfortable and pleasant, and are now spending seven months a year in Florida and five months in Dubuque. We are happy to see any of our families that come to visit us.

You are always welcome!

CHAPTER 19

Iven's School Project

This article and the following article where written as a synopsis of our lives as requested by our grandson Ben for a school project in 1992.

It is difficult to sort out things that might be of interest to you at 77 years of age. My life seems very mundane, as I see it nothing very special happened. Yet I look back and see it as a collage of many colorful events, some dark and foreboding, others bright and filled with laughter. My childhood was happy, raised on a farm, with two sisters, three brothers and lots of animals. One brother, Roger was born handicapped, and though he lived to be seventeen years old, was never able to walk or talk, and spent his entire life in a crib that could be wheeled from room to room. My mother was a very caring individual and taught us from early on to care for those less fortunate than we. As a result, as we grew up we took turns staying home and caring for Roger when the entire family was invited for a Sunday dinner at one of our many uncles and aunts.

During the Big Depression my parents very frequently invited the children of my mother's widowed cousin, one at a time, to spend a couple of weeks with us during the summer, as we always had plenty of milk, eggs, meat and garden produce, and a horse to ride.

We lived 2 1\2 miles from the parochial school, so got there by horse and buggy - my older brother always, "at the reins." At that time we always went to Mass and Communion every first Friday of the month for special indulgences. One spring Friday my brother and I were in route to church, when the horse lifted his tail and SPLASH, we were covered with horse feces! What a mess! Of course we went back home, had to hurriedly bathe and get to school. I was devastated, and cried and cried. Now I can see the humor of it, but at the age 9-10, I was embarrassed, hurt and angry.

I was the first of my family to graduate from high school, and so hoped to go on to college, but that was not to be. We simply could not afford it. As mentioned earlier, we always had plenty to eat, but very little money. I recall that as graduation drew near, we graduates had to pay cash for our graduation pictures. My parents did not have enough money on hand to do that, so my father looked over the pigs which were not yet ready to market, and picked out the heaviest hog and took it to town and sold it, so I could have the picture with the rest of the class.

Graduated, depression, no jobs, how dismal it seemed, but I guess I was lucky at that. At first I did housework for a dentist family in Dubuque, and then got a job as waitress in a Worthington restaurant. As I was dating Les at that time, I was happy to be there. My wages were $16.00 a month! I had to rise very early to be at the restaurant in time to get breakfast for a crew of men who were doing road work there. On dance nights it was not unusual to have to work until 1:30 or 2:00 A.M.

In spite of all that I saved enough money to buy my wedding dress and trousseau. And of course a big event was my marriage to Les. He was ambitious, handsome, and owned his own business, operating a feed mill that went from farm to farm to grind grain for the livestock. We lived in Worthington, Iowa, a town of considerably less than 1000, in a duplex where we shared the outdoor facilities with another couple.

After a year or so, Les became an auto dealer, the first and only Ford Dealership Worthington ever had. Two years after we were married, Les was offered a larger dealership in Cascade, Iowa. It was a scary move for me, as we already had Nancy, and were expecting Paul. Both of those births were big events in our lives, and even though we were short of money, we were high on ambition, faith and hope. First we lived above the garage, then bought a brick home for $2,500.00 on the hill where we lived several years.

Our family grew larger as our business prospered, and by now Les was part owner of a Lincoln-Mercury dealership in Dubuque, commuting the 25 mile daily. Finally, in 1962 we built a new home in Dubuque and moved there. It was a good move, as we had better school facilities, more cultural events, and no more commuting.

How proud we were as one after another of our 8 children graduated from high school and went to college. Sad times in our lives? Yes, Grandpa Charlie Weber passed away in 1946. Our children missed hearing his stories about his hobby of bees and gathering their honey. Shortly after that Les supervised the building of a small house in Cascade, for his mother, Grandma Kate Weber, so we could look after her. How she loved her new home, and how she loved our babies, often rocking them in her old Shaker rocking chair. It is now the prized possession of Nancy Noonan.

Grandma Kate died in February 1962, which allowed us to make the move to Dubuque without feeling guilty. Gram Mollie Willenborg and Grandpa Ben lived in Dyersville, so we saw quite a bit of them also. Both lived to be very elderly, and as "live in help" they were unable to hire, they decided to move into the Stonehill Care Center in Dubuque. After Gram broke her hip, she deteriorated rapidly, and passed away in 1980. Grandpa became very lonesome, but lived to be the ripe old age of 99 1/2, so many were the tales he could tell of his parents pioneering days. I became a regular visitor at Stonehill taking Grandpa Ben by wheelchair

to visit other residents there, and to just listen to his stories. By this time he was very deaf, so difficult to really converse with him.

In 1984, my father, Grandpa Ben passed away, creating a great loss in our lives. Now Les and I were truly the "older generation." Will we be able to carry on as nobly as our parents did? Only time will tell.

Two other very bad times come to mind. The first is when my youngest brother Carl, a Marine, was killed by sniper fire on Saipan in 1943. My parents were heart broken, and my children deprived of a fun loving and interesting young uncle. To this day tears come to my eyes when I dwell on his senseless death, and the horror of any war. Another sad point in my life was the news that our oldest grandson, Chris, was hurt in a motorcycle accident leaving him brain injured. This has been a constant heartache to Nancy, Oz, his brother and sisters, and all of us.

Now on a lighter note. You asked about embarrassing moments. There were many, but the one I recall most vividly, was around 1965 or so, well established in our parish, etc. This particular day I was asked to model in a "money maker" fashion show for our school. The stage had been beautifully decorated with styrofoam garden wall, arch and many plants. Each model had to approach the arch from the back of the stage, pause, then proceed forward, turn both ways, and make an exit to the side. Most of us had done this

two or three times. My last appearance was a disaster! As I paused to turn, I accidently touched the arch. Everything, and I do mean everything tumbled down. The styrofoam fell on plants, which toppled over, then knocking over more plants and more plants. There I stood in a lovely pink dress, amid what I thought must have looked like the ruins of Rome. Not knowing what to do, I simply curtsied to the crowd, and made my exit accompanied by a thunderous applause! How embarrassing! I've been approached several times since to do modeling for the church or school, but I've always declined. How could I top that?

This writing pretty much brings me to our "golden years," wintering in Florida, summers in Iowa, the best of two worlds. Les is now retired, and loves his lawn work. Now, in 1992 he no longer hires anyone to do it, and takes great pride in having the most well cared for lawn on the block, and perhaps in the city. I keep busy caring for this "much to large" home, go to bridge club twice a month, entertain occasionally, take a daily 2 mile walk, weather permitting, and some volunteer work at Stonehill. We both look forward to the annual family reunions, and take much pride and pleasure in seeing how our family has developed, and in their footsteps, our grandchildren.

Sometimes Les and I hold hands and say, "Look what we started." Life has been good to us. We give thanks to God for our countless blessings, and ask that He look on our families and bless them as abundantly.

CHAPTER 20

Les's School Project

This article and the previous article where written as a synopsis of our lives as requested by our grandson Ben for a school project in 1992.

I was born on a small acreage at Worthington, Iowa, population 250 people, the youngest of 9 children. We were all born at home, without a doctor, but with the help of my mother's sister, a good midwife. Aunt Mary assisted at the births of many children in the area.

Our home had no electricity, running water, or bathroom facilities. Believe me, it wasn't exciting to use the outdoor facilities in the winter! During winter a heating stove was set up in the Living room, and the kitchen had a wood burning stove on which my mother did all the cooking and baking, plus heating water. The stoves were fueled by wood cut from a timber several miles away. The trees were cut down by a 2 man hand saw, one on each end. I remember this very well, as when I was 7 or 8 years old, my Dad took me along and allowed me to "help," as did my older brothers.

Another job we learned early was to pump water from a well for livestock and house use. Also, feeding chickens and gathering eggs became an assigned chore as soon as we were old enough. Mother was a great gardener, and taught us at an early age to spade, rake, plant, hoe and pull weeds resulting in raising 90% of everything we ate. We raised a lot of strawberries which we sold for $5.00 a crate of 24 quarts. If we picked the berries Mother made a shortcake for us nearly everyday, much to our delight. When flour, sugar, salt, and that sort of thing was needed, I carried a bucket full of eggs to the grocery store, 1 mile away and traded them for the necessities.

Another thing I vividly remember is the swarms of bees my father cared for, as the honey was not only for our consumption, but also, much of it sold for extra income. To avoid being stung, garden and yard work that had to be done, was done early in the morning, before the bees became active. By spring the hives became overcrowded, so the older bees would take off and form a "swarm" or new colony. As youngsters we had to watch for them, and quickly make a lot of noise with pans and lids etc., which kept them in the vicinity, usually landing on a tree limb or nearby post. Then my father dressed for the job, in long sleeved shirt, gloves, and a hat with a long veil that covered his face and neck, a smoking machine and a long handled brush, would gently brush the bees into the new hive. That hive(box) was prepared with combs of wax cells in which the bees deposited their honey and sealed. To prepare the

honey for table use, the honey filled wax combs were put through an extractor, resulting in the delicious honey as you know it today.

When I was 13 or 14 years old my grandmother died at St. Donatus, Iowa, about 35 miles from Worthington. An older brother had to stay home to take care of the livestock and chores, while I drove my father and mother to the funeral. This was considered a very long trip, so I had to go to bed early the night before so I would be alert to drive the Model T Ford that great distance. Because of the distance we had to stay with relatives overnight so we could be there for the funeral in the morning. The most memorable thing about that trip was getting to know two boy cousins slightly older than I, who chewed tobacco, and then had a contest to see who could spit and hit a stove leg most often!

During the school months we children got up early enough to help feed the cows, horses and chickens and then help do the milking before we walked to school. As a general rule we had to come right home from school so we could fill the wood box, and then do the same chores all over again. However, during my last couple of years in school, I washed cars for a Chevrolet dealer on Saturday, after school and during vacation for 25 cents a car - then came home to help where I was needed. My schooling ended after Junior High because my father thought I would grow up to be a bum if I hung around “those town kids,” so he hired me out to a farmer for 8 months for $325.00 which included room

and board. There I had to get up 5-5:30 A.M. and worked until 8:00 P.M. That is when I decided not to become a farmer. At this time it was the custom for young people under the age of 21 to turn their earnings over to their parents. So I guess I was another source of income!

With the persuasion of the Chevrolet dealer, I bought a portable feed mill to grind feed for the area farmers. To finance it, my Dad loaned me $300.00 of the $325.00, I had given to him, and also signed a note for an additional $300.00 at the local bank to finance the down payment. In one year, I make 12 payments on the mill, plus the $300.00 my Dad loaned me, and the $300.00 dollars I had borrowed from the bank. I ran the mill for 5 years. During the last 2 years I also sold Ford cars for the Ford dealer in Dyersville.

In 1935, I got married, and became a Ford Dealer for myself, and have so often said, "both were successful." In 1937 we bought a building in Cascade, Iowa, and moved the dealership there. Our country was still in the Big Depression, and things were often difficult, but with hard work, faith and perseverance we could see ourselves getting ahead. World War II was in progress, several of our help were called to service. My draft number came up. but because I was now also selling farm machinery, I was given an occupational deferment. Our product was badly needed by the farmers, so I not only sold cars and machinery, but serviced and maintained them, as both were difficult to get.

By now we had four children, so we moved from the crowded apartment above our business to an old brick home that had been on the market for some time. We paid $2500.00 for it. We did some remodeling and painting and were very comfortable. By now we were well established and flourishing, so in 1950 we built a lovely home on the outer edge of Cascade. Gradually our family increased to 8,(6 boys and 2 girls).

One of my favorite memories is when we got the tow truck out on a snowy Sunday afternoon, and invited the children and their friends to hitch their sleds together, and slowly pulled them around seldom used streets. We must have had 12 to 14 sleds, and what fun it was!

By this time we acquired 2 horses for the children to ride in a large pasture adjoining our home. A small stable was built, and it became a gathering place for our children and their friends. One horse was a Palomino named Duke, and the other, a feisty Shetland named Target. Many children learned to ride there.

My father passed away in 1946, so my mother moved from Worthington to a small house a few blocks from us, and near the church she loved. We could easily look after her there.

In 1948 we expanded our business by taking on the Mercury and Lincoln Dealership in Dubuque, Iowa, which was

managed by a brother who was getting out of the Service. I commuted to Dubuque several times a week, so was very busy with two businesses.

In February 1962, my mother passed away at the age of 92, and my brother George, was no longer in the automobile business with me. So later that year we built a new home in Dubuque to eliminate the daily commuting, and to give our children a better opportunity for education. We were also in a position to be spending part of the winter in Florida.

Two of our sons worked with me in the auto business, and in 1988, I sold the dealership to Phil and completely retired. Our youngest son, Russ, is New Car Sales Manager there, and it is a pleasure to see the business go on, from it's very humble beginning.

We are now living in Florida 7 months of the year, and needless to say, thoroughly enjoying it, and always look forward to our summers in lovely Iowa, close to family and old friends. As I look back over my nearly 80 years, I say "It's been a good life."

CHAPTER 21

Epilogue

May 1995 I have been writing these articles off and on for several years. Now that I've passed my 80th year, it is time to put down my pen and just enjoy the news from children and grandchildren. It has been a pleasant journey, but I cannot close without leaving this message to you. I've had it taped to my refrigerator for many years and feel it keeps me thinking straight.

> " I shall pass through this world but once. Any good that I can do, or any kindness that I can show another human being, let me do it now, and not defer it. For I shall not pass this way again." Author unknown

God bless and keep each and everyone of you.

Mother

Les and Iven

Taken In 1991