Growing Up on Tenth Street

Dick* Ecker

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*When I applied for Social Security in my early sixties, I was advised that they did not have me in their records. The person listed under my social security number did not have the first name "Richard." The name they had was "Dick." The fact is, when I applied for a SS number at about age 13, nobody called me Richard without being corrected. The only exceptions were Mr. and Mrs. Rollins, an elderly couple that lived a block up Tenth Street from us. Out of respect for their age, I tolerated it from them. Even the name next to my graduation photo in the high school yearbook was Dick, not Richard. So it seems appropriate that, on a memoir of those years in which that was the only name I used, the author should be listed as shown above.

Prologue

There are some things I need to mention before you start reading these recollections. I suppose, given that intention, this should be called a Preface. However, I recall once reading the definition of a Preface as "…that part of a book that is written last, placed first and read least." So, in hope that you'll read what I have to say here, I'll call it something else.

This is a memoir of the first fifteen years of my life—years that I lived in a house on Tenth Street in Waverly, Iowa, roughly up to the end of the Second World War…although a few of the experiences I relate took place a bit after we moved from that house. I wrote the book initially without any photographs or illustrations, but I hoped in the end to be able to supplement it with pictures from the family photo album and whatever other sources I could locate. Now that has been accomplished. While the writing was in process, I happened to make contact with Jude Gardner, who was an underclassman while I was in high school in Waverly. Jude graciously supplied me with an abundance of photographs from Waverly's past, some of which I found to be excellent illustrations to supplement my stories. I'm sure that most of those photographs did not originate with Jude, but I have no idea who else to credit with supplying them, so I'll say thanks to Jude and hope that his sources are agreeable to his having passed them on to me.

The aerial photographs I used came from the Waverly Public Library. I am grateful for their generosity in responding so willingly when I inquired.

My mother's old photo album provided a treasure trove to choose from when I needed to illustrate the stories I was telling. I'll never forget the old Kodak bellows camera that recorded those images. It continued in faithful service for well over a quarter of a century.

Setting the Scene

When, at the age of 85, my father wrote a memoir of his early days in Waverly, Iowa (*No Greener Pastures*, Tom Underwood Enterprises 1989), he described what life was like in small-town, Midwestern America in the 1920s and 30s. His perspective was one of a young tradesman, raising a family and surviving the hardships of post-World-War-I reconstruction and The Great Depression. Now, as I pass into my eighties, it occurs to me that there remains a story yet to be told about those years in that small town. That story is the one describing what it was like growing up in Waverly in those days.

I came on the scene in 1930, just at the beginning of the Depression, the third son of Robert and Winifred Ecker. Robert was 27 years old when I was born and he was a Linotype operator by trade. Several years earlier, he and mom had bought the house at 323 10th Street NW. That was where I was born and where I lived for the next 15 years. The house was in a unique neighborhood and the character of that neighborhood—and the town— dominated in many ways the progress of my early life.

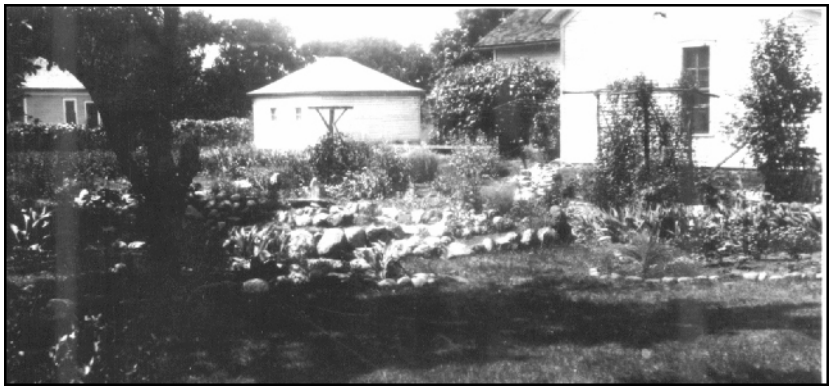
Our property was directly across the street from the campus of Wartburg College, a small, Lutheran liberal arts college. Although the college abandoned the campus for two years when I was three years old, it returned in 1935 and has remained there ever since. For a kid growing up there in the 1930s and 40s, the college campus was a playground of extraordinary opportunity. A lot of the other families in the neighborhood were associated with the college, so many of my mates on that playground were faculty kids.

But the college campus was by no means the only land of opportunity for a curious youngster growing up in Northwest Waverly. The corner of 10th Street and 3rd Avenue was in an area approaching the outskirts of town. A two block walk to the north put you in a large pasture, at the far end of which was the main line of the Chicago Great Western Railroad. We flew a lot of kites in that pasture—and searched often for treasure along those railroad tracks. A walk of about the same distance to the west would take you across the Illinois Central tracks and into farm fields. The sounds of steam locomotives were a part of our lives, day and night. All of these features can be seen in the 1939-1940 aerial photo of Waverly shown at the end of this chapter.

By today's standards, the lot on which our house stood would be considered an acreage. Our land occupied a quarter of a city block, or roughly half an acre. That was not unusual in our neighborhood at that time. On our block, there were only three houses—and across the street to the north, Mrs. Correll's property occupied the whole block, part of it overgrown with trees, shrubs and wild berry bushes. So, for us, finding interesting places to explore did not have to take us very far from home. Much of that neighborhood can be seen in the aerial photo in the chapter on Wartburg College.

On the other hand, our own yard (shown here) could boast no wild underbrush to hide adventuresome youngsters acting out their fantasies of pirates and pilots. Every square inch of our property was cultivated, either as lawn or

vegetable garden (described in the next chapter) or rock garden. The rock garden (on the right) occupied a large area of the south lawn. That area can be seen in the photo above as the area to the right of the house and extending almost to the trees along the alley. When I was a kid playing around in it, it never impressed me as being particularly unusual. Now, I realize that it was a most unique and extraordinarily complicated enterprise in landscape design. In fact, during my very early years, the rock garden even included a fishpond (left), complete with a fountain and a generous population of goldfish. However, I have only vague recollections of the pond, which was filled in and sodded over, probably sometime in the early to mid 30s. These two photos, from my mother's album, were probably taken some time in the mid-1920s. In the photo below, taken almost a decade later, I was posing on one of the tiers of the rock garden. My favorite rock—shaped like a sailboat—can be seen in the background. I can still remember the color of that suit I was wearing…green.



We had a garage, facing 3rd Avenue on the north, but I don't recall it ever having been occupied by an automobile. Robert writes in his book about owning several different cars in the 1920s—and they may have found a place in that garage—but I was born right at the beginning of the Great Depression and our family's automobile obviously became an early victim of the hard times that followed. During all of my growing-up years, we were a family without a car. The garage, however, did not sit idle for all of those years. But that is a story for a later time.

On the parkway of our corner lot grew half a dozen very large sugar maple trees. One of them, directly in front of the house, became the subject of one of the stories in *No Greener Pastures*. Another, next to the driveway to the garage, had a branch just low enough to be reached by a kid who was old enough to climb…and a shape that The Creator had to have designed with adventuresome youngsters in mind. It was a most accommodating old tree.

Although most of my activities as a kid growing up in Waverly were centered in the neighborhood around our house, this was a small town (around four to five thousand people in the 30s) so nothing in the community was too remote to escape becoming a challenge to a young

curiosity. For example, an easy ten-minute walk down 3rd Avenue from our house would put me on the banks of the Cedar River. It served as the dividing line between the east and west halves of the community and provided almost unlimited opportunities for recreation—summer and winter. With a can of worms freshly dug from the garden and a cane pole—equipped with a few feet of line, a cork, a lead sinker and a hook—I could be guaranteed a delightful afternoon on that river matching wits with an abundance of sunfish, crappies and bluegills. Or I could spend a summer day exploring endless mysteries along its banks or in the pools and backwaters it left when the water level was low.

In my very early years, there was a swimming beach on the river, but I have only vague recollections of it. Quiet water for swimming and boating was made possible by a dam that had been originally constructed to regulate the flow of the river through a hydroelectric power plant. In my day, power was generated by diesel engines, although water still ran through the millrace. By the time I was five or six years old, the swimming beach was abandoned and the town built a swimming pool.

In winter, the river typically froze solid…solid enough that a truck with a snowplow could be used to clear a large area for skating. When the snow was light, we could even skate up and down the river and explore areas that were inaccessible in the summer. However, kids from our neighborhood didn't always have to trek to the river to find a good place to ice skate. On the Wartburg campus, snowmelt often collected in a low area on a vacant lot next to the president's house and created a popular ice arena.

As we didn't have a car, everywhere we went was on foot or on a bicycle. That was seldom a problem, of course, because nothing in a town that size was very far away. Even the wooded areas outside of town were not so remote that all-day excursions could not be easily undertaken without being late for supper. (In our family, as in most families I knew at that time, *dinner* was the noon meal and *supper* was in the evening. More about that later). The virgin woods surrounding our town were always exciting places to explore. Wildlife was abundant and the flora could fulfill a botanist's dream. In fact, many of the specimens of wildflowers that generously adorned our rock garden (jack-in-the-pulpit, wild columbine, bluebells and Dutchman's britches to name a few) had been collected in those woods.

The main street in town, called Bremer Avenue, ran east and west, perpendicular to the river. The two arteries divided the town into quadrants, hence the identification of our part of town as NW. The main business district was along East Bremer Avenue, beginning just over the Main Street bridge. There were also businesses along Bremer Avenue on the west side of the river, but when people in our neck of the woods talked about going "down town," it was generally assumed to mean across the river. The only hotel in town was there; as were the two movie theaters, the two banks, three taverns and most other retail establishments. Also on East Bremer Avenue was the Waverly Publishing Company, my father's place of employment (at least while it remained in business…but more about that later).

There were three public school buildings in town when I was growing up there; two elementary schools and the high school (which also accommodated the junior high and the kindergarten). One elementary school was located on each side of the river, which was undoubtedly the primary cause for the feeling (at least among the elementary students) that the "other side of the river" was foreign territory. My elementary school, about an eight-block walk from our house, was named after the author, Washington Irving. Of course, at that time, in a rural community like ours, many of the kids who would ultimately become our classmates in high school were from farm families and attended one-room "country schools." In addition, because

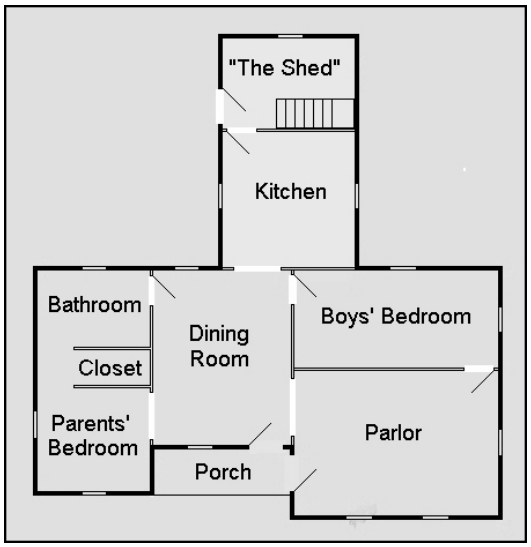
Waverly was a strongly German Lutheran community, the Lutheran church in town supported a parochial school that offered classes through the eighth grade

These, then, were the primary venues in which I served out my youth in Waverly; my home, my neighborhood, the river, the swimming pool, the wilderness areas surrounding the community, "down town" and my school. Hopefully, this brief introduction (and the photo below) will provide sufficient background to give an understandable perspective to the stories I have to tell about being a kid in Waverly during the 1930s and early 40s.

Depression Era Life on Tenth Street

By the time I was old enough to be aware of the social setting into which I had been thrust, the Great Depression was in full swing. The publishing company went bankrupt in 1933, putting my dad out of work. So, my earliest recollection of his workplace was the Conoco service station on west Bremer Avenue, where he worked for a number of years during the middle 30s—at a considerably lower salary than he had been making after a dozen years as a Linotype operator. What I don't remember from those times is any feeling that we were a family on the edge of subsistence. As I look back on those days now, I can see that we were—but we never tumbled over the edge, due primarily to the determination and ingenuity of my parents.

Early in 1935, a fourth son joined the family, adding to the financial burdens of our existence. The family grew, but our income didn't…nor did our accommodations. We adapted to the small, two-bedroom house at 323 10th Street—and if we were crowded, I was never aware of it. I'm sure it never occurred to me that our living circumstances might be different from those of anyone else in the world around us.



The house was shaped like a "T" with the top of the "T" facing the front. An approximate floor plan is shown in the adjoining graphic. I estimate a total living space of not more than 1,200 square feet. The total outline of the house was probably about forty feet square. The front door, off an inset porch, entered into the dining room…although I don't recall ever doing much "dining" in it. In my earliest days, it accommodated a large, coal-burning pot-bellied stove, the only source of heat for the front part of the house. Off the dining room to the left were my parent's bedroom and the bathroom. Between them was a large walk-in closet that opened into both rooms. To the right off the dining room was a parlor and a second bedroom.

To the rear of the dining room was the kitchen, and behind it a utility room that we called "the shed." To the left as you entered the shed from the kitchen was the back door. To the right were stairs down to "the cellar," a bit of subterranean space that obviously had been dug out after the house was built. As I suspect was the case for most families in those days, our kitchen was the center of family activity. It accommodated a large table and, in the earliest days, a coal- and wood-fired cook stove. In winter, it was the warmest room in the house and it was where my mother could be located most of the time. I don't recall that either the kitchen or the parlor had doors—and I seem to recall that the master bedroom had only a curtain. These arrangements were probably made to allow circulation of air from the space heater in the dining room. The remodeled house as it is today, and in its current location—having been relocated to make room for college expansion—is shown on the left.

When Tom was born in 1935, Don was pushing 12, Ted was 8 and I was just short of 5. I don't have any recollection of our exact sleeping arrangements before Tom was born. I do have vague memories of sleeping in that small, unheated bedroom in the days before the pot stove in the dining room was replaced by an oil-fired furnace in the cellar. In winter, the temperature in our room sometimes dropped below freezing, so the morning routine for us always involved a mad dash for the stove to get dressed.

My clearest memory of the details of our sleeping arrangements is from the late 30s, when the four of us slept in two sets of double bunks. One set was "store-bought" furniture. The other had been built by Don in a high-school class that at the time was called "manual training." Don started high school in 1936, having skipped an earlier grade, so the bunk beds were probably built the following year. They were made of bird's-eye maple and were remarkably sturdy. In fact, that school project—which was made to be disassembled into two single beds—outlived the "store-bought" bunks by decades and could still be found at our parents' house long after all of us were out on our own.

To suggest that space was limited with four growing boys in that tiny bedroom would be putting it mildly. In addition to the door to the dining room, it also had an entry into the parlor and two windows, so wall space was at a premium. With one bunk against the wall on each side of the room, there was just enough space to walk between them. There was no closet, so all of our clothes had to be stored in a couple of dressers. However, that was not a big problem because we didn't have that many clothes. We typically changed them only once a week…on Sunday, after our weekly Saturday night bath, although I'm sure there were occasional exceptions to this practice, because little boys and dirt were most often inseparable companions. By the standards of hygiene operating in our culture today, a once-a week bath and change of clothes would mark you as socially unacceptable, but at that time, necessity mothered most social norms and I expect that our family's practices were not particularly unusual in these matters.

My mother washed laundry on Monday—rain or shine; summer or winter—because that was the first work day after the bed linens were changed and the flotsam from the Saturday-night baths was available for resurrection. The laundry room at our house was "the shed." There my mother did her Monday-morning battle with the washing machine—a round vessel on wheels equipped with an agitator and a pair of rubber rollers (ringers) attached—and couple of large square wash tubs. I do not recall being very often involved personally in her wash-day rituals, but it was impossible to avoid an acute awareness that it was going on. Even with infrequent wardrobe changes, six people can generate a lot of laundry in a week. In the summer—and even in winter, when the sun was shining and the snow wasn't too deep—my mother hung the wash on a battery of clothes lines that stood along the side of the house, eliminating for most of the day that part of the yard as a play area.

In the winter, even on the best days, the wash seldom dried totally on the lines. I can recall many times watching my mother recover the wash in totally petrified condition, to find space in the house to thaw and complete the drying process. Part of this could be done on two large, collapsible clothes racks that she would set up in the parlor. The rest occupied rope lines that were strung all over the rest of the house. It was the same whenever the weather was inclement on Mondays. We spent those days (when we weren't in school) dodging laundry and enduring the high humidity that accompanied the drying process.

Before we got a hot water heater…and I frankly have no memory of when such a thing might have been acquired or where it was installed (probably in the cellar)…hot water for washing people and laundry came from a teakettle and/or a large, oval shaped copper "boiler"

that maintained a presence (the teakettle perpetually and the boiler when needed) on top of the cookstove. I do remember my mother using that teakettle to warm the water for our Saturday night baths.

So, although our accommodations were not palatial, we maintained reasonably comfortable living conditions as the Depression crowded in around us. We ate well—as I will explain in more detail shortly—and our clothes were always in good repair…although seldom in mint condition. New clothes were very rarely in the budget, particularly for those of us on the bottom end of the "hand-me-down" line. It was undoubtedly a disappointment for my mother not to have produced a girl child (although she actually did after most of us were grown and gone), but it certainly made it a lot easier and cheaper to keep clothes on us because we were all boys. However, that required my mother to spend most of her evenings mending and altering our wardrobes. Our clothes had patches, but they were always neatly sewn and as close in fabric type and color as her abundantly stocked ragbag could provide.

What I remember most about her mending ventures was how deftly she darned our socks. She didn't just sew up the hole. She painstakingly re-wove it. To accomplish this, she needed—in addition to the needle and thread—a thimble and a wooden device shaped somewhat like a light bulb. In fact, I seem to recall that women in those days sometimes used a burned out light bulb for the same purpose. That purpose was to fit inside the sock and provide a proper contour for the mend. Most of the holes in our socks were in the heel. (Although the big toe area usually ran a close second, but this was not considered as critical, as you could switch feet with the socks and move the holes to a place where the big toes no longer protruded through them.) So, with the wooden bulb inserted into the heel of the sock to expose the hole, my mother would fill the hole with thread, using a large-eyed needle that accommodated a number of strands, and pushing the needle with her thimble (which was affixed to the middle finger of her right hand), pulling the thread back and forth across the hole. When she had filled the hole with a matrix of thread extending in one direction, she would then begin to cross weave in a perpendicular direction until she had created a fabric patch over the hole.

You might ask how I remember so vividly after more than seventy years the details of my mother's sock-mending routine. To answer that, I need to explain a bit about what happened in the evenings at our house—and, I expect, most houses—in those days. We listened to the radio. The interesting thing about radio is that it challenges only one of your senses. My mother would sit in front of the radio and mend socks…by the hour. And what did I do while my ear was tuned to Fibber McGee and Molly on the radio? I watched my mother mend socks. Of course, I don't remember consciously doing that, but I must have, because the details are imprinted in my memory like a cattle brand.

The other thing about my mother's sewing routines that remains vivid in my memory is the thimble. With four boisterous boys competing for space around the radio, a certain amount of roughhousing was inevitable. My mother's remedy was simple—and extremely effective. She would pick out the one of us she considered to be most responsible for the disorder and give him a quick rap on the head with the thimble. One rap was always plenty sufficient to restore order.

Keeping the crew in serviceable shoes was a particular challenge for our parents. New shoes were occasionally necessary, of course, but that was always a last resort. And, in the summer, shoes were seldom an issue because we most often went barefoot. Summer or winter, however, we walked everywhere—and played hard—so the soles of our shoes typically wore through before we outgrew them. At our house, there was never talk of taking these shoes to the cobbler to be resoled. The cost was not in our budget. So, the first line of defense to protect our

feet from contact with the pavement was a playing card. We played cards a lot at our house and there were always decks that were short a few cards and could no longer be used. These became material for short-term shoe repair. The inserts didn't last very long, of course, but replacements were almost inexhaustible.

The stuff of more permanent repair for the holes in our soles was obtained by our father at the local "five and dime" store. There he could buy for a modest investment a kit consisting of two rubber soles, a small tube of rubber cement and a thin metal scraper. The scraper was used to rough up the area to be repaired so that the glue would have more surface area to stick to. After the glue had been applied to both the shoe and the replacement sole and allowed to dry, the two were pressed together. Then, if things worked the way they were supposed to, the new sole could be trimmed with a sharp knife and we once more had rubber between our feet and the pavement.

As I recall, however, it seldom worked that way…at least for any extended period of time. Typically, the first sign of a problem was when your shoes began to "flap-flap" when you walked, as the new soles detached from the shoes at the end nearest the heel. Efforts to stem the progress of the detachment with applications of additional glue usually resulted in only short-term success. We endured the "flap-flapping" until the new soles became more like alien appendages clinging to the toe ends of our shoes. Then we would rip them off completely, return to the playing cards and wait for our parents and the family budget to come up with an alternative solution.

The one thing I don't recall about subsistence living as a kid in the Great Depression was ever being hungry. As I said, we ate well. Of course, food prices in those days were very low. Even given that, however, supporting a family of six on fourteen dollars a week—and feeding them well—required some additional resources. These came primarily from the family garden. At least a third of the land at 323 10th Street was cultivated to produce food. However, ours was no simple back-yard vegetable plot. It was a BIG garden and it required major preparation and major maintenance. The location of the garden can be seen in the aerial photo below, which is a reprint of the one shown in the previous chapter. The garden is directly behind the garage (at the bottom of the photo), extending right (south) to the property line and up (east) somewhat past the back of the house. This garden was an all-consuming family project…and it started with a man called Charlie Liedemann.

Every spring, Charlie, a local-area, small-holding farmer, would drive his horse drawn wagon up the alley that divided our block and began the annual ritual that would prepare our garden for planting. First, he spread the ground with a generous layer of horse manure. Then he hitched his team to a shiny steel plow and turned the rich black earth in neat, straight furrows, maneuvering that heavy plow as deftly as I might steer my tricycle. When he had finished plowing, he swapped the plow for a disc, which chopped up the freshly-turned soil as he guided the horses back and forth across the garden. Finally, he hitched the team to a drag and leveled the uneven contours left by the disc. For us kids, when Charlie

showed up, it was like having the circus come to town. It was fascinating business and we watched with rapt attention.

However, when Charlie left, the real work began. All of that freshly plowed ground had to be planted. We grew a large variety of vegetable crops in the garden. The typical planting included potatoes, tomatoes, sweet corn, cabbages, string beans, peas, carrots, leaf lettuce, radishes and onions. Occasionally, dad would get adventuresome and try something a bit more unusual. Once, I recall he tried growing celery and another time kohlrabi. Now, in retrospect, I find these choices even more unusual, because he would never be caught dead eating either one of them.

Except for the potatoes, I don't have any vivid memories of being very much involved in the planting. I remember watching the garden being laid out; the seeds being sown in neat, marked rows, the tomato and cabbage plants being spaced into patches and the rows of the seed onions dug into their assigned spaces. But I don't recall being asked to do much of it…except for the potatoes. On planting day, those potatoes and I would begin a relationship that would carry us through almost until my mother put them in the pot to boil.

Potatoes reproduce by sprouting from the eyes that cover the surface of the tuber. When it came time to plant our potato patch, my mother would cut the "seed potatoes" into pieces, carefully isolating several eyes into each piece. Then my father and I would head for that section of the garden assigned for them, he with a spade and I with a bucket full of the potato fragments. Following a line lain out by a string, he would dig holes and into each I would toss a fragment (or more…I don't remember now) and then cover it with dirt. For me, it was not particularly difficult work and I don't recall ever complaining about having to do it. Certainly, with our "assembly line" routine, it didn't take long to plant what was a very substantial potato patch.

With a garden as large as ours, everyone had to join in the effort to keep it free of weeds. However, my personal participation in that effort was not sufficiently bothersome that it has stuck in my memory. I do recall that my dad did most of the cultivating using a device with a single large steel-rimmed wheel, a pair of wooden handles much like the ones on Charlie Liedemann's plow and some interchangeable cultivators. My only vivid memory of helping to keep the garden free of intruders was my role as the "potato bug patrol."

As the summer wore on, and the potatoes we had planted began to produce large, leafy plants, they inevitably attracted swarms of speckled beetles we called potato bugs. These beetles looked much like the common lady bug, except they were somewhat larger and lighter in color. Small as they were, however, they had voracious appetites for the leaves of the potato plant. Left to their own devices, they and their offspring would soon reduce our potato patch to neat rows of leafless twigs—and few potatoes would be forthcoming in the fall.

So, when these pesky critters began to appear in our garden, one of my jobs was to intercept them and to assure that they were denied the opportunity to feast on our potato plants. The only equipment I needed for the job was of a short stick and an empty coffee can. Going from plant to plant, I would search out the insects crawling on the leaves and knock them—one at a time—into the coffee can with the stick. As I recall, they were able to fly, but they never seemed to try to escape from the can. For them, this was a regrettable lapse because, after I had collected a good number of them, it was time for their execution—the most interesting part of the job…at least for a pre-teen kid. Pouring a little kerosene into the can, I would toss in a lighted match and listen with fascination as the bugs would begin to explode like a skillet of roasting popcorn.

Throughout the summer, the battle continued between these ubiquitous creatures and the brothers with their coffee cans and kerosene, but I'm happy to say that the brothers always prevailed. By the time fall arrived, the family could look forward to bumper crop of large fleshy tubers. Thus came the next chapter in my continuing relationship with those tubers…the harvest. When my father judged that the potatoes had reached their maximum growth, we would head for the patch; he with a spading fork and I (and/or one of my brothers) with a bucket. He would uproot each hill with the fork, exposing what the plants had produced during the summer. I would follow along on my hands and knees, digging through each mound of soft earth to recover the potatoes. When my bucket was full, I would tote it to a large potato bin located under the shed, next to the stairs to "the cellar." It had to be a large bin, because our garden produced a lot of potatoes—hundreds of pounds; enough to supply the family for most of the next year…and we were a big "meat and potatoes" family. More about the "meat" later. There remains one more story to tell about my responsibility for those spuds.

Throughout the fall and winter after their harvest, the potatoes kept very well in the cool bin under the unheated shed. When spring came, however, the attention of the tubers became diverted to thoughts of reproduction—and they began to sprout. Without immediate intervention, they would begin to convert the food value of the potato into long, inedible stems. Alas, my brothers and I became the means of intervention. When sprouting began, we were sent to the bin to remove the sprouts…a tedious task requiring each tuber to be inspected and rubbed clean of the ever-present sprouts. It was an inescapable, unending and universally detested assignment. Potatoes are not easily discouraged from their God-given mission in life—creating more potatoes—so trips to the dungeon to do battle with those inclinations became ever more frequent as the coming spring turned a young man's thoughts ever more frequently to baseball, kites and exploration.

Food for the Tribe

Potatoes were the only output from our garden that were maintained in the "root cellar," but by no means the only ones preserved to help sustain the family through the coming winter. Home canning was common in those days. For many families it was essential for survival, so canning equipment could be found in most homes. In ours, the key apparatus was a very large pressure cooker. As I recall, it could hold a number of one-quart fruit jars in two tiers (although looking up at it from my child's perspective at the time may have led me to exaggerate its actual size). With a high-pressure lid held on by huge clamps, it could easily withstand the 20 pounds of steam pressure needed to guarantee the preservation of the food.

Beginning in mid-summer, that cooker maintained a regular place on the stove in the kitchen, accommodating quart jars of beans, peas, tomatoes (whole and juice) and sweet corn—plus various pickles and other preserves—each in turn as the garden made them available. In the fall, when peaches by the crate became available in the local grocery, quarts of peaches were added to the queue waiting for their turn in the pressure cooker.

I don't recall being very much involved in most of these rituals. I do remember picking beans and shucking peas, but for the most part, the canning process remained the domain of my mother and father. What I do remember is the production of sauerkraut, mostly because I have always liked the stuff and because the process for making it was so fascinating.

Sauerkraut is simply fermented cabbage. At our house, the fermenting took place in a large stoneware crock. After shredding the cabbage (a lot of cabbage) with a hand shredder, my mother would dump it into the crock, add salt (a lot of salt) and cover it with grape leaves from the vines that overgrew the arbor over our back porch. To this day, I don't know why she used the grape leaves (see The Continuing Story below), but she always made great sauerkraut, so I'm not prepared to question her wisdom in the matter. On top of the leaves, she placed an old dinner plate that just fit inside the opening of the crock. Finally, the plate was weighted down by a large rock (apparently kept around for just that purpose), and the crock was stored in the back of "the shed." Sometime later, when my mother determined that the fermentation had completed (and I have no idea what criteria she used for making that judgement), the rock, the plate and the grape leaves—now all submerged in fragrant brine—were removed and the kraut was sealed into quart jars to join the rest of the preserves on shelves in the cellar.

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The Continuing Story

It wasn't until years later that I had the opportunity to learn a bit more about what was going on in that crock of cabbage as it was fermenting away in the back of our shed. Having, by that time, achieved some credentials as a scientist, I was earning my living doing laboratory research in biology. The work in which I was engaged presented the need for measuring the amount of a particular amino acid in some samples I was studying. At that time, a common technique for doing such measurements used a microorganism that required that specific amino acid for its growth. However, a culture of that particular organism was not available in the laboratory where I was working, and my budget was currently insufficient to allow it to be purchased from a supply source. Not to worry, I thought, I will simply find where that microbe occurs in nature and isolate a culture.

What I discovered was that this organism, bearing the lofty name *Leuconostoc mesenteroides*, occurs as the last of a series of continually changing bacterial populations in the fermentation of…you guessed it…sauerkraut. As it turns out, the fermentation of cabbage into kraut is a complicated process in which different kinds of microorganisms predominate in the culture at different times. The high salt content initially favors the first of these populations, which begins the production of ever-higher concentrations of acid in the culture. As each succeeding population raises the acid to a level it can no longer endure, a new—more acid tolerant—organism takes over, until *mesenteroides* finally finishes the job.

All I had to do, then, was make some sauerkraut. Following the procedure I had seen my mother use—on a much smaller scale—I acquired a cabbage, shredded it into a large laboratory beaker, added sodium chloride (they don't call it salt in the laboratory) and searched around for a bottle that would just fit inside the beaker. The bottle, filled with water, substituted for both the dinner plate and the rock in my mother's process. It kept the kraut oxygen free (anaerobic), which favored the growth of the acid-producing organisms. Then, as the assay I proposed was not immediately critical to my research program, I put the beaker on a shelf in the lab and went on to other things for a while.

After an appropriate time, my efforts produced a beaker full of sauerkraut and I was able to isolate a pure culture of the desired organism from the juice. Of course, I had to taste the product to see how it compared to my recollections of my mother's output. It wasn't bad…but no comparison to the sauerkraut of my childhood memories. Was it those grape leaves? Alas, we'll never know.

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We were, as I have said, a meat and potatoes family. So, whatever deprivations we had to endure in our often-meager circumstances, my father always saw to it that meat wasn't one of them. In fact, he seemed to be somewhat of an expert on the art of butchering. On the wall in our shed he kept a meat saw (shaped like a hack saw only about three times bigger) and, next to it, a large illustration showing how a steer was typically butchered into the various meat cuts. In addition, on those occasions when I would accompany him shopping at Pete Buehrer's meat market, his conversations with the butchers always struck me as discussions among equals. However, although I did see him use that meat saw on regular occasions, I don't recall that he ever brought home cuts that were large enough to require reference to the chart on the wall in the shed. Later—during the war—we did acquire half a hog that tested his acquaintance with porcine anatomy…but that is a story for another time.

So, although we seldom—if ever—ate prime cuts, I don't recall ever having a meal without meat. Fortunately, my mother was an expert at converting the toughest cuts of meat into very chewable servings. When we would hear sounds coming from the kitchen like someone was hammering in a new floor, we knew that mom was mercilessly pounding economy cuts of steak with her multi-pronged meat hammer and we could look forward to a meal of "tender" Swiss steak that day.

At our house, the noon meal was called "dinner" and the evening meal was "supper." Dinner was the main meal of the day. For supper, we got leftovers. If we had pot roast and boiled potatoes for dinner, there would be cold roast beef and fried potatoes for supper. Sometimes the leftovers would become hash. My mother had a hand-cranked meat grinder that she used frequently to pulverize leftover meat cuts. To these she would add chopped boiled potatoes,

leftover gravy and some seasoning and fry the mixture in a big skillet. I know that it is popular to poke fun at hash, but I always liked the stuff and looked forward to when my mom served it. Of course it didn't hurt that she was an outstanding cook.

Although red meat at our house was acquired in the sorts of cuts shown on the chart in the shed, chickens came to our table by a more complicated route. Dressed chickens (that is, those that have been deprived of their heads, their feathers and their innards) were available at the meat market, but at a price that was not in our budget. This didn't exclude poultry from our diet. It just meant that we had to get involved a bit earlier in the preparation process. In fact, if you were willing to start with a chicken that remained in possession of its squawk, it was probably the least expensive meat we could acquire at the time—with the exception of the fish we might pull from the river.

Prominent on West Bremer Avenue in Waverly stood the local produce market. I don't recall all the different commodities that were bought and sold there, but I clearly remember it was the place where we went for live chickens. As kids at home, the first indication we had that a chicken dinner was in the offing came when dad showed up with a gyrating gunny sack (burlap bag) over his shoulder. In our back yard, under the lilac bush that stood outside the bathroom window, there was an old tree stump. It was on that stump that the contents of the gunny sack began their journey to the kitchen table.

I recall watching with fascination as dad would reach into the sack, pull out a squawking chicken by its feet, lay its torso on the stump, quickly lop off its head with an axe and toss it aside to flip-flop its death throes on the grass. On the back porch nearby, mom was ready with a large dishpan and a teakettle of boiling water. Thankfully, I have never had the occasion to pluck a chicken myself, but I still have vivid memories of my mother pouring boiling water over those chickens and snatching out the feathers in big handfulls. I don't recall the exact sequence she followed to complete the dressing, but I know she had to pluck out smaller "pin feathers" from the skin and remove the bird's entrails, keeping the liver, the heart and the gizzard. Not long thereafter, those birds would appear, golden brown on the center of our kitchen table (either roasted or fried, depending on the type of chicken…more about that later).

Fish, although relatively abundant in the river, were never a big item on our table. My dad didn't like fish and most of us kids tended to agree with his taste in the matter. Mom enjoyed eating fish and we would catch them for her, but she always prepared something else for the rest of us. To this day, I don't like fish.

My dad never took lunches to work and could not afford to eat out at noon, so he always walked home for "dinner," six days a week, whatever the weather. It was the same for us at school. In fact the whole town was pretty much on the same schedule. Work stopped at noon and started again at one o'clock. In fact, you didn't even have to carry a watch. A whistle—loud enough to be heard all over town—was blown at each of these critical times. For us kids, when we weren't in school, that noon whistle meant that we had about twelve minutes (the time it typically took dad to walk the mile from "the shop") to get ourselves home, washed and seated at the table in the kitchen. If we were in school, although we had to cover only about half the distance that dad did, we knew we didn't have time to tarry because he really walked fast.

With these kinds of time pressures, you might think that the midday meal at our house would be chaos, but I don't remember it that way. It was tumultuous, but well organized. In fact, on school days when the weather was good, the noon-hour typically allowed time to get back and play a few games of marbles in the schoolyard before classes resumed at one o'clock.

Most of the other food staples we used—in addition to meat, milk and produce from the garden—were acquired by my father once each week at one of the local stores. Dad always did the grocery shopping. Routinely, late on Saturday after work (with a week's pay in his pocket), he would stop by Irv Hardin's grocery store on East Bremer Avenue (shown on the right) and buy the week's groceries—which were always more than his 140-pound frame could carry the mile to our house. Fortunately, the Hardin's lived on our side of the river, closed their store at six p.m. on Saturday and were accommodating neighbors. So, each Saturday, at about six fifteen, we would see the Hardin's black sedan pull up in front of our house, with dad and our week's provisions in the back seat.

Milk was delivered daily (seven days a week) from a local dairy. Herb Albrecht was the dairyman and, for a number of years in the late '30s and early '40s, my brother Ted helped him with deliveries, running up to each house from Herb's truck with that day's order. At that time, the milk came only in glass quart bottles, was always whole milk and was not homogenized. The narrow-necked bottles were sealed with a pressure-fitted paper cap, about the size of a silver dollar. A regular ritual before pouring milk was to put your thumb on the cap and rotate the bottle back and forth to distribute the cream into the rest of the milk. In winter, when it was really cold, if you didn't bring in the milk fairly quickly after it was delivered, you would go out to your front porch to find those paper caps sitting on top of an extruded column of frozen cream.

Milk really had to be delivered every day because we used a lot of it and we did not have the space to refrigerate more than a few quarts. By the time I was old enough to be aware of such things, our family had an electric refrigerator. Certainly I don't have any memories of the iceman making stops at our house. But a lot of our neighbors had iceboxes—even into the early 40s. These were insulated cabinets with a large chamber at the top into which, every few days, the iceman would insert a big block of ice. Below the ice was another chamber that held items to be kept cool.

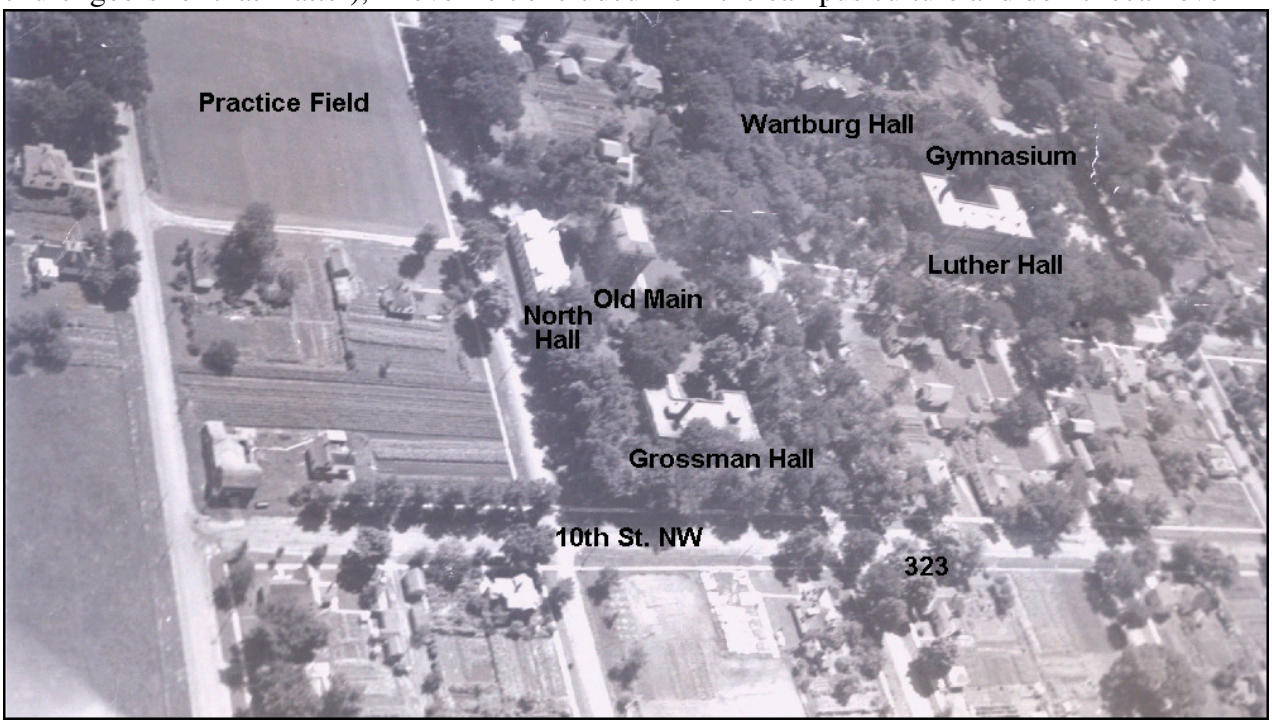
On hot summer days, Mr. Illian the iceman always attracted a crowd of kids when he arrived in the neighborhood. And, as he deftly wielded his ice pick to split the large masses of ice on his truck into perfectly shaped blocks for each delivery, he would chip off fragments for us to suck on to help mitigate the sweltering heat. The photo on the right shows three of those kids on the back of his truck on a hot day in about 1940. The three boys are my brother Tom on the left and, on the right, Wendell Lemohn above and Bill Wiederanders below. Wendell and Bill were both sons of Wartburg professors.

At the time, I had no idea where the ice had come from. As a kid, you don't think about things like that. For us, it was not at all illogical that Mr. Illian would regularly show up in our neighborhood with a truck full of ice when the temperature was 90 degrees. In fact, that ice came from the river, sawed out in huge blocks from the frozen surface the preceding winter and stored in an insulated warehouse at the Crystal Ice and Fuel Company, Mr. Illian's employer. (In the winter, the iceman used the same truck to deliver coal.)

Dad never attempted to buy a whole week's supply of bread for our family on his Saturday excursions to Hardin's grocery. To replenish our bread supply during the week, we depended on Everett's "store." It wasn't really a store in the usual sense of the word. It was just a house with a big screened-in front porch. The Everetts lived three blocks up 10th Street on Bremer Avenue and they had converted their porch into a sort of grocery store. Except for bread and candy, I can't recall what else they sold, because those were usually my only interest in the place. My mom would give me a dime with instructions to go to Everetts for a loaf of bread. At that time the bread cost nine cents, and it was understood that I could spend the penny change for candy as a reward for my efforts. One of the enduring stories my mother has told over the years involves one of my trips to Everetts. Apparently, I had taken an extraordinarily long time for the trip and when mom asked me what delayed me, I replied that "I was besiding and besiding what candy to choose."

Wartburg College

While I was growing up in northwest Waverly, the campus of Wartburg College occupied a little over 10 acres and the student body numbered no more than a few hundred. In fact, when my wife started there in 1948, enrollment was still only about 650. With so few students, there were also relatively few faculty and most of them lived in the near vicinity of the campus. So, the neighborhood of my youth was always influenced by the culture of campus life. Although my family had no direct association with the college and we were not Lutherans (or even churchgoers for that matter), I never felt excluded from the campus culture and don't recall ever being treated like an outsider. I was just one of the neighborhood kids. A lot of them were faculty kids, but nobody seemed interested in making any big distinction among us.



At the time, there were only six buildings on the campus—not including the president's home and a maintenance garage. There was a boy's dorm (Grossman Hall) and a girl's dorm (Wartburg Hall); an administration/classroom building (Luther Hall); a gymnasium/auditorium; Old Main, which accommodated music and art; and North Hall, a barracks-like wood frame building that housed the cafeteria and additional dorm rooms for boys. The aerial photograph above ((taken in around 1939 or 1940) shows the Wartburg campus and some of the surrounding neighborhood, including our home at 323 10th Street NW. The adjoining photo shows Ted, Tom and me (on the tricycle), taken in our yard in the spring of 1936, with Grossman Hall and Old Main in the background.

With so few buildings on that much wooded land, it was

like living next door to a big park. The athletic practice field occupied a whole block. When it wasn't in use by the students, it stood as an inviting acreage of regularly-mowed turf—a dream come true for kids in search of some space for a game of ball, flying model airplanes or other activities. Another favored assembly area on the campus was the lawn in front of Old Main. On summer evenings it became the space for all of the neighborhood kids to gather and play games, like "Kick the Can" and "Run Sheep Run."

When we weren't playing games in front of Old Main, a popular gathering place on the campus in the summer was the fountain in front of the girl's dorm, Wartburg Hall. The fountain guarded the walk leading to the steps of the dorm and adjoined a large pair of semicircular concrete benches. At the center of the circle of benches stood a concrete pedestal with a brass sundial on top. As I recall, it wasn't a very good place to put a sundial, as the campus was generously populated with large trees so it stood in the shade much of the time. However, even when the sunlight found it, the sundial was usually of little use for telling the time, because the style (indicator) was almost always broken. This was not due to vandalism (at least in the usual sense of the word), but because some young lad (not I) was showing off by trying to leapfrog the sundial and didn't quite clear the style. I will confess to doing some leapfrogging when the style was missing.

The college gym was a special attraction for boys whose interest in basketball was constantly thwarted by the absence of suitable places to play. In those days, a barrel hoop nailed to a tree or to the front of a garage was usually the best we could hope for as an arena for playing basketball. So, an empty gym a couple of blocks away was always a big temptation—often too big to ignore. Of course, the building was usually locked when it wasn't in use, but we often could find an unlocked window that would allow us to drop down onto an interior stairwell that led to the gym floor. At a different time and in a different place, such unauthorized entry and blatant trespassing might bear severe consequences for us if we were caught—which we almost always were—but we knew that the worst we could look forward to was being scolded and escorted to the door. Most often, our escort was Elmer Hertel, who was the college coach and biology instructor. Occasionally, we were ejected by Charlie Pichelmeyer, the campus maintenance man, whose son (one of our companions) might well have been among the intruders. Charlie tended to be less charitable in his lectures.

But the campus itself was not the only attraction the college culture provided for neighborhood kids. Two venues of particular interest were the horseshoe course behind Cotterman's barn and the croquet arena next door, in August Engelbrecht's backyard. Of course, we were never participants in these activities…just spectators. But, they were always exciting places for a kid to be in the early evening on warm summer days.

Growing up as a town kid in the college community, I had little idea what went on in the classrooms at Wartburg. I did know that it was a Christian college and that most of the students were preparing for careers in the church—pastors, parish workers, teachers. And, over time, I learned the areas of specialty of most of the faculty. However, it was not the academic credentials of the faculty members that impressed me most as a neighborhood kid…it was their passion for horseshoes and croquet.

The Cotterman's lived on 9th Street a block east of us, on the corner directly across the street from Old Main. Professor Cotterman taught language at Wartburg (Latin, I know, but I never knew what else). Their "barn," which had undoubtedly been built originally to keep horses and now was used as a garage for their car, adjoined the alley behind their house. On a narrow strip between the barn and the alley, a pair of horseshoe pits had been fashioned, each

surrounded by substantial wooden timbers and filled with clay around the stake. There, almost nightly on clement summer evenings, several Wartburg faculty would gather to match their skills at pitching horseshoes. And there we would be, hovering in the background, awed by the down-to-earth recreational pursuits of these learned men.

Meanwhile, next door in August Englebrecht's back yard, a game of croquet would very likely be underway with another group of faculty and their wives. August had retired as president of Wartburg and continued to live directly across the street from the campus. He was also the grandfather of another family of neighborhood kids, who lived just half a block from him down 9th Street. Their father was not on the faculty, however. He was a banker.

The croquet players were just as zealous and competitive as the horseshoe pitchers, but their activities tended to attract more adult spectators, who sat around on chairs or blankets, often less interested in the game than in their conversations. There were also plenty of kids among the onlookers, whose presence was always accepted without comment and without much concern for which kid belonged to whom.

For us, the college students were not nearly as awe-inspiring a group of individuals as the faculty, but we always appreciated it when one of them took an interest in us. We were not supposed to hang around in the dorms—and for the most part we didn't—but the campus was not only a playground for us, it stood between our house and almost every other destination we might want to get to in town. So we traversed the campus, for one reason or another, many times in a typical day and easily became familiar players on the campus scene. Given that, it was almost inevitable that we would attract the interest of an occasional student. I should hasten to emphasize that, with one notable personal exception, this interest was always totally benign. That exception occurred when a male student I had befriended invited me to his room in Grossman Hall and began to expose himself. I was out of there in a flash—more than a little shaken by the experience—and never mentioned the episode to anyone for many years after that.

I'm sure that there were other times in which my meanderings on the campus led me occasionally to investigate some guy's dorm room, but the only such experience I still remember vividly was a visit to the room of the Becker twins in North Hall. I don't know how it was determined which of the male students would be assigned to that upstairs corridor of rooms in North Hall, but—at least by the time I became aware of such things—it was generally conceded that it was a more "worldly" setting than the main dormitory in Grossman Hall. I have no reason to suggest that this definition applied to the Becker twins—both of whom, I think, went on to become Lutheran ministers—or to the other residents of North Hall when I hung around there as a kid, but it did seem to be a place where the rules were interpreted somewhat more loosely. I don't now remember the occasion for my visit that day to the Becker quarters in North Hall, but I do recall most clearly the large bull whip they had hanging on the wall in their room. For a small-town, pre-teen kid, this was a most impressive possession. I could only imagine how they had come to possess it or what they conceived to do with it.

However, the student whose friendship I remember cherishing most was a red-headed guy named Rudy Langholtz. He played catcher on the Wartburg baseball team, which made him a big man on campus as far as I was concerned. He always took time to talk to me when I encountered him on the campus, and I made sure to maximize those encounters by heading for the college practice field after school on spring days to watch baseball practice and hang out with "my friend."

As I have said, I had little knowledge of what went on at the college aside from my chance encounters with faculty or students as I nosed around on the campus or its environs.

However, one Wartburg tradition could not help but attract the attention of anyone living within shouting distance of the campus. That tradition was "outfly." (I'm sure that is not how the actual word is spelled and I think I was once told what the word was in German and what it meant, but I don't remember now.) Every year in the late spring, I could always look forward to being awakened very early one morning by shouts coming from the campus across the street. The shouts, beginning in a small group outside the boys' dorm, began quickly to increase in volume as more voices were added and the cacophonous crowd began to migrate toward the girls' dorm. The single word emanating from the students was…OUTFLY! Irrespective of the early hour, it was an event not to be missed, and we were up and dressed as quickly as possible to follow the students on their mission to entreat the college president for a day off to have a picnic.

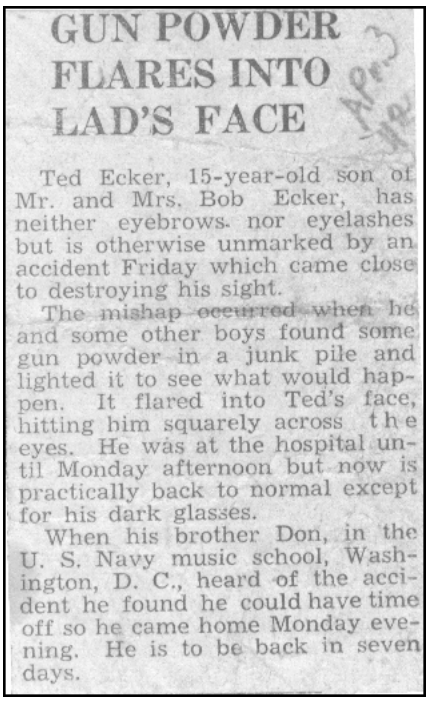
The whole process took a bit of time because, like us, all but a small handful of student organizers were totally surprised to hear those shouts penetrating the early-morning quiet. Very quickly, however, they were dressed and gathered around the home of the president—across the street from the girl's dorm—shouting in unison "OUTFLY!" at the top of their voices. Of course, the whole thing had been scheduled in secret by the student and staff organizers, so that the meals, the games and all other activities were already planned for the day. So, after making the shouting students cool their heels for a time, the president would appear on his front porch and consent to giving the students the day off for "outfly."

In my day, the picnic was held in Woodring's Woods, an area of pasture and woods on Anson Woodring's farm along the river just north of town. (This area can be seen in the aerial photo in the first chapter.) It was an ideal site for such an event, less than a mile walk from the campus and as rustic a setting as you could ask. As I was growing up it was one of our favorite areas to hike and explore. Now it is a housing development. I'll have more to say about tramping those woods a bit later. On this day, it was the venue for outfly. Regrettably, the Wartburg students were awarded a day off from class for the event, but we weren't, so we never got the opportunity to investigate the proceedings until they were winding down late in the afternoon. It was still worth the walk out there to watch the Wartburg students at play.

Although hanging around on the campus during the school year had its many attractions for us, the real excitement began when the school year ended and the male students packed up to go home for the summer. The stuff they didn't want to carry home with them was just left in their rooms for Charlie Pichelmeyer to collect and haul away. We lived directly across the street from Grossman Hall, so we could always be found on the last day of class standing in our yard watching the progress of events in the dormitory. When most of the students had cleared out, we made a beeline for the dorm and searched each of the rooms for "treasures" left behind. Most of the junk we accumulated on these forays looked very impressive as they were discovered, but had relatively short half-lives among our possessions. For my brother Ted, one of those treasures disappeared in an instant, with near disastrous results.

He was fifteen at the time and I was twelve. He had found among the discards in a room at the college a small, cylindrical vial made of wood and containing a few grams of a gray powder. The container was common in those days for storing small amount of dry chemicals. This vial had no label and we had no idea what the gray powder was. You could argue—quite convincingly in retrospect—that just about the dumbest way to find out was to put a match to it. But that was what Ted did…with no small amount of encouragement from me, I'm sure. We were standing just outside the back door of our house, with Ted's treasure on the table that mom kept there for sorting vegetables from the garden. The first couple of matches produced no

results. Then, peering down into the container as he touched one more match to the mysterious gray powder, it blew up with a tremendous *whoosh*, right in his face.



GUN POWDER FLARES INTO LAD'S FACE

Ted Ecker, 15-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Bob Ecker, has neither eyebrows nor eyelashes but is otherwise unmarked by an accident Friday which came close to destroying his sight.

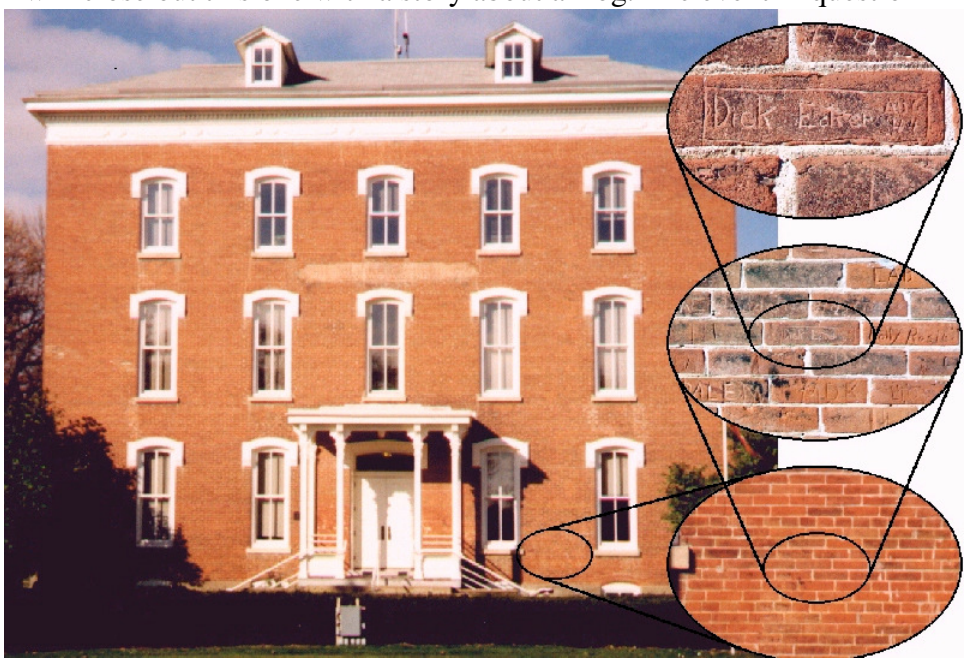
The mishap occurred when he and some other boys found some gun powder in a junk pile and lighted it to see what would happen. It flared into Ted's face, hitting him squarely across the eyes. He was at the hospital until Monday afternoon but now is practically back to normal except for his dark glasses.

When his brother Don, in the U. S. Navy music school, Washington, D. C., heard of the accident he found he could have time off so he came home Monday evening. He is to be back in seven days.

What happened after the *whoosh* is a total blank in my memory. I don't recall being frightened, although I was undoubtedly scared out of my wits. I just don't remember anything. I have only my parents' recounting of those post-*whoosh* events. The good news is that, among the medical practitioners in Waverly at that time, was an EENT (eye, ear, nose and throat) specialist of some considerable reputation. Ted was taken to him and the specialist is credited with saving my brother's sight. In fact, when Ted died at the age of 77, he still had never used prescription eyeglasses. On the left is an article on the accident my mom clipped from the local paper. The date she wrote on it is "Apr.3, '42."

Anyone that has ever walked around Old Main could not help but notice the abundance of graffiti (mostly initials) scratched into the old bricks at the lower levels of the building. Space on those bricks has pretty well become exhausted by the present day. However, in 1944 it was possible for a 14-year-old boy to find a reachable brick on which to identify himself for posterity—and so I did, using the entire brick for my efforts, which are shown in the photograph above. The recorded date was "Aug. '44."

The Wartburg campus and its inhabitants will undoubtedly creep into later narratives from time to time, but I will close out this one with a story about a frog. The event in question didn't actually take place on the campus, but across the street, where a new residence was being constructed for one of the professors, Dr. Hiltner. Although the Great Depression was winding down by the late 1930s, the construction of a new home was still a very rare event. In fact, I don't recall another being built in our neighborhood while we lived there. So the construction site on 9th Street, across from the college tennis courts next to Luther Hall, was an attraction too tempting for a 7- or 8-year-old kid to ignore.



I must have visited there almost daily that summer, because I can recall becoming quite friendly with two bricklayers who were working on the house. And it was that friendship that led to the incident with the frog. The bricklayers were taking a lunch break when I was there that day, and one of them captured a frog that was hopping past the stack of bricks where they were sitting. Of course, the area around us was strewn with straw, which was apparently used to insulate the bricks as they were being shipped. Picking up a fairly intact length of straw from the ground, the bricklayer with the frog turned to me and said, "Hey, kid. Watch this."

Then, he inserted one end of the straw into the hind end of the frog, the other end into his mouth and blew…and blew…and blew. With each breath, the little frog got bigger and bigger, looking ever more like a balloon with legs. It was, I'm sure, a most surprising experience for the frog, but she couldn't possibly have been more surprised than I was. As she grew in size, my eyes kept pace. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I just stood there agape, watching in wonder. The bricklayers, of course, were delighted to see that their little prank had produced the desired effect. I wonder if they had any idea how enduring that effect would be. After more than 70 years, I can still picture vividly the details of that experience.

Railroads, the River and the Swimming Pool

As a small-town kid in the 1930s, a lot of my play activities involved exploration of the world in which I was growing up. I'm sure my mother limited those activities when I was very young, but I don't recall ever feeling that my zest for discovery was seriously curtailed by an excessive parental fear for my safety. Yet, as some of my recollections will demonstrate, I did sometimes stretch the limits of her trust in my good judgement. At least she didn't have to worry much about losing me around town—or finding me in real serious trouble—because everyone in town knew everyone else (and their kids and where we belonged), so she could be pretty well guaranteed that somebody had an eye on me wherever I was.

Because we lived less than a quarter mile from the rights-of-way of two different railroads, steam locomotives (and the cars they pulled) were always a big attraction. (See the aerial photo in the first chapter. In fact, the smoke from a train on the Great Western tracks can be seen in that photo.) I don't think there were passenger trains on either line during the years I was growing up. However, during those depression years, this didn't mean that the freight trains had no passengers. They just didn't have *paying* passengers. Hobos were a common sight on trains coming through town in those days. And, because we lived fairly near the tracks, I can recall many a hobo coming to our back door to ask my mom for a meal in payment for doing odd chores for her. I don't remember her ever turning one away.

Even though none of the trains coming through town carried passengers, both railroads had depots in town. The Great Western depot was on the other side of the river, half a block east of the publishing company where my dad worked. By the time trains on that line got to our neighborhood, they were well underway and about all we could do during our hikes along those tracks was wave at the engineer…and an occasional hobo. The depot for the Illinois Central line, on the other hand, was only a few blocks from our house, and next to it was a very substantial —for the time and the town— stockyard, which can be seen in the aerial photo. In addition, just across Bremer Avenue on the east side of the tracks were the warehouses of the Marshall Canning Company, a plant that processed locally grown vegetables (sweet corn and green beans that I can recall from those days). So, if you were a kid who enjoyed watching steam engines switch freight cars, the vicinity of the Illinois Central tracks west of our house was the place to be on nice summer days.

The steam locomotive was a most imposing piece of machinery. It was all the more imposing when viewed from the perspective of a seven- or eight-year-old kid. It chugged and it hissed. It had a great steam whistle and a big bell, and much of what made it work was in plain view for the curious observer…the pistons and the cams and the valves. Even when it stood perfectly still, it remained animated and ready for action—panting like a huge dog. I can't imagine that there was ever a kid who grew up around steam trains that didn't aspire—at some time in his youth—to become a railroad engineer.

For a kid on the hunt for adventure, railroad tracks were thoroughfares forever ripe for exploration. There was no telling what treasures you might find when you strolled along those tracks, or competed with a friend along the way to see who could walk the narrow rails the longest without falling off. And, of course, when you had a penny to spare, it was always exciting to put it on the rail when you heard the train coming and then, if you were lucky, finding it on the roadbed, smashed thin and shiny by the giant wheels of the locomotive.

The Great Western line had to cross a bridge over the Cedar River as it traveled west from the station down town. It was a trestle bridge perhaps an eighth of a mile long, supported by

several huge piers in the river. That railroad bridge was a favorite place for adventure…and a quick shortcut down town if you happened to be playing near where the tracks crossed North Water Street (1st Street) on our side of town. Trains did not run frequently, but we were always more than a little nervous as we tread the ties (there was no walkway on the bridge) over the several hundred yards from one end of the bridge to the other. More than once, we found ourselves in the middle of the bridge when we heard the whistle of the locomotive signaling its departure from the station. Running on widely-spaced railroad ties (at least measured by our shoes…or, more often, bare feet), with nothing between them but air and a clear view of the river twenty feet below, was no easy task. But, with necessity mothering the process, and adrenaline at peak levels, we never were forced to choose the river over the cowcatcher.

Sometimes we would climb down the trestles to one of the large concrete piers below to experience the thunder of the giant cars as they passed overhead. Those piers also made excellent perches on which to spend a pleasant summer afternoon fishing for panfish in the gently flowing waters below the bridge. Actually, I have never been much of a fish eater, but my mom always appreciated the luxury of a few fresh fish—as long as she received them ready for the frying pan. That was the rule at our house…don't bring home any fish if you aren't willing to clean them. Some people would argue, I'm sure, that eating a fish is not nearly as unpleasant an experience as cleaning it—but I never saw it that way. Mom always received her fish scaled, gutted and beheaded—and I was always served something more terrestrial for supper.

Although there were plenty of places around town for a kid to challenge the fates, our exploits on the river probably gave our mothers the greatest opportunity for heart failure…had they known what we were up to. Certainly that was the case the day that Eldon Montgomery and I decided to explore along the river in Anson Woodring's pasture north of town. It was early spring and I had probably just past my tenth birthday. Eldon and I were pals and classmates in the fourth grade at Irving school. It was the time of the spring thaw. Ice on the river had pretty well broken up and the river was flowing swiftly, swollen and accelerated by the melting snow and ice. Only about a dozen feet of thick ice remained clinging to the bank. That shelf of ice proved too fascinating for us to resist.

We found a couple of driftwood boards along the bank and began to use them to chop off pieces of the ice shelf that we shoved out into the current where, sometime later, we could picture them passing under the railroad bridge and being swallowed in the cascade of river water crashing over the dam. Of course, the curiosity of fourth-grade boys could not be expected to be long satisfied simply imagining the journey of small ice vessels as the disappeared around the bend in the river just south of where we were working. We imagined a larger raft of ice—one big enough to carry a couple of enterprising boys on a sailing adventure down the river.

It was not an easy job. The ice was perhaps eight inches thick and we had to work long and hard to separate a block about five feet square from the ice shelf along the river bank. As soon as it separated, I hopped aboard, fortunately still clinging to my driftwood board as did. Eldon, however, missed the boat—whether from lack of opportunity or lack of courage I don't now recall—but I quickly found myself adrift alone on an ice raft, being drawn by the current toward the middle of the river. I paddled frantically with my makeshift oar, slipping once and immersing one leg up to the knee in the icy water.

The frenzied paddling, however, was of no avail. My "craft" continued to gain speed and separate itself from the ice shelf that had been its shipyard. That increased speed, as it turns out, was probably my salvation. As the river made its turn to the east, the inertia generated by our weight and the speed sent it crashing into the ice shelf a couple hundred yards down river on

what was now the south bank of its meandering waters. To his credit, Eldon had continued to follow me down the river, shouting encouragement and greeting me happily as I hopped onto the bank. I don't recall my mother making a particular fuss about my wet foot when I got home. She knew that early spring in our neck of the woods offered a ten-year-old plenty of benign opportunities to wade in water deeper than his overshoes. However, I was an adult before I finally mustered the courage to tell her the details of my ice-raft voyage.

If Eldon and I had been on the Bremer Avenue bridge that day, we would have seen torrents of water cascading over the dam and under the bridge. It was like that every spring when the river swelled from the melting snow. But it was a very different river in the late summer, when a slow current through the millrace was the best it could offer. Then, the dam stood dry as a bone in the summer sun and the riverbed under the bridge was reduced to a scattering of pools fed mostly by leakage from under the dam. It was a scenario made in heaven for an adventuresome pre-teen.

At the base of the dam, where cascading waters had eroded a deep trench about ten feet across, you could find a comfortable rock to sit on and spend a few pleasant hours matching wits and skill with a variety of pan fish that were trapped there. Or, you could explore a great expanse of exposed rocky river bottom to discover what treasures the river had left behind as it went into its summer hibernation. Or, you could climb over the wall that separated the main course of the river from the millrace and drop down onto the narrow concrete shelf that now lay exposed at the base of the wall. There you could always find bullheads darting about in the shallow water near the shelf. If you were quick of hand—and willing to risk getting barbed by their sharp pectoral fins—you could reach down and grab them. However, for me, my mother's "clean what you catch" rule made bullheads a much less desirable trophy for the frying pan. They were a colossal pain to clean. They didn't have scales; they had to be skinned—typically with the help of a pair of pliers. My bullhead snatching was done mostly just for the sport of it.

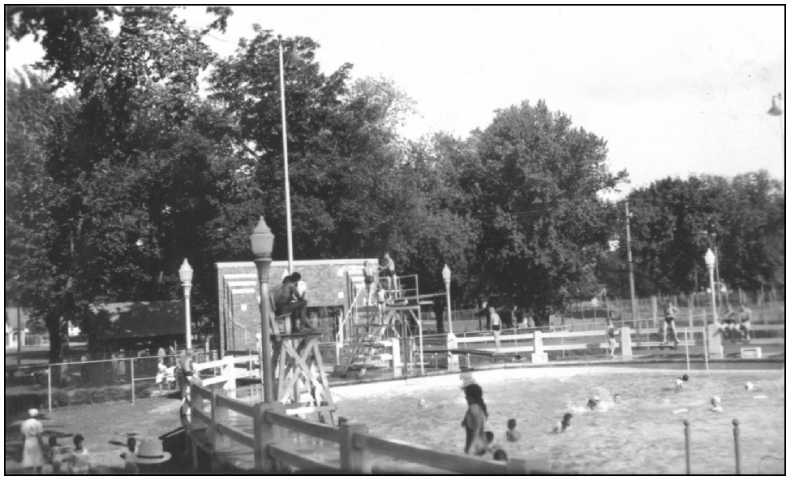
The millrace was perhaps thirty feet across, extending under the bridge and joining the main course of the river about a hundred yards farther south. It was a popular gathering place not only for bullheads, but other bottom-feeding fish; notably catfish and carp. The catfish took a certain amount of skill to hook, but the carp were are stupid as they were undesirable. Any kid with a line long enough to reach the water, a heavy sinker, a treble hook and a couple of slices of white bread could be guaranteed a generous catch of carp from the wall of the millrace or from the street-level sidewalk at the end of the bridge on the other side. Carp were pushovers for doughballs. All you had to do was moisten the bread slightly, press a ball of it firmly onto the treble hook and drop it in the water. The sinker took it down to the bottom where the scavenging carp hung out, ready to eat anything that came their way. They were no challenge to hook, but they always put up a good fight. The carp, however, was not a fish that many people were willing to eat—my mom wouldn't look at one—but once in a while we could give one away. Mostly they ended up on the rocks under the bridge. It was considered a public service to eliminate them from the fishing waters.

The woods along the river on Anson Woodring's farm seemed, at the time, to be a generous stand of timber, but in fact it covered no more than a few acres. For a kid in search of primeval adventure, however, it was an ideal venue. It was close to home—no more than three-quarters of a mile from our house—and Anson never objected to our being there, as long as we didn't disturb the cows that often grazed in the area. Flora and fauna abounded in those woods, and of course, it was right on the river. It was a place guaranteed to provide any kid a fun-filled afternoon of exploration.

Some of the fauna in those woods were considered to be less than welcome inhabitants. These were creatures on the county's wanted list and had a price on their head. A bounty could be collected at the courthouse for delivering their remains as evidence that they no longer were residents of the county. I don't recall the identities of all the animals for which bounties were paid, but I do remember that foxes and pocket gophers were among them. The foxes were a bit out of my class as a pre-teen explorer, but the gophers presented an acceptable challenge—and they were worth a little spending money when we presented evidence of their demise. For a kid in the 1930s, when candy bars and sodas were a nickel each and you could go to the movies for a dime, ridding the county of gophers could be a worthwhile enterprise.

The gophers lived in burrows in the ground and they were shrewd enough to realize that, with the possibility that their happy homes might be invaded by small predators, they furnished their burrows with a second entrance as an escape route. It was this gopher disaster plan that made it possible for two young boys in quest of movie money to cash in. All they needed was a container that could hold perhaps a gallon of water and a five-foot length of copper wire. The container was filled with water from the river and the copper wire was formed into a loop at one end. Then they had to search out the gopher holes, sometimes having to guess whether the two openings led to the same burrow. The wire loop was placed to just encircle one of the openings to the burrow and one boy held on to the other end of the wire, giving himself as low a profile as possible. The second boy poured the water into the other hole. When the gopher stuck his head out of the first hole to escape, boy #1 gave a quick yank on the wire and garroted the critter before it knew what had happened. I'm sure we didn't threaten the gopher population with our endeavors, but we always had fun—and earned a little spending money.

Of all the activities that occupied my summer days as I was growing up in Waverly, the pastime that occupied me most was swimming. As I pointed out in the opening chapter, I have only vague recollections of the beach area along the Cedar River where residents went swimming before the municipal swimming pool was built in the mid thirties—and I had not yet had any opportunity to learn how to swim. For kids in Waverly, that pool became the center of activity for summertime recreation.

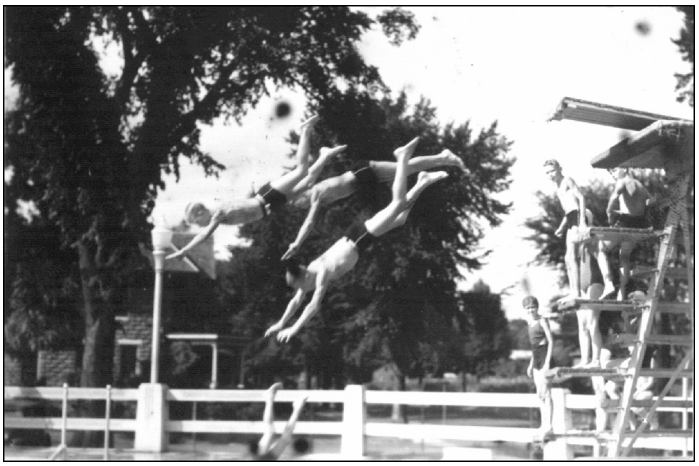


My mother told me that she sent me there for swimming lessons soon after the pool opened, but that the instructor ultimately sent me home as a hopeless case. However, when you put a kid in the water every day to play with other kids, he is going to figure out how to swim on his own…and I did. In fact, fifteen years later, I became the swimming and life-saving instructor at that pool.

I expect that there is little I could relate about my experiences at the Waverly municipal swimming pool that haven't been repeated by untold numbers of kids over the generations since that time. If you put kids together in the water, they will invent—and reinvent—ways to compete, to show off and to push the envelope. I'll relate just a few of the things I remember about doing all of those things as a regular habitue of my hometown pool.

By modern standards, the Waverly pool was small for a municipal facility. There were no "lap lanes" because competitive swimming was unheard of at that time in small towns like ours. The pool was permanently divided by a rope into a deep end and a shallow end. Any competition that did occur took place in the deep end…on the diving boards or in games that took place off the edge of the pool.

Once you learned how to swim and could demonstrate to the lifeguard your ability to make it from one side of the pool to the other under your own power, you were given the privilege of swimming in the deep end—which opened a whole new world to a kid in search of adventure. There were two springboards for diving at the end of the pool—one three feet above the water and another on a tower at ten feet. Usually, for a kid just getting started, even the three-foot board was too daunting a challenge, and the edge of the pool was where you honed the skill of entering the water headfirst instead of belly first. Finally, with an acceptable front header as a starting point, we embarked on a trial-and-error learning process that involved ever-increasing challenges—and continued for years.



As I recall, two different kinds of challenges competed for our attention as we were sharpening our skills as divers. The first was the challenge to muster the courage to dive from greater heights. The second was the challenge to add more creative (and risky) movements to the dive. Once we overcame our fear of the three-foot board—and even began to use its flexibility to give more height to our dives, the tower stood as the next daunting challenge. Whoever designed the diving complex at this pool most have had kids like us in mind, because they built the access to the tower not as a ladder from the back, but as a set of stairs from the side. And, every other one of those steps was extended out over the water and covered with matting to provide footing for anyone who wanted to dive from it. So, we could build our courage to dive from the tower a little bit at a time, diving from ever-increasing intermediate heights on the steps leading to the springboard at the top.

While that courage was being mustered, we were already embarked on efforts to introduce somersaults, twists and other variations into our low-elevation dives. Typically, these efforts began with crude attempts at flips from the edge of the pool. Of course, that starting height was not sufficient to allow a full rotation before hitting the water, but it was also not high enough to make it particularly painful to hit the water on your back after an incomplete rotation—which inevitably happened. In fact, these beginning efforts at somersaults from the edge of the pool were intended less to perfect form than to get the hang of it so we could more confidently move the operation to the low board, where there was enough height for a full rotation. There we doggedly kept at it—enduring a lot of painful entrances—until we became comfortable with the rotation and ultimately could even include a spring from the board in our dives.

By then, we had also conquered our fear of the high board and could do front headers from there with increasing confidence. Every year thereafter we would push the envelope a bit farther and venture into more complex dives from both boards. None of us ever got good enough

to be considered really skilled divers, but it was great fun and a marvelous way to spend time with your friends at "the ol' swimmin' hole."

The one game I remember playing at the pool was called "dibble-dabble." To explain this game, I have to first introduce another essential element of the pool complex—the concession stand. Near the entrance to the pool, the concession stand was housed in a small brick facility that remained open for business whenever the pool was in operation. Among the many treats available at the stand were Fudgecicles and Popcicles, frozen treats that were formed around flat, wooden sticks about four inches long. Similar treats are still made today using the same kinds of sticks. Typically, the stick would be discarded after the treat was consumed—but not if you wanted to play dibble-dabble. That stick was the key to the game.

Usually, three to five kids were involved in playing dibble-dabble. One would dive into the pool with the stick, taking it deep into the water before releasing it and then swimming away from the release point before emerging. The others would stand at the ready on the side of the pool and watch for the stick to surface, which could be almost anywhere given the shape of the stick and the turbulence of the water. The first kid to spot it hollered "dibble-dabble" and dived to recover it—with the rest of the crew in hot pursuit. What followed was a mad scramble to retrieve the stick. Whoever succeeded was the next one to dive in and release it.

In those days, a universally popular activity at the pool was sunbathing. Every bit as intense as the competition on the boards or in the games was the rivalry to acquire the most intense suntan. Back then, no one was concerned about skin cancer and—at least to my knowledge—sun blocks were unheard of. We simply made sure that, when we weren't in the pool or on the diving board, we were where we could take best advantage of the sun's rays. At the end of the summer, we were always "brown as berries," as my mother used to say. Here is a photo she took of Ted and Don standing beside the grape arbor outside the back door. The year was probably around 1935 or 36. I don't know about other kids from that era, but my brothers and I have all experienced skin cancer in our later years—most likely the result of days spent soaking up the sun at the Waverly swimming pool.

Things that Fly

Little boys these days don't seem to be nearly as fascinated by things that defy gravity as we were in the 30s. Airplanes in rural Iowa were a rarity at that time, and when one flew over the town, you can bet that every kid would be out in his yard, watching and waving. As it happens, one man who had grown up on a nearby farm was a barnstorming pilot in the 30s and could be seen flying over on rare occasions. His name was Doug Harris and his identity and reputation had spread quickly through the youth of the town. Whenever any plane flew over, kids from one end of Waverly to the other could be seen waving and shouting, "Hi, Doug."

My own introduction to this flying legend came when I was six years old. Barnstormers in those days made money giving plane rides. First they would make arrangements with a local farmer to use a level expanse of pasture land to use as a landing strip—not too far from town—and then they would herald their presence by performing aerobatic stunts where everyone could see them. Then, they would fly to the landing field and wait for the curious to arrive, which they invariably did—including, that day in 1936, my dad and me. I assume that my older brothers were there also, but I don't remember.

At that time, Doug Harris was flying a two-seat, open-cockpit Waco biplane. For some reason, it sticks in my mind that the cost for a ride in the plane that day was two dollars, although I wouldn't swear to it. The fact that I can still remember some of the details of that plane ride after almost 70 years testifies to what a momentous impact it had on me. Doug piloted the plane from the front cockpit and my dad and I were belted together in the rear one. I'm sure that, as a vertically challenged six-year-old, it was difficult for me to see very much from my seat in the cockpit that day, but it had to have been the thrill of a lifetime just to hear the roar of that big engine, to sense the vibrations it caused and feel the wind as it whistled past my ears.

Doug Harris went on to a long career as a pilot and aerial photographer, and was still flying well into his eighties. The reason I know this is that his son, Doug Jr., came to Waverly to attend high school, where we became close friends—and which we remain to this day.

The farmer's field the senior Harris used for his plane-ride enterprise accommodated other airplanes at different times in those days. I do recall rather clearly going there at least one other time—this time as an observer only—when a large Ford Tri-motor landed there to entice the populace to pay for a short ride over the town. The field was probably two miles from our house, but the walk out there (we walked everywhere) was well worth it for the excitement of spending an afternoon watching that behemoth gorge with passengers and take to the air with the monstrous roar of its three engines.

The next opportunity I had to take a ride in an airplane occurred some seven years later, while I was visiting my aunt and uncle in Burlington, Iowa. My mother's younger sister, Lavonne, and her husband Bob Giles had met in Waverly when Lavonne was staying with my parents to finish high school and Bob was a local student. After graduation, Bob studied to become a mortician and, by the time of my visit there in 1943, had established a thriving undertaking business in Burlington.

The Ecker boys were always welcome to spend some time in Burlington with our aunt and uncle. They had no sons—at that time only an adopted daughter—and seemed to enjoy having one of us there and observe our delight as we discovered what it was like to be in a city that had so many new and exciting places to explore and where you could ride a bus to anywhere you wanted to go. A couple weeks in Burlington was one of the highlights of summer vacation for us.

I don't recall now how old I was when I was first allowed to make that trip alone, but I do remember that I went by myself that summer of '43. It is quite possible that my dad accompanied me as far as Waterloo—22 miles to the south—where I could catch the Rock Island passenger train from Minneapolis that made a stop in Burlington. How did we get to Waterloo? Most likely on the WCF&N (Waterloo, Cedar Falls and Northern), an electric trolley that connected Waverly with the rest of the world…but that's a story for a later time.

An easy walk down the street from my uncle's mortuary (and residence) was the Burlington airport. It became a popular place for me to hang out when I was in town and, over time, I had befriended some of the pilots who worked there. On one of those days, I asked one of them what it would cost to take a ride in a Piper Cub. He told me that, for three dollars, I could not only get a ride, but he would give me a half-hour flying lesson and a log book to record it in. It was an offer I couldn't refuse. For a thirteen-year-old, it was an unbelievable experience. In those thirty minutes, he taught me straight-and-level flight and turn-and-bank maneuvers. I reveled in every moment of it—even gaining some confidence that I could really fly that bird. In spite of that heady experience, however, those were the only minutes I ever logged in an airplane—although I did spend a lot of time in a similar plane…but that is also a story for a later time.

Young boys who were taken with airplanes in those days—and didn't have the finances or the opportunity for a ride in a real plane—could experience flight vicariously for the price of a balsa wood model. I was not as taken as my brother Ted, who was a total fanatic, but I did build my share of balsa and tissue-paper airplanes. You could buy them at the "five-and-dime" for a sufficiently reasonable price that even kids from modest income families could afford one once in a while. However, these models were not for individuals who lacked patience or who had no heart for details. The planes we could afford were small—and every tiny piece had to be painstakingly cut out from sheets of balsa with a single-edged razor blade.

Typically, these kits came equipped with everything needed to build a flying model, except the glue to assemble the parts and the paste to attach the covering. I'm sure the glue we used had a trade name, but its primary users seemed to be model builders and, whatever it was used for, it was generally just called "model airplane cement." Most of the time, we made our own paste to attach the tissue-paper covering. We just mixed some flour and water in sufficient proportions to give a pasty consistency and we were in business. A better paste could be made by cooking the flour/water mixture—and sometimes we could talk mom into making some for us, but that wasn't too often.

Most of these models were made to fly under their own power, and if the builder attended well to detail, they usually did—although they seldom endured very many flights before wayward landings or a tree in the flight path rendered them too mutilated to repair. The power for these planes came from a rubber band, which was connected between the propeller and to a hook in the rear of the fuselage. You simply rotated the propeller in the direction opposite the rotation required for it to move the plane forward. As you did so, the rubber band would twist into knots, storing up the energy you invested in winding. Then, holding on to the propeller, you aimed the plane in the direction you wanted it to fly and gave it a little push. If you were lucky, and had built the model well, you could log several flights before it had to go back to the shop for repairs. Sometimes, however, a model never made it into the air at all. Modelers who became too enthusiastic about winding a lot of energy into the rubber band—and whose attention to structural detail had been a bit lax—suddenly found the fuselage collapsed like an accordion under the pressure.

The model airplane I remember most from my youth was a present from my fourth-grade classmates. In those days, a number of contagious diseases were considered sufficiently life-threatening that individuals diagnosed with such a malady were quarantined in their homes. Officials even came out and posted a very conspicuous notice on your front door announcing that someone in the home had the disease. And so it happened that, sometime in the winter of 1939-40 I contracted scarlet fever and was quarantined in my home for six weeks. Then, because of some kind of involvement with my lymph nodes, the doctor tacked on another six weeks.

The fact is, I don't recall being very sick at all for much of the time I was under quarantine. I do recall occupying my parents' bedroom by myself to keep me from infecting my brothers—at least in the early stages. Frankly, as I remember it, it was for me mostly a very welcome vacation from school during those twelve weeks. Miss Hill, our teacher, was a tough cookie and I was never that crazy about school anyway. However, after the length of my absence made it appear to the class that I must be near death's door (we did have a classmate that died of leukemia later that school year), they took up a collection and bought me a "get well" present—a model airplane.

There was no space in our bedroom for building model airplanes, but Ted had built a workbench for that purpose next to the furnace in the cellar. It was there that I spent my days during the later weeks of my quarantine, assembling the kit I had received from the fourth grade at Irving school. I'm sure that, by then, my mother was delighted to have me out from underfoot. It was a big plane, at least measured from the perspective of a nine-year-old…possibly thirty inches in wingspan, and I was diligent in its construction, anxious to finish it and show it off to my classmates when the doctor finally sprung me from quarantine.

I wish I could tell you more about that day when it came, but there is only one event that I remember clearly. It must have been the kind of day that made going out for recess less than appealing—certainly not the kind of day for flying a new model airplane in the schoolyard. So, a couple of my friends and I decided to skip recess and test the plane in the hallway outside our classroom. We got a couple of flights in before Miss Hill appeared, saw what we were up to and made a substantial fuss about it. I don't recall whether or not she confiscated the plane, but if I ever flew it again it did not make nearly the impression of those maiden flights in the Irving school hallway.

My childhood interest in model airplanes, however, was lukewarm at best, and that fourth-grade project was the last one I can remember. By the time I was that age, I had begun to cultivate more of an interest in science—an interest that has persisted to this day. Among the family resources that helped fuel that interest was an old (circa 1890) set of encyclopedias my parents had acquired (probably at some auction sale). These fading volumes offered a wealth of information on a variety of subjects of interest to a curious young investigator like me. In particular, I was interested in learning how to make hydrogen. I had learned by then that this was the lightest element and that it could be used to fill balloons to make them lighter than air.

In the encyclopedia, I discovered that you could generate hydrogen by dissolving zinc in muriatic acid. All I had to do, then, was find sources for these ingredients and a small container that had a narrow enough neck that it would accommodate the sleeve of a dime-store rubber balloon. The muriatic acid was easy to find. Ed Meyer, the local druggist, had a back room in his store in which he kept a host of chemicals. Over the years, for an affordable price, I was able to obtain from that resource many of the ingredients I needed for my various experiments. So, whenever I needed some muriatic acid, Ed would disappear into his back room and return with a small bottle filled with the caustic, yellow liquid.

As it turned out, I had an even easier time acquiring the zinc I needed. In those days, the covers for the jars my mother used for canning produce from the garden were made of zinc, with a glass insert. Occasionally, one of those inserts would break and the cover would have to be discarded. Those discards, I intercepted on their way to the trashcan and saved for later use. The other item I needed, the narrow-necked bottle, also was intercepted on its way to the trash.

As the family fortunes improved in the late '30s and early '40s, my mother remained very frugal in how she used the food budget. Certainly, bottled soft drinks were rarely on her grocery list, even for hot summer days. Instead, she concocted homemade coolers to quench the thirst of her four active sons. Kool-Aid was available and popular in those days and I recall that she used it to make drinks for us in the summer. But, when another product became available that allowed her to make the same about of drink for less cost, she switched brands. Unlike Kool-Aid, which came as an envelope of dry flavoring, this product came as a liquid concentrate in a small, narrow-necked bottle. I even remember the trade name of this product—Virginia Dare. I don't recall whether this stuff tasted as good as Kool-Aid, but it was better than nothing…and the bottle became the launch pad for a lot of balloons. In fact, the bottle was ideally suited to that use. It had a relatively broad triangular base and a kind of pyramid shape with a long neck, tapering to an opening little more than about a centimeter across. It accommodated the sleeve of a balloon very handily.

So, with all the necessary elements acquired, all we needed was some string to tie off the sleeve of the gas-filled balloon and we were in business. A large ball of string was always available at our house—and I expect in most other houses—in those days. The merchants in town used string to tie up everything, and it was seldom wasted. It was just added to the ball for later use.

A certain amount of planning and timing was necessary to produce a hydrogen-filled balloon from the arrangement we had set up. The muriatic acid had to be diluted just the right amount, so that the hydrogen wasn't generated so rapidly that it burst the balloon before we could tie it off, or so slowly that it couldn't produce enough pressure to expand the rubber. We also had to have a knot looped in the string loosely around the sleeve of the balloon before putting it over the neck of the bottle, so that it could be tied off quickly before bursting from the pressure. Then, we had to have the zinc pre-made into lumps small enough to fit inside the neck of the bottle. This we did by tearing pieces from a jar lid with pliers and compressing them into pellets. Finally, it was usually a good idea to blow up the balloon first to stretch the rubber and make it easier for the hydrogen pressure to fill it.

Then, we simply poured some acid into the bottle, wiping off the opening to assure that the sleeve of the balloon wouldn't get eaten by the acid, dropped in a couple of pellets of zinc and quickly mounted the sleeve—already tied loosely with the string—and watched the balloon fill with hydrogen. When it had filled sufficiently, we tied off the loose knot and the hydrogen pressure would force the sleeve off the top to the bottle. Voila! A lighter-than-air vessel that could carry messages and other cargo into the summer sky to all sorts of unknown destinations. I don't recall, however, that any of those messages ever reached anyone who bothered to reply. Nonetheless, it was great fun watching our projects take to the air and disappear into the summer sky.

Although manned hot-air balloons had been in use for at least a century before my childhood days in the 1930's—and I possibly had seen pictures of them in magazines or the newsreels at the local theater—when the opportunity came for me to see one actually see one fill and ascend, I was a most interested and enthusiastic spectator. I don't remember the occasion

that brought this spectacle to town—possibly the county fair—but I do recall being close to the action for most of the day it took place.

In those days, if you wanted hot air to fill a balloon, it had to come from a bonfire—and the process, from start to finish, took a long time. That process started in the morning, with a man digging a pit in the middle of the park along the river, just down Third Avenue from our house. For a pre-teen kid, it was a wonder to behold. The man, who for most of the day remained stripped to the waist and blackened with soot, started a wood fire in the pit and then laid out on the grass this enormous fabric structure, with its smaller end next to the fire pit. As I recall, the pit had two openings—one was used to feed the fire, and from the other came the smoke and hot gasses.

When those gasses were being emitted to the man's satisfaction, he maneuvered the opening of the balloon over the fire pit and began to direct the hot air into the balloon. The whole process went on into the afternoon and I don't recall missing a second of it (although it is unlikely that I missed lunch, as my mother granted few exceptions to our being present at the table at noon when dad came home from work). It was astounding to see that enormous bag beginning to fill and round out into its designed shape.

There must have been some target time scheduled for the ascent to take place, because crowds of people began to appear along the riverbank as the afternoon progressed. The man tied off ropes dangling from the expanding balloon and moved a large basket into position near the fire pit—all the time continuously feeding the fire with new wood.

Finally, with the balloon filled to capacity over the still-roaring fire and tied securely to stakes in the ground and to the sandbag-ballasted basket, the man donned his shirt, hopped into the basket and asked several bystanders to loose the guy ropes from their stakes. As the freed balloon settled in over the basket, the man dropped several of the sandbags and slowly, magnificently, the huge craft ascended, drifting out over the river and into the afternoon sky. It was a most memorable day.

Paper airplanes and balsa wood gliders were common and inexpensive vehicles for us to use for experimenting with flight, but of course, powered flight was always a lot more interesting. Perhaps the simplest experiment we undertook in this arena employed the power of a common household pest—the housefly. All you needed was a thin strip of toilet paper, a little airplane glue and, of course, a live fly. It took a little quickness and a bit of dexterity—and the process of capturing a suitable victim usually resulted in demise of more than a few—but, after several tries, we could get one between the thumb and forefinger and stick his abdomen to a small drop of glue at one end of the toilet paper strip. Then you simply let the fly do what comes naturally and follow along as it made its escape…leaving a paper trail (so to speak).

In the days of my youth, most kites were homemade—even those that were flown by adult enthusiasts. The ones we built as kids were simple and cheap, but they usually flew pretty well. All we needed was a couple of long, narrow sticks (which we could almost always find as scrap around the saw at the lumber yard), some string, some old newspapers, some flour-and-water paste and a few strips of cloth from Mom's ragbag. We never had any plans. We just eyeballed the dimensions.

First, we made a cross with the sticks, with the cross piece a bit shorter than the upright and connected about two-thirds of the way up it, tying them together with string. Then we notched each of the wood members on both ends and ran a string around the perimeter of the kite through the notches. This gave us the skeleton we needed to paper the kite. Next, laying this structure on top of a layer of newspapers (pasted together if necessary to make a sheet somewhat

larger than the size of the skeleton, we cut a kite-shaped pattern in the paper with scissors, leaving enough extra to fold over the perimeter strings. We then folded the paper to the size of the kite perimeter and pasted the folds over the strings.

After the paste dried, a string was tied to the notch on one end of the cross member and connected with tension to the other end across the back side of the kite until a slight bow was created in that member. Turning the kite over, another string was tied to each end of the main member, this time leaving sufficient slack to allow perhaps a hand span when the string was pulled taut. This would serve as a connector for the kite string. Finally, a few knots were tied in the strip of cloth from the ragbag and this was tied to the tail of the kite to help with stability. With a kite string tied to the connector—about directly above the connection of the two wood spars, our creation was ready to fly.

Our favorite place for flying kites was the pasture next to the Great Western right-of-way, just down the street from our house. Although we built and flew kites there often, my most memorable experience was when I attempted to set some kind of altitude record. I don't recall how I chose the distance with which I challenged myself, but I do remember that my goal was to put that kite up half a mile (2,640 feet). Fortunately, kite string was cheap, because half a mile is a lot of string. It was a good kite and I had a good wind. Every inch of my half mile of string played out as that kite became a smaller and smaller speck in the sky north of town. It was a bit disappointing that the weight of the string kept the kite from venturing higher in the sky, but as far as I know, few if any kids in town ever matched my "higher than a kite" record.

According to my encyclopedia (somewhat more recent than the one I employed to discover how to make hydrogen…and gunpowder, which you'll learn about later), Leonardo da Vinci sketched the concept of a parachute in 1495, although the first recorded parachute jump was not until 1783. Certainly, in the 1930s, they were in common use and offered one more gravity-defying challenge to enterprising youngsters. Again, the starting materials were easily available…and cheap. Although the designs were as varied as a kid's imagination, the simplest and easiest started with a paper napkin, a few feet of string and a rock.

Construction of the parachute began with the napkin still folded in quarters as it came out of the package. A parachute is most stable when it has a small hole in the center for air to escape. The hole was created by snipping a small piece off that corner of the folded napkin that would become the center when it was unfolded. Then, with the napkin lying flat, a length of string was glued to each corner. When the glue dried, the napkin was refolded so that the attachment points of the strings were now all at the corner opposite the hole and, holding the apex of the parachute, the strings were stretched to equal length and tied in a knot. Within reason, the length of the strings seemed to be of relatively little importance in determining the performance of the parachute. We never followed any formula. We just eyeballed it and most of our creations worked just fine. The rock—or anything we could find among the collection of nuts and bolts my dad had accumulated—was tied securely just below the knot and the parachute was ready for use. Below is a photo of Don, Ted and me showing Ted holding a homemade parachute. It was probably taken on the same day as the one of me in the rock garden in an earlier chapter.

Getting the parachute into the air high enough for a satisfying descent was always a challenge. Typically, the method most often used was to simply fold the napkin into its original quarters and then continue folding several more times until it became a narrow wedge of paper with the strings dangling below. Then beginning at the apex, where the hole had been cut, the napkin was rolled loosely toward the strings and the strings were wrapped around the resulting roll of paper. This gave a wad with sufficiently reduced air resistance that it could be thrown into the air a reasonable distance before it began to unwind. If the components had been wrapped properly and thrown high enough, the rock would pull the parachute open as it fell and it would drift slowly back to earth. Of course, the challenge was always to see how high it could be thrown so that the return trip could be extended in time.

One alternative to throwing the rolled-up napkin was to use a slingshot, but that required a bit of finesse or the parachute was easily doomed to the influence of excessive acceleration. That is, just as the rock fell more rapidly than the napkin under the influence of gravity, it could begin to open the parachute on the rapid trip into the air and rip the strings loose while it was still in its ascent. A solution to this problem was to make the chute out of stronger material, but at least at that time, stronger materials—typically cloth from old bed sheets out of the ragbag—were also heavier and made much less satisfying toy parachutes.

Having Fun…and Learning a Lot…Without Breaking the Bank

It has been well said that necessity is the mother of invention. Certainly, necessity was a way of life in the years of my youth, so invention was no stranger to our family. This was assisted in no small measure by the fact that my father was a very creative guy. In his book, No Greener Pastures, he recounts some of the enterprising ways he found to supplement the family income during The Great Depression. My own recollections tend less to matters of income and more to the things we did to avoid having to spend any of that income. It was here that invention became a member of our family in a big way.

For example, I don't recall hardly ever seeing a repairman at our house. With rare exceptions, if something needed fixing, we fixed it; if something needed to be built, we built it. The story I told about resoling our shoes was just one of many I could tell about the ways we found to improvise and avoid costs we couldn't afford. To this day, as I set about to take apart something in need of repair, my thoughts go back to the days when I watched with wonder as my dad disassembled the coaster brake on my bicycle (a very complicated device) and put it right without seeming to have replaced any parts. When you can't afford the things you need, you make do with what you have…or you invent acceptable alternatives. Here are just a few of the things I remember about being a beneficiary of that process.

Like most kids, I had a baseball and glove and I remember playing games of "workup" with my friends on the sandlot down the street, but what I remember with the most fascination was a game we played in our yard, using nothing but a broomstick. My dad introduced us to the game and taught us how to play. If the game had a name, I don't recall what it was. In fact, I don't even remember most of the rules. It was just a marvelous example of how you can spend an exciting afternoon entertaining yourselves with just a couple of pieces cut from the handle of an old worn-out broom.

The broomstick was cut into two pieces; the shorter one perhaps eight inches long and the other was whatever length remained. Then you had to pick a place in the yard where there was room enough that flying pieces of broomstick would not become a hazard to people or property. In our yard we used an open stretch of grass next to the rock garden that extended all the way from the yard in front of the house to the alley. This "south lawn of the white house" was where most of our outdoor play activities took place.

The game required that we dig a small trench in the grass—about four inches deep and slightly wider than the broomstick. The end of the trench toward the house was shaped to give about a 45-degree angle to the surface of the lawn. In this way, the short length of broomstick could be fitted into the trench at a slant with about half its length sticking out. Then, using the longer piece of broomstick, if you hit down on the exposed portion of the short stick, it would pop up into the air. As I recall the game, the idea was to hit the short stick again while it was in the air. First, you hit it directly out into the field. Then, the next time, you tipped the stick once into the air in front of you and swatted it into the field. Each time thereafter, you added a tip before swatting the stick—until you missed a tip or failed to deliver the stick to the outfield. At that time, you forfeited your turn and the next kid tried to see if he could tip the stick more times before striking out.

I don't imagine that every boy in those days had a jackknife, but it seems to me now that most of us did. There were just all sorts of things that we could find to do with them. Of course,

being equipped to fashion a "Y" shaped tree branch into a sturdy slingshot was a definite priority. But another thing we used them for was creating box elder whistles. Box elders were not very popular as shade trees, but our neighbor Mrs. Correll had a bunch of them growing wild at the far end of her property. The new-growth branches of the box elder were ideal for making whistles because the thin bark could be so easily separated from the wood of the branch. To fashion a whistle, you first needed to cut off about a 3-inch length from a branch about 3/8-inch in diameter. Then, about ¾-inch from one end, you cut a wedge-shaped notch about one-fourth of the way into the stick. The vertical side of the notch was toward the shorter end of the stick and the angle of the other side was perhaps 60 degrees.

Now, tapping gently on the surface of the stick with the butt of your knife, you loosened the bark from the woody portion—being careful not to split it in the process—and separated the sleeve of bark from the stick. The reason for removing the bark was to make it possible to cut an air passage into the notch, which we did by shaving a small portion off the top of the stick between the notch and its short end. When the bark sleeve was carefully replaced and aligned, you had a whistle…sometimes. I don't recall being successful very often, but some of my friends were pretty good at it.

Another way we entertained ourselves with our jackknives was playing mumblety-peg, a game of skill testing your ability to maneuver the knife into different landing attitudes after flipping it with one finger from a resting position on a surface. For us, the surface was usually just an area of closely cropped grass. Most pocketknives we carried were the simple, two-bladed variety, with both the long and the short blade connected at the same end of the haft. The long blade was extended to its full open position and the short blade was fixed at the half open position. You started your turn with the small blade stuck a short way into the ground and the back end of the haft resting on the grass. When the knife was flipped into the air from that position—and you judged well the number of rotations—one of the blades would end up stuck in the ground. As I recall, different scores were achieved depending on whether the knife landed on the long blade, the short blade or both. No score was earned if a blade didn't stick.

Although we had the run of the town—and I have related a few of the adventures we enjoyed from that freedom—we also spent a lot of time finding entertainment in our own yard. Several memories of those experiences remain most vivid for me. One was climbing in the big old maple tree along the parkway next to the garage. Another was lying on a blanket with a stack of comic books in the shade of another maple in the front yard. And, of course, there were the games of "Cowboys and Indians" we played, reliving the westerns that always appeared as one of the double features at the Bremer Theater. (More about that later.)

The climbing maple had a low, horizontal branch that most of the time had a swing attached to it. Until we were old enough to reach that branch by jumping for it, we climbed the swing rope to get ourselves into the tree. The spread of the upper branches of the tree made it ideal for climbing and pretending. At different times, the tree became a rocket ship or an airplane—or whatever else little boys' imaginations could conceive. At one place in the tree, about two-thirds of the way to the top, there was point where three branches diverged forming a kind of seat. This elevated perch became the cockpit of the aircraft—or the seat of authority over whatever the tree had become. Whoever reached that seat first was in command. Other places in the tree with stable, but less comfortable accommodations, became stations for the crew. It is remarkable how much time a bunch of little boys could spend pretending in that big old maple tree.

At that time, as I recall, comic books cost a dime. As I seldom had a dime—at least one I wanted to spend on comic books—my exposure to Superman, Batman, Captain Marvel and their like was limited to well-worn, dog-eared issues that had accumulated at our house, probably from the enterprise of two older brothers. In any event, there always seemed to be comic books available—or friends to invite that had copies to share in the shade of our front yard maple tree—for an afternoon of relaxation engrossed in the exploits of our favorite superheros.

Waverly had two movie theaters—the Waverly Theater and the Bremer Theater. First run movies always appeared at the Waverly. The Bremer featured two class B pictures—typically one of them a western. As my brother Don's friend, LaVerne Clarey, once replied when asked what was showing at the Bremer, "It's a cowboy and another good one." For pre-teens at that time, the price for admission to either theater was a dime. That was probably the reason I seldom had the price of a comic book. For me, the movie theater was a more exciting opportunity.

My favorite cowboy hero was Hopalong Cassidy (William Boyd). I seldom missed one of his pictures and always wanted to assume his persona when we were playing cowboys and Indians. (Incidentally, some forty years later, a physician I was working with in California had purchased Boyd's mansion in the Hollywood hills and he invited me to the house. A large painting of Hopalong Cassidy still hung over the fireplace in the living room.)

I don't recall what kind of rules we followed (if any) when we squared off to fight those western gun battles, but I do remember that they always began with fierce arguments about who was going to take the part of the redskins. I think we usually ended up taking turns. The play mostly involved chasing around the house and yard pointing our toy pistols at one another, making loud noises to mimic the sound of the weapon firing and then confidently claiming, "I gotcha." If your opponent agreed (which didn't always happen), he would act out the death throes dramatically and finally fall to the ground with a climactic flair.

A significant part of the necessity that mothered invention for us in the '30s was the fact that we didn't own an automobile. The family had owned a car in earlier days, before my dad lost his job in 1933, but my only memories of the years of my youth were of an empty garage and alternative transportation. Around town, that transportation involved shoe leather and occasionally a bicycle—although I don't recall that we ever owned more than one or two of them. I do remember walking a lot more often than I rode a bike in those days. Traveling out of town was a different matter. I'll relate later about our use of public transportation, but right now I want to tell the story of my first experience at hitchhiking.

As I have indicated, my father never let necessity stand in the way his quest for a normal life—for him and for us. So, one day when I was perhaps ten years old, Dad suggested that he and I take a trip over to Shell Rock, a little town about six miles to the west, and go to the large gravel pit there to hunt for agates. Some time in his youth, Dad had acquired a fascination with semi-precious stones and had developed an eye for identifying them. Now he wanted to pass on that fascination and skill to me.

State Highway #3 came through Waverly from the east, traveling along Main Street—which was just three blocks from our house—on its way to Shell Rock and points west. That day, my father's solution to our transportation problem was to walk up to Main Street, stand in front of Everett's store and put our thumbs in the air—which we did. By then, Dad had been living in Waverly for almost twenty years, and there were few people in the area (including the local farmers with whom he regularly played schöpskopf at the pool hall on Saturday afternoons) that didn't recognize him. So, we didn't have to wait long to get an offer of a ride.

That day became one of the most memorable of my childhood. I learned how to spot an agate among all the other rocks in that enormous pile of gravel, and I collected some specimens that remained personal treasures well into my adult years. (A photo of an agate—not one of mine—is shown on the right.) Most of all it was an opportunity for an adventure alone with my dad. Those opportunities were rare with three brothers competing for his limited spare time. However, one other such opportunity sticks in my memory from those days—although this time we didn't have to hitchhike to get there.

In the spring of the year, when conditions are just right, a unique kind of fungus would appear in the woods around town and, for a few hours, they were available for collecting. Called morels, or commonly "sponge mushrooms" (although they really aren't mushrooms—they are relatives of the yeasts), these fungi typically appeared on a warm morning in early spring following a rain the previous day. On one such morning when I was ten or eleven, my dad roused me at an early hour and announced that we were going hunting for morels. The ideal place, he advised, was Woodring's Woods (where I had started my adventure on the ice raft) and we'd better get going if we wanted to retrieve these delicacies before the sun got to them.

The woods were less than a half-hour walk from our house and, when we got there, it was clear that Dad had picked the ideal day for morel hunting. We found them in abundance poking themselves out from under the dead leaves and from the shelter of fallen branches. By the time we had finished, we had a paper sack brimming with sponge-like specimens (shown on the left—not one of ours). I'm not sure what we did with all of them. My dad contended that they made an ideal sauce to eat with steak and I do recall some of them being used that day for that purpose, but can't say for sure that I ate any of them. At that time I tended to be a bit of a meat-and-potatoes purist (although less so than a couple of my brothers), so the fact that the morels were highly treasured delicacies carried little weight with me. It was great fun to collect them, but my fascination ended there.

Another memorable enterprise I shared with my dad took place one summer in the later years we lived on 10th Street. I have pointed out that he was an enthusiastic gardener. That summer he carried his enthusiasm to the limits. Our neighbor to the north, Mrs. Correll, had some unused space on her property, which, as I mentioned earlier, was a full city block. (Her property can be seen to the left of our place in the aerial photo of Wartburg College in Chapter 4.) Dad arranged with Mrs. Correll to rent a good-sized plot in her "back forty" and advised that we were going to grow cucumbers for the pickle factory.

The Marshall Canning Company, located on West Bremer Avenue, just a few blocks from our house, processed primarily green beans and sweet corn. However, back behind the main factory buildings were a battery of vats in which the company produced pickles (shown here). Those vats were the proposed destination of the cucumbers that dad proposed to grow. By that time, Don was already in the Navy and Ted had a summer job, so I became his assistant in the project. I don't recall anything about the planting and the cultivating of the cucumbers, probably because I didn't do much. My part in the enterprise came at harvest time.

As I recall, we produced a lot of cucumbers and they had to be picked every day, because they were graded for size at the factory and the best prices were given for those in a certain limited size range. So, over the weeks that the vines were producing, our harvesting routine followed a very precise pattern. Dad would wend his way through the patch, being very careful to avoid stepping on any of the vines, and I would patrol the perimeter of the patch with a basket, trying to stay as close to him as possible. When he found a specimen of proper size, he would pick it and throw it to me. I would catch it and put it in the basket. When we had covered the whole patch for that day, we would head with our basket(s) to the factory, where they graded our harvest and paid dad for the produce.

I do remember one final thing that the two of us did together, but I don't recall when it was. We must have had a car available at that time because where we went was more than walking distance out of town. And my part in it was hazardous enough that he would never have allowed it if I were not old enough for him to be assured that I could take care of myself. That summer, my active curiosity had enlightened me on the subject of clam pearls. I had never heard that you could get pearls out of clams and I was very surprised to learn that the best ones could bring a very good price. I don't know how I got my dad interested in the project, but he agreed to take me to a place several miles up the river where he was apparently aware that clams were abundant in the muddy river bottom.

All I can remember from that adventure is that we had a rowboat; I have no idea from where, except that the area is now a county park and it may have been one then, with boats to rent. Wherever it came from, we rowed out into the slow-moving current and I—dressed in my swimming trunks—hopped overboard and made a number of dives, feeling for clams in the muddy bottom. I would surface with my discoveries, drop them in the boat and make another dive. Meanwhile, my dad would open the clams and search for pearls. At the end of the afternoon, we had a lot of dead clams…but no pearls. It was nonetheless a very memorable adventure.

One final recollection of my dad's inventive encounters with necessity comes from when I was in the sixth grade at Irving School. I was not a particularly good student, although the teachers (particularly Miss Hooker, our drill sergeant homeroom teacher) assaulted me regularly with messages that I could be a top student if I just tried. I really never tried—at least not at that time. After my long absence from school due to scarlet fever in the fourth grade, I had developed a passion for loafing, plus an abiding aversion to schoolwork and a malingering pattern that

persisted into the later grades. Given that, it is most surprising that I was selected for a lead role in the sixth grade production of a minstrel show.

In 1942, a minstrel show, with black-faced white folks burlesquing the customs of southern Negroes, was perfectly acceptable entertainment in the culture in which I grew up. Obviously, we don't see such shows performed in this day and age. Typically, the performers in a minstrel show sat in a semicircle on stage with the three main characters distributed with one on each end and one in the middle. The "end men," as they were called, were the show's comedians. Their names were "Mr. Bones" and "Mr. Tambo." I remember that my friend Roy Knott played Mr. Bones. I don't recall who was Mr. Tambo. The man in the middle, the only white face in the show—and the part I was selected to play, was "Mr. Interlocutor." He was the master of ceremonies of the show and the straight man who fed lines to the two comedians on the end. The rest of the performers in the semicircle were the chorus for the musical portions of the show.

The black-faced performers were all dressed in work clothes typical of slave-era southern Negroes. The white man, Mr. Interlocutor, was dressed in formal attire, including a top hat…and therein lay the problem. Where do you find a top hat for a 12-year-old boy? That was heavy on my mind when I went to bed the night before I was expected to show up in costume for dress rehearsal. My father assured me, however, that things would be taken care of. Sure enough, when I awoke the next morning, I discovered a top hat, leaning against a hot air register where Dad had put it for the paint and the glue to dry after he finished making it the night before. It was made from a large oatmeal container and a brim cut from a pasteboard box. I don't recall whether or not I distinguished myself as Mr. Interlocutor in that performance, but I was certainly well dressed for the part.

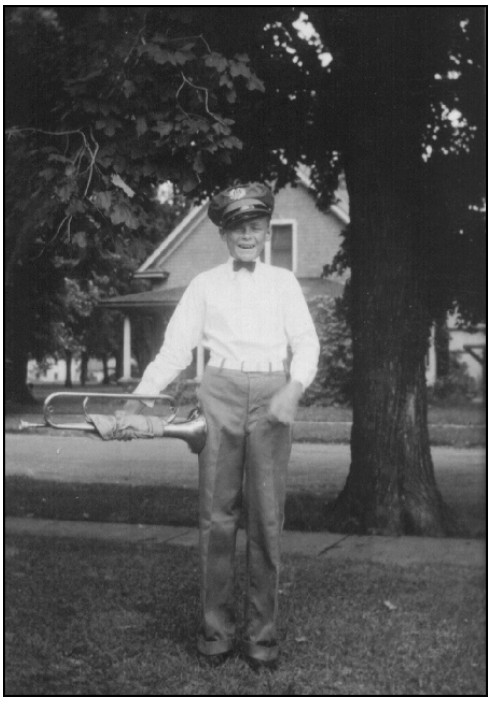
Music, Music, Music

My family heritage in musical performance was sketchy at best. My paternal grandfather was reported to have once played the cornet in the Barnum & Bailey's/Ringling Bros. Circus band. My father confessed to having played the trap drums in a dance band while he was courting Mother…and he knew how to play the ukulele. My mom may have taken piano lessons in her youth, but I don't recall ever seeing her play—although we did own a piano for a while when I was a teenager. Whatever their own experiences, both of my parents appreciated good music and were keen on having their boys given the opportunity to learn to play some musical instrument. Little did they know what that encouragement would bring about.

My brother Don graduated from high school in May of 1940. He was not quite 17 years old, having skipped an earlier grade. Yet, by then, he was already an accomplished musician—not a prodigy in the usual understanding of the term, because he was never able to stick to one instrument or other musical specialty long enough to earn that label. He was simply a remarkably versatile and multi-talented sixteen-year-old musician.

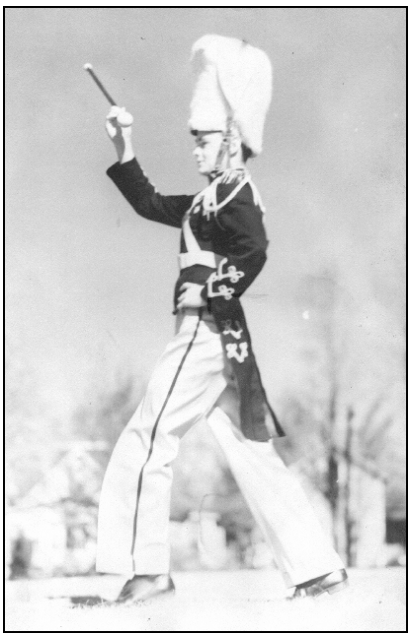
As is often the case, the early development of Don's musical talent was as much a result of opportunity as innate ability. Such opportunities for young people in small, rural communities during the depression were not all that common. But, Waverly, Iowa (population somewhat under 5,000 at the time), was the home of some rather uncommon characters. One of those characters was a fellow named Walter "Bud" Hayes.

In his book, "No Greener Pastures," Dad recorded some of the antics of Bud Hayes, but he did not specifically mention Bud's leadership of the Waverly Drum and Bugle Corps. I was some seven years younger than Don, so my recollections of the Corps are pretty hazy. It disbanded in the late '30s, as the country began to emerge from the Great Depression. However, the family archives have helped me piece together some of the chronology of the Corps and my brother's involvement in it.



It was apparently Bud Hayes and the Waverly Drum and Bugle Corps that started Don on his musical career....at a fairly early age. As it turned out, the Corps was much more than an opportunity for the sons of Waverly to display their talents in front of their friends and neighbors. Director Hayes had much higher ambitions for the group. In the summers of both 1936 and 1937, they traveled to national competitions halfway across the country, the first year to Denver, Colorado, and then to Buffalo, New York. Don played a bugle in the Corps (see the adjoining photo), and was just thirteen years old when they performed in Denver in September of 1936. Because he had skipped a grade in elementary school, he was already a freshman in high school at the time.

I don't have any personal recollection of Don's early years in the high school band. I know he played



the sousaphone in the concert band and became the drum major—and assistant director—of the marching band. During that time, he also played in the town band, which held weekly concerts on the court house lawn during the summers.

By this time, it was apparent that he was headed for a career in music. Strange instruments (at least strange to me) began to show up in our parlor, which had became almost more of a rehearsal room. He had learned to play the bass fiddle and had acquired one from somewhere. Then, soon after he graduated from high school, he came home with a vibraphone, a xylophone-like instrument with metal keys in place of wooden ones. It had an electric motor that drove rotating discs in the resonating tubes below the keys and gave a tremolo sound to the tones. Hence, the name *vibra*phone. I recall that he spent a lot of time practicing on it, and at least to the critical ear of a 10-year-old, he became pretty good at making music on it.

Meanwhile, my brother Ted, now almost 14 years old, had begun to play the trumpet in the high school band. (You didn't have to be in high school to play in the Waverly High School band. You just had to be able to play an instrument, and Ted had been playing one for several years.) So, Don hatched the idea of organizing a family trio....vibraphone, trumpet and bass fiddle. All he needed was a bass fiddle player. Among the two remaining siblings, there was only one real choice. Tom was only 5 years old at the time. So I was recruited to play the bass.

The problem was that I was not yet tall enough to stand on the floor and reach the neck of the instrument to finger the strings. Not to worry. The solution of that problem was found just across the room from the vibraphone. It was a hassock, or footstool as we called it. It had come with the parlor easy chair, and it was just high enough that I could reach the neck of the bass comfortably when I stood on it.

Now the only remaining problem was that I hadn't the slightest idea how to play the instrument. Not to worry. Don was totally confident that he could teach me everything I had to know...and he did. I couldn't read music at that time, but that was no obstacle. I didn't use any. Don told me where to finger a string and when to pluck it and then ran me through each routine until I had memorized it.

Of course, there were no musical arrangements readily available for the kind of trio we were, so Don did the arrangements himself. Where had he learned to do that? As I said before, opportunity is very often a major factor in the expression of genius. In this case opportunity had presented itself in the person of Professor Heist, piano and music theory teacher at Wartburg College, the campus of which was directly across the street from our house. Sometime earlier, Don had arranged with the professor, whose son was his high school classmate, to teach him some music theory. Thus, by the time he conceived of the family trio, my brother was already equipped with sufficient know-how to arrange the music for us.

Although it has been over seventy years, I can still vividly recall standing on that footstool in the middle of our parlor, plucking the rhythm on that big bass fiddle as my brothers rendered the melodies on the trumpet and vibes. The footstool was the kind that had springs under the cushion. As each song progressed, I would begin to bounce on the springs in rhythm to the beat. We must have been quite a sight—two teenagers and a bobbing ten-year-old,

performing original arrangements of music made popular by the big bands of that time. The only number we played that I can still remember was called "Frenisee."

By the end of 1940, we had become good enough that Don decided to book us into one of the supper clubs in the area. I'm sure the booking was due far more to the novelty of it than any proprietor's hope that we really could produce music that was good for listening. We'll never know. Early in January 1941, before the date he had scheduled us to perform, Don decided to join the Navy. Our moment in the spotlight never came. Even though I was only ten, and should have been scared out of my skivvies at the prospect of performing in front of all those adults, I regretted then—and regret to this day—having missed the opportunity to get up on that footstool and show my stuff.

As it turned out, however, that was not the end of my musical career. There was only one band in the Waverly school system and that was the high school band. Being a small town and a small school, some compromises had to be made to enlist sufficient members to constitute a decent sized band. Those compromises included recruiting members from the grade schools and giving free instrumental music lessons to all comers. Thus it was that, when I was in the fifth grade (about the time I became a short-term bass fiddle player), I expressed an interest in playing the clarinet and my parents acquired a used one for me at a cost of 20 dollars.

The high school band director, as a part of the responsibilities of his position, gave free private lessons at both of the elementary schools. So, along with a number of my classmates, I began to learn how to play a musical instrument. I don't recall that I ever approached the endeavor with a great deal of passion—and I'm sure that I drove both my parents and the director nuts with my tendencies to avoid boring routines like practicing the clarinet—but by the time I was in 7th grade, I was finally deemed sufficiently proficient on the instrument to become a 3rd chair clarinetist in the high school band.

In a band, the clarinets were sort of the equivalent of the violins in an orchestra. They sat in three rows immediately to the left of the director and carried much of the responsibility for the melodic themes of the music. The best performers in the section sat in the first row and were titled "first chair." More intermediate performers were in the second row. They played less difficult arrangements of the music and were titled "second chair." The last row of the section, the "third chair" performers, were the least accomplished and played the least difficult arrangements for the clarinet section. Within each row, seats were assigned by proficiency from the side facing the audience. Thus the best clarinetist in the band sat in the first seat in the first row. And, so it was that last chair in the third row became my assigned seat on my first day in the band.

At about the same time, a 7th-grade pal named Jerry Davis came to join me at the end of the 3rd row of the clarinet section. Although our placement in those seats was necessary by virtue of our very limited accomplishment with the instrument, it turned out to be an arrangement made in hell—at least from the perspective of the director. Our antics never got us in serious trouble with him, but I suspect that was mostly because we were so well hidden back in that third row behind our music stands and the older players in front of us that we usually escaped detection. One episode in particular stands out in my memory from my tenure as a 3rd-chair clarinetist.

It is hard to imagine—particularly if you know anything about the delicacy of a reed instrument—but Jerry and I showed up at rehearsal one day with a bag of unshelled peanuts. Because the director usually has to divide his time during rehearsals among the various sections of the band, there were frequent interludes for us as he did "sectionals" with other parts of the band. It is probably some kind of timeless axiom that if you give a couple of 7th graders no place

to go and nothing to do, they will invent something. We did. While the director had his back to us doing a sectional with the trumpet section, we ate peanuts, finding a most inventive way of disposing of the shells.

The arrangement of the band—and our placement at the far end of the 3rd chair row—placed us right next to Ewald Mueller and his sousaphone. The sousaphone is a big bass horn with coiled brass tubes culminating in a large flared opening called a bell. The bell of Ewald's horn, facing in our direction, offered too attractive a target for us to resist. We chucked our shells into his horn while he sat silently steaming. To his credit, he never ratted on us but just patiently removed the instrument from his shoulder, rotating it till the shells spilled out on the floor.

I'm sure it was to Ewald Mueller's great relief that my tenure in the back row of the clarinet section was short lived. The reason wasn't because I was promoted. It was because my clarinet got stolen—and my parents couldn't afford to replace it. I don't recall now what my feelings were at that time when I knew I was no longer in the band, but I expect I was disappointed. I did enjoy playing in the band and it was kind of cool being a junior high person playing in a high school band. So, when the director offered me the opportunity to continue in the band, playing the bass clarinet—an instrument owned by the school—I jumped at the chance.

The transition to the bass clarinet was no great challenge—even for a 13-year-old. The instrument was in the same key as the regular clarinet and the fingering was the same. It was, of course a lot larger and had to be suspended from a strap around my neck. But, once I adjusted to the larger mouthpiece, I could produce the necessary sounds, and because it was primarily a background rhythm instrument, none of the music we played was particularly difficult for me. So, I became the one-man bass clarinet section of the high school band. I was certainly no virtuoso, but I contributed the appropriate sounds at the appropriate times and enjoyed myself immensely. It was a great time to be in the band.

During my eighth-grade year, the Waverly High School basketball team became the team to beat for the state championship. If you've seen the movie *Hoosiers*, then you have a sense of the frenetic enthusiasm the people of a small mid-western town can build for their high school team. The spring of 1944 was no exception in Waverly, and as a member of the band, I always had a prime seat for all home games. We may have traveled to some of the games away from home, but I don't remember. At that time, it was a major logistic job transporting a band when the school had no busses. Even the team members traveled out of town in private cars. What I do remember is our trip to Iowa City for the finals of the state championships.

I have already mentioned the WCF&N (and I'll discuss it in more detail later), but for now, I'll simply point out that the trolley was our transportation to the state finals. Apparently the school had chartered a couple of the trolly cars to carry the band to Iowa City, about 120 miles to the south. At that time, the terminus in Waverly for the WCF&N was on Main Street, just east of downtown. There we assembled the day of the game for what was to be a long and exhausting—but fabulously exciting—round trip. Imagine riding for some three hours each way on a streetcar packed with kids in band uniforms and then playing your hearts out as your team went on to win the state basketball championship. It was indescribable.

I continued my tenure as the bass clarinet section of the band for a couple more years, until sports became a greater passion. Meanwhile, some of my most enduring memories of playing in the band came from the fall of the year, when we became a marching band. From my earliest days, I can recall hearing the sounds of the band in the morning as I was getting ready for school. Marching band practice began at 8:00 in the morning (school started at 9:00). When the band wasn't on the football field at the fairgrounds—practicing routines for a forthcoming home

game—it trod the streets of northwest Waverly rehearsing the marches that became the backbone of its performances. Of course, in the late '30s, my brother Don was the drum major and it was always exciting to watch him strut his stuff when they came into our neighborhood—or when I encountered the band on the way to school.

As a member of the marching band, rehearsals were very different than the ones I described for the concert band. There was no time for antics. We were on the move all the time. The band assembled on the school lawn at 8:00 am and, after brief instructions from the director, we marched—either on the streets around the school—serenading the neighbors with our marches—or to the football field, where we would practice the routines that the director had designed to entertain the crowds during halftimes at home football games. Those routines were always the highlights of the week whenever the team played at home.

As the only marching band in town, we also did duty whenever there was a parade—which always included Memorial Day and Armistice Day (now called Veteran's Day). The parade route on both of these occasions was the same—down Main Street from the courthouse, across the river and then along the river on southwest First Street (sometimes called Water Street) to the cemetery. I have pleasant memories of marching in these parades, but the proceedings at the cemetery I recall with much less enthusiasm. Patriotic oratory is not likely to hold the rapt attention of most adolescent boys. I'm happy to report that I did a lot of squirming on these occasions, but kept my peace. Perhaps that was mostly because Jerry Davis and I no longer were seatmates.

Being the only person in town who played the bass clarinet, I had the opportunity to perform in one other group before I abandoned the instrument for greater glory on fields of conquest. Every week of the summer during my youth, a town band—made up of a disparate variety of citizens from the community—gave midweek concerts from the courthouse terrace. It was the place to be on band-concert nights, and I have fond memories of gathering there with family and friends for an evening of fellowship and frolic. The photo above shows the courthouse as it was in those days. The terrace where the band gathered was directly outside the main entrance. The spectators gathered on the broad lawn between East Main Street and the terrace.

Although both of my brothers had played in the town band at one time or another, I doubt that I would have been invited to play in this august group as a minimally-talented 15-year-old if the director had had any other option. As I was, in the business of the bass clarinet, I was the only game in town. It was fascinating—and a bit intimidating—to share the spotlight with business and professional figures from the community, some of them old enough to be my grandparent. Alas, that summer was the end of my short career as a musician. I dropped out of the high school band the following school year. However, before I conclude the narrative on my career in music, I should probably confess the actual circumstances that led to my departure from the high school band.

I was palling around some at that time with a fellow named Jim Whitmore. I don't recall what we were supposed to be doing at that time during the school day, but circumstances found us both by ourselves in the hallway that led to the music department and to the band director's office. From the boy's restroom at the end of the hall, we had acquired a spare packet of toilet paper. This was not a roll, but individual sheets wrapped for packaging with a tight band of brown paper. As such, it offered an interesting—and challenging—bundle for playing catch in the hall. Of course, just playing catch soon became too subdued for our tastes and one of us (I think it was I) decided to kick it just as the band director emerged from his office…discovering the hallway snowing sheets of toilet paper. He was not a happy camper. And, as I was the only guilty party with membership in his band, I received the brunt of his invective. He didn't expel me, but I was sufficiently incensed at the tongue-lashing I received that I turned in my bass clarinet the next day—and never touched an instrument again…well, unless you want to broaden somewhat what you define as an instrument.

In my grade school days, I had acquired—possibly at the request of Mrs. Lynch, the grade school music teacher—an instrument called a Tonette, a black plastic tube with finger holes that you could blow on and create flute-like sounds. I don't recall having much enduring enthusiasm for the Tonette—as its sound did not have much character—but I did learn to play it and it led me into an enduring interest in a much more fascinating instrument…the ocarina or "sweet potato." So called because its shape was very much like that of a yam, the ocarina had a much more mellow sound and could be acquired in a variety of sizes and playing keys. You fingered the ocarina much the same as a Tonette (or a recorder, the Baroque period instrument after which the Tonette was patterned). However, the body of the instrument was totally enclosed, which undoubtedly contributed to the deep, mellow sound it rendered.

The best ocarinas were made of clay, but they were also the most expensive. My first ocarina was made of maroon-colored plastic. It was about the size of an average sweet potato and it was, as I recall, in the key of C. I was never what you would call passionate about playing the instrument, but I became fairly proficient and retained an interest in it for a number of years. I even purchased ocarinas in other keys—one so small that my fingers would barely fit over the holes and another so large that it was a stretch to cover them. A couple of those instruments were made of clay and were prized possessions. One of them, an E-flat ocarina about the size of a grapefruit, was made in Czechoslovakia. The sounds it produced were indescribably mellow.

Playroom, Poultry and Pigs

I have pointed out that the garage at 323 10th Street never in my memory housed an automobile—and I have no recollection of what it was used for after the family's fortunes fell upon hard times when my dad lost his job in the Great Depression. By the time those fortunes began to improve some four years later, and he returned to his job at the publishing company, my brother Tom had joined the family and things were getting a bit cramped in the small bedroom that now had to accommodate four growing boys. For our enterprising parents, the garage provided the solution needed—at least for a significant portion of the year. When you have a small house, a need for more space and an empty garage, what could be more logical than to convert the structure into additional living space. And, that's what they did.

The project must have begun about 1938, because I do recall it being completed and usable the following summer. It was no small project. Among the first things they did was tear out the garage door and fill the space with a large stone fireplace. I'm sure that Mom and Dad would never have attempted such an enterprise were it not for the resourcefulness of Jack Wright—Dad's nephew by marriage, close friend of the family and proprietor of the local greenhouse and flower shop. In my experience with the man in later years, there were few things Jack was unwilling to try. Certainly he considered himself a credible fireplace designer. In fact, I have lived in three different places in Waverly that boasted Jack Wright-designed fireplaces. They were all remarkably beautiful—and they were all smoky.

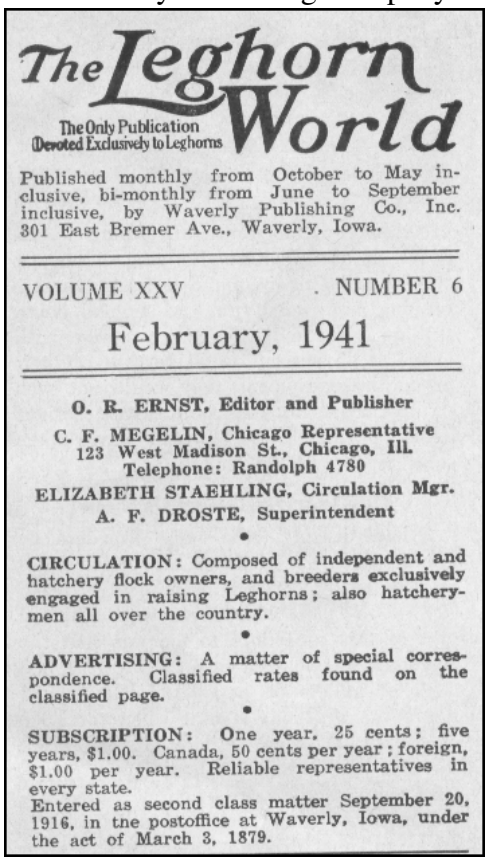
I was not old enough to be much more than an observer to the transformation of our garage into a family room and bedroom, and only a few of the details remain in my memory. I certainly remember the fireplace and the search for fieldstone to use in its construction. And, I remember the walls of the garage being covered with tongue-in-groove wood paneling. Mostly, however, I remember the ceiling. The material used to panel the ceiling was a kind of lightweight fiberboard popular in those days. The same material is still used these days in bulletin boards or the tiles for drop ceilings. Yet, the real uniqueness of our ceiling was not in how it was constructed, but in how it was decorated.

The entire surface—over 200 square feet—was covered with colorful pictures and cartoons cut from magazines. Before the job was completed, it seemed like everyone in town had heard about the project and was contributing pages from magazines; ads (Four Roses whiskey ads were very popular), cartoons (Esquire cartoons were also very popular, but Mom censored these before permitting their use) and photos from travel or news magazines. All of these contributions were cut into appropriate shapes and pasted on the ceiling to make a giant collage. It was a work of art.

When the new facility was completed, it served a dual purpose. It was a second bedroom for us boys—when the weather was warm enough—and it also provided a cozy place on cold evenings for the folks to entertain their friends in front of the fire. I don't recall now how many summers I slept in that room. Certainly, the early years—when it was the greatest novelty—are most vivid in my memory. In the summer of 1939, I was an inveterate Chicago Cubs fan, listened to all of their games on the radio—when reception allowed—and wrote in for their fans' packet. The packet included a decal of the team logo, which I can still picture pasted to the door of that remodeled garage. We continued to use the space for that purpose until the middle of World War II, when necessity again inspired my father's inventive spirit.

However, before I can relate the scenario that spirit engendered, I have to back up and provide a bit of background information on the subject of chickens. As it turns out, Dad was a bit

of an expert on this subject—not through any formal education, but rather by what you might call the process of osmosis. He was the chief typesetter for the Waverly Publishing Company at the time when at least two of its primary publications (*The Plymouth Rock Monthly* and *The Leghorn World*, the latter described in the adjoining graphic) were dedicated to the business of raising chickens. Over the years, I was always amazed at Dad's grasp of subjects that would have marked him as a man of letters rather than merely a high-school graduate. The reason, of course, is that he had at one time or another typeset publications dealing with those subjects…and he seems to have read and absorbed much of what his Linotype machine produced. So, an expertise on poultry husbandry on his part should have come as no surprise.



The Leghorn World

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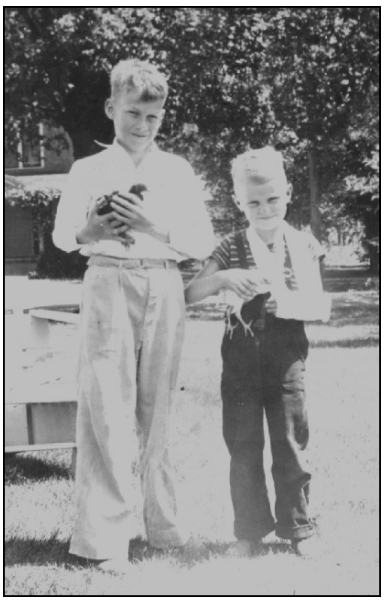
That expertise became apparent to us at first in a rather small way. The year was about 1940. In those days, at Easter time, a local hatchery acquired space in a Main Street storefront to display newly hatched chicks whose pre-feather fuzz had been dyed like Easter eggs. These chicks were sold as holiday novelties. And, as might be expected, when the novelty wore off, the color faded and the birds required more extensive care and feeding, most of them were abandoned and died. Not at our house.

That year, Tom and I were allowed to select two from among the Technicolor specimens in that storefront brooder and take them home to observe and nurture. From the outset, there was no question concerning the ultimate survival of these chicks. Although we viewed them mostly as pets, Dad made it clear that they were going to be given proper care—and they were. We made a pen for them outside the back door and we fed and watered them diligently…although Mom and Dad were always there to cover for us when our diligence waned.



By the end of the summer, our husbandry had paid off with two adult chickens—what the trade called "fryers." And, of course, that had to be the ultimate destiny of our pets. We had no facilities for keeping these critters into the winter months. So, one Saturday, Dad sharpened his axe, Mom boiled water and the two Easter chicks were dressed for Sunday dinner. Mom always made mouth-watering fried chicken. However, that Sunday, there were no watering mouths at the Ecker dinner table. I don't know what we ate for dinner that day, but it wasn't chicken. Other families may have viewed that platter of steaming fried chicken with anxious anticipation. Ours viewed it only with sorrow.

I will have more to say in some detail later from the viewpoint of a kid in Waverly living through the Second World War. For now, I will simply say that the war motivated necessity for

our family from a number of different perspectives. Which of those perspectives was most responsible for stimulating my father's inventive juices in early 1943, I cannot say. I can only report that he decided at that time to start raising chickens…not just a few chickens; a lot of chickens. To do that, our garage/family/bed room had to be converted into a hen house.

You would think that such a drastic decision would have been a cause of some grief in a family that had become accustomed to the luxury of the extra space it provided, but I don't recall any such feelings myself, nor do I remember that the decision faced any opposition at all. We were simply a family that was going into the chicken raising business. Certainly, the garage provided ample space for the size of the project Dad anticipated, although I doubt that the birds really appreciated the wood paneling, the field-stone fireplace or the magnificently decorated ceiling.

At age 13, I was not old enough to be a major player in the project, but I was kept well enough informed—and I was given sufficient responsibilities—that I can still recall some of the details. In the early stages, no extensive remodeling of the garage was required. The place was cleaned out and two brooders were installed. As I recall, these were round structures, perhaps five feet in diameter and some two feet high. The center portion of each brooder was covered and contained heating elements (light bulbs, as I remember). The outer portion was open, and it was there that feed and water were supplied to the inhabitants. Those inhabitants, obtained in early spring, were baby chicks—like the ones we acquired at Easter time three years before—only this time they came in big boxes and there were a lot of them, possible 100 or so. These were installed in the brooders, where they lived for some weeks until they were sufficiently developed and the weather had improved enough for them to begin life on their own—and to begin testing the outside world.

I don't remember much about that transition but I do recall that it was at about this time that the back yard, between the house and the garage, was enclosed with a high fence—which was divided in the middle by a partition fence—and two ports were cut into the side of the garage to allow the birds access into the outside world. The reason for the partitioned yard and separate exits from the chicken house was the need at that time to isolate the birds by sex, so that they would be discouraged from their inclinations to procreate. I'm sure, although I have no memory of how it was done, that the chicken house itself was similarly divided. First, of course, it was necessary to figure out which bird was of what gender. That, as it turns out, is no simple task.

I have no idea how the task is accomplished these days, but seventy years ago the skill to distinguish between male and female chickens seemed to have resided exclusively in the Japanese. Every hatchery in town employed one or more Japanese-Americans that were hired out to the farmers in the area to sex their chickens when the birds "came of age." Although we were at war with the Japanese at the time—and I seldom missed a war movie at the local theater—I don't recall any feeling of anxiety or antipathy toward the fellow my dad hired to sex our chickens. He just came one day and, when he left, the pullets (females) were on one side of the fence and the cockerels (males) were on the other. These guys had to be good. When you are raising chickens to produce eggs, one rooster in the hen house can create a major disaster. Most of us can probably recall bawdy jokes from our early days about such a rooster and his romantic exploits.

Of course, as the chickens began to mature, they ate a lot more feed and soiled their environment with a lot more droppings. I don't recall having any regular responsibility for cleaning up after the critters—which I think I would have remembered if I had—but I do recall

helping to supply their feed. At this time, we still did not own an automobile, so the increasing quantities of corn and meal the birds ate had to be transported by other means. The "other means" in this case was a unique bicycle my brother Ted had recently acquired. Ted, now 16, had been working since he was about 12, mostly to support his passion for model airplanes, but also to have disposable income to support other dreams. One of those dreams was this bicycle. It had a large basket over a small front wheel and could carry up to 150 pounds. I have no idea what attracted him to this strange vehicle, but it assumed an essential role in the chicken project. That same bicycle—reconditioned and repainted in recent years by Ted's son, Bruce—is shown here.

The elevator and feed store in Waverly at that time was on the east side of the river, just across the bridge and a block north of Main Street (shown below). From our house, it was just short of a mile. When feed was needed, it become my job to ride that bicycle to the elevator, have the workers there load the basket with a 100-pound bag of cracked corn (or whatever else was needed at the time), and then make a beeline for home, hopefully not having to stop on the way. Although the small front wheel lowered the center of gravity of my cargo, it probably weighed more than I did at the time, and the best way to keep it upright was to keep moving. The war, and the gas rationing that went with it, kept car traffic at a minimum—and I could turn off of Main Street as soon as I crossed the bridge— so I could usually make it home in a straight shot. The only real challenge was a short, but steep, incline at the end of a dirt path that I used as a shortcut across the south end of Wartburg's campus. When I turned off onto that path, I had to peddle like mad to get up enough steam to make the grade. From there, it was an easy two-block trip to the waiting chickens.

Through the summer that year, those chickens were a major presence our lives. They grew and matured to fulfill their ultimate destiny, which for the cockerels would be Sunday dinner and for the pullets would be the daily ritual of producing eggs. So, when the pullets had matured sufficiently to become egg-laying hens—and the cockerels had enough meat on their bones to be sold off as fryers—the dividing fence in the chicken yard was removed and the garage became a hen house. Nests were constructed for the hens and we went into the egg business.

Interestingly, what I remember most about that business was all the paraphernalia that went with it. First, we had to have a candler, which was just a small box with an electric light in it. One face of the box had a round hole in it slightly smaller than an egg. To "candle" an egg, you placed it next to the hole, where the light coming through the egg would reveal any foreign material in it. Then the eggs had to be graded according to size. This required the use of a special egg scale. When they were candled and weighed, the eggs were sorted into cases and sold to the

local produce house. How they got there, I don't remember. I do know that it was not in that bicycle basket.

One other adventure in animal husbandry in which I became involved probably would never have occurred except for the war. As I have mentioned, we were a meat and potatoes family. As I also pointed out, the potatoes were never a problem—and, obviously, there was no shortage of chicken to eat at our house. But, my father's tastes definitely leaned in the direction of red meat and, during the war, meat was rationed. So, although our appetites had to be adjusted somewhat to requirements of the national emergency, dad's enterprising nature came to the rescue once again.

In his own memoir, he wrote about a few of the friends with whom he and mom had socialized during their early days in Waverly. By the time I was old enough to become acquainted with most of them, this roster of family friends had been expanded to include a couple of area farmers. One of them, Pete Mueller, had a sow that had produced such a large litter of pigs that two of them were being crowded out by all the others and had become "runts." Runt pigs typically die if they are not bottle fed until they are old enough to eat on their own. Pete made dad an offer he couldn't refuse. If we would nurse those runt pigs until they were weaned and able to be returned to the farm, he would give us a quarter of a hog the next time they butchered. (Not either of the runts! We had learned our lesson with the pet chickens.)

So, we acquired temporary custody of two runt pigs and made space for them outside the back door, where the two pet chickens had their home a couple of years earlier. I have little recollection now of their early days with us, but they were with us long enough to become house pets and their antics as rambunctious weanlings I can still picture most vividly. We named them Porky and Beansy (the one I am holding in the photo) and, quite contrary to the general consensus concerning the cleanliness of such critters, they never had an offensive odor (at least offensive to a 12-year-old kid) and I don't recall our family living in fear that they would leave a mess in the house.

During the short time they were guests at our house, they developed an eager affection for human company and learned quickly that the doorbell meant the arrival of new humans with whom they could become acquainted. In fact, if the pigs were in the house, you had to race to beat them to the door when someone came to call. And, their arrival at the door was always accompanied by squeals of anticipatory delight. On at least one occasion, this scenario was the cause of some embarrassment for my mother, when the caller turned out to be a minister. As I will relate in a later chapter, we were not churchgoers. But my paternal grandmother was a high church Episcopalian and my father seemed to find it easier to tell people he was Episcopalian rather than that he was a heathen. So, the local Episcopal priest would occasionally make a call. On that particular call, he was greeted by two delighted pigs.

When the pigs were old enough, they were returned to the farm. We never saw them again, but I'm sure we pondered how they were making out. It had to be a real adjustment for them to discover that they were actually pigs and not humans. And, true to his word, Pete

Mueller gave us a quarter of a hog the next time he butchered. Then we were faced with the momentous task of figuring out what to do with all that meat. I do have recollections of the scurry of activity in our kitchen in the days following its arrival.

Except for some relatively small portions, freezing the meat was not an option because we had never rented space in the local meat locker and our small refrigerator would accommodate very little in its frozen food compartment. The alternative, for most of the meat, was my mother's canning operation, which I described in an earlier narrative. We had never had canned meat (at least not canned in this way) and I don't know what kind of obstacles my folks had to overcome to preserve both the taste and texture, but the stuff wasn't that bad and my mother always seemed to find ways to serve it that made it reasonably appealing to most of us most of the time.

I think that the cuts that could be made into bacon were salted and smoked, but I don't remember where it was done. I do recall big pots on the stove rendering the fat into lard. And, of course, for several weeks during and after all of this processing was going on, we ate pretty "high off the hog," as the old saying goes. I related earlier that dad was somewhat more than an amateur when it came to cutting meat, so chops and loins and roasts found their way into our refrigerator and graced our table at virtually every meal.

School Days

Irving School, the elementary school I attended in Waverly, had been the high school in earlier days. I attended there from the first through the sixth grade. The school building, as it was when I attended, is shown below. Obviously, the photo was taken while it was still the high school, which it remained until some time in the 1920s. Earlier, I went to kindergarten in a room on the ground floor of the "new" high school building. Because Irving had once been a high school, its accommodations were pretty extensive at that time for an elementary school. We had a gymnasium with a locker room and showers, a large auditorium and, in addition to very spacious classrooms (In fact, we once built a large wikiup [American Indian dwelling] in our 6th grade room), there were additional rooms that could be used for things like art and science projects—and the school nurse. It was to her room that I recall going whenever it was time for "vaccinations."

In those days, immunization was a regular part of the school regimen. You couldn't go to school without being immunized for smallpox, diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus…and the school was where you got your shots. I don't recall that there was ever any charge for these shots. You just lined up with your class when the county health officials said it was time, rolled up your sleeve and tried to act brave. It must have been effective. No one I knew ever came down with any of those diseases.

As I prepared to enter the first grade, a cloud of gloom hung over the heads of all of us who were headed for an education at Irving School. That's because there was a 67 percent chance you would be assigned to the classroom of the dreaded Miss Carey. Both of my older brothers had had Miss Carey for the first grade and they did not pull any punches when describing the horrors of having her for a teacher. In addition to being a first grade teacher, Miss Carey was the school principal. So my brothers did not escape her involvement in their lives when they advanced to higher education. Any infraction of the rules that the teachers felt warranted the most severe discipline earned you a trip to see Miss Carey. I knew my brothers' horror tales were based on solid personal experience.

The reason that entering first graders had a 33 percent hope of escaping servitude in Miss Carey's classroom was the size of the school's enrollment. There were too many kids in the lower grades at Irving School to have single classes in each grade—and too few for two classes. Their solution was to have two combination classes—one for first and second graders and one for third and fourth graders—leaving the remainder of the students in regular classes for those grades. So, one third of the entering first graders would be assigned to Miss Brockway's combination first/second class. I don't know how the choice was made, but I was one of the "lucky" ones that escaped to Miss Brockway. Perhaps, after having both of my brothers in her

class, Miss Carey decided she had had enough of our family for a while. Below is a photo of Miss Brockway's class. I think I am the kid in bib overalls in the middle of the second row. The photo is courtesy of Dick Swensen, who is the blond kid in the middle of the front row. Three of the kids in the front row went on to graduate from high school with me.

It is an interesting exercise to think back more than seventy years and try to focus on memories of one's experience in elementary school. Few of those memories, at least for me, involved academics. I think I was generally viewed as a bright kid—but a mediocre student. I expect I received occasional admonitions from my parents to be more diligent in my studies, but I don't recall they every made a big deal of it. I learned my three Rs (except as noted below), but generally did so with the minimum possible effort.

The one academic subject that does stand out in my memory is penmanship—possibly because it was the one subject that I was regularly assured of receiving a D. I don't think anyone ever flunked penmanship. Otherwise I would certainly have been a prime candidate. For me, penmanship classes were pure torture. They consisted of endless exercises copying "ovals" and "push-pulls" onto sheets of paper that were divided into lined tracks. The object of the "ovals" exercise was to draw a continuous line into overlapping ovals, keeping the overlaps consistently spaced and with their tops and bottoms touching—but not venturing outside—the lines that formed the track. The push-pulls were equally challenging and—for me—equally impossible. These exercises required you to make the continuous line into equally-spaced up-and-down sweeps with your pen—again tightly spaced, but not overlapped, and fitting exactly between the lines of the track. To me these were hopeless tasks…but the coup de gras of the exercises was the requirement that your pen had to be held in such a way that your thumb never lost contact with the paper. I didn't write that way. I wrote with my fingers—as it seemed to me most people did—and there was no way I could ever figure how to write legibly holding the pen the way the technique required. So, I got D's in penmanship and cultivated a hatred for the subject that endures to this day.

I expect I was not alone among my classmates in my conviction that what went on inside Irving School was far less fascinating than what went on in its surroundings. However, there are some things that I remember about being in that school that, if not treasured memories, at least help define the experience from the perspective of a participant. I'm sure the fact that they remain memories at all says something about how I viewed the world and what my developing belief system judged to be noteworthy.

For example, the only kid I remember from my first/second grade class was Arlin Shellhorn. I don't recall whether he was a first grader or a second grader, but that was of little consequence, because he was already too old for either. Arlin was mentally retarded—or perhaps I should say "intellectually challenged," to use more politically correct language. In those days, of course, there was no such thing as special education for students like Arlin, so they were

simply mainstreamed with the rest of the kids. Teachers would hold them back when they couldn't achieve with the rest of the class, and finally pass them on to the next grade, where that teacher would have the opportunity to struggle with the problem. I know I was in the third grade with Arlin, because I have a picture of that class. Already he towered over all the rest of us. I have no recollection of him after that. I couldn't find Arlin in the photo of the first/second grade class, but the third grade class picture is below. Arlin is in the back row on the far left of the picture.

At the other end of the spectrum among the kids I remember was Raymond Smith. He lived a few blocks from me in an area called "Sunnyside," which was "the other side of the tracks" in west Waverly, although technically you didn't have to cross the tracks to get there. That is, the people who lived there were among the poorer people in town and the homes in their neighborhood were sometimes little more than shacks. As a kid, I don't recall that fact being a particular problem for me, although for the most part I didn't hang around much with kids from there. I remember Raymond mostly just from being in school with him. In the photo, Raymond is in the middle of the third row, wearing a necktie.

When you have a classmate in elementary school that seems to know more about electricity than most of the adults in your life, you tend to take notice. Raymond Smith was such a classmate. He would regularly show up in school with something hooked up to a battery and astound teachers and students alike. Once he came with a contraption in which he had jacked up the amperage enough to give a considerable shock, and challenged us to touch the wires. Those of us who were naïve enough to try got a very surprising jolt. Then, when he had gathered a sufficient crowd of curious classmates, he would grab the wires himself and just hold on, obviously becoming the conduit for a considerable amount of electricity.

I don't know whatever happened to Raymond. Certainly, he had the potential to be a good scientist. And, I'm sure his influence helped motivate me to the experiments that began my own interest in science. Like many of my elementary school classmates, Raymond was not around by the time we went on to junior high school. In fact, of the 27 students in that 1939 third grade picture, only seven ended up in my high school graduating class. I expect that the coming war had something to do with that, although several I know dropped out of school and one was reported to have ended up in jail.

For me, the most memorable of the classmates that didn't continue on with me was one with whom I had little contact, in school or in town. She was just "a kid in my class"…until the day the teacher reported to us that Delores Hallman had died of leukemia. When you are nine years old, the death of the kid who sits next to you in school is a most shocking revelation…witness the fact that the details of the experience still remain very vivid in my

memory. I can even recall the kind of flowers the class bought for her funeral with the nickels and dimes we all chipped in. They were yellow daffodils. To this day, daffodils continue to remind me of my fourth-grade classmate.

Most of my Irving School memories of in-class activities are sketchy at best, but I do remember most of the teachers. The second grade teacher is the one exception. In fact, I don't remember much at all about the second grade except hating penmanship and being ratted on for some minor infraction by Marcia Lou Chandler. Marcia Lou was not only a rat fink…she got A's in penmanship. I also suspect that, ten years later, she was the one who skewered me with the following verse that appeared next to my senior picture in the high school yearbook:

A humorous land with plenty to say,
He likes to talk and does it all day.

My third grade teacher was Miss Baker—and she was my favorite. I used to stay after school to help her clean up the classroom and then, because she lived just up the street in the direction of my house, I would walk her home. I can't say what particular attributes endeared her to me. Whatever they were, every teacher ought to have them.

I have already mentioned Miss Hill, my fourth grade teacher, in the matter of the maiden flight of my model airplane in the hallway outside her classroom. She was a redhead and, whether or not her hair color had anything to do with it, she tolerated no nonsense…witness the airplane incident. However, another incident etched this fact much more indelibly into my memory. Writing on one's desk was a major violation of the rules at Irving School. However, I did it…and Miss Hill discovered it. I can't imagine how I could think she wouldn't. The day after she encountered my handiwork, I was invited to stay in from recess and she confronted me with the evidence. I don't recall trying to deny being the creator of the etchings. What good would it do? It was my desk. I was the only occupant. So, I confessed—whereupon she picked up a ruler from her desk, asked me to stick out my hands, palms up, and gave me a half dozen whacks with the ruler on each hand. Future activities for me in the fourth grade did not include additional artwork on my desk.

For fifth and sixth grades at Irving School, we moved up to the second floor. There, we encountered a different way of doing things. We still had too many kids in each grade for a single class, so three teachers were assigned to the two grades and we saw all three teachers both years. Miss Zerbe was the fifth grade homeroom teacher and Miss Hooker had the sixth grade homeroom. The extra teacher I don't remember. She had a room down the hall, where we went for the subjects she taught. For the most part, I don't remember who taught what, but I do recall that Miss Zerbe taught geography and Miss Hooker taught math. I also remember that Miss Hooker was one tough cookie and tolerated even less nonsense than Miss Hill. She was the only teacher I had at Irving that I felt could compete with Miss Carey's reputation as a disciplinarian. I think that perception pretty well kept me in line when she was in charge.

Nothing stands out in my memory from my year in the fifth grade, but I do recall a few highlights from the sixth. As the oldest kids in the school, sixth graders provided the pool from which were selected the four who would have the honor of being named "patrol boys." Many Irving students had to cross one of two highways to get to school. So the teachers selected the four sixth-graders they considered to be the best male students in the class (females were apparently not eligible, whatever their class standing) and these four were assigned in pairs to escort students across each of those highways—morning and afternoon. On duty, each patrol boy

wore a broad white canvas belt with shoulder strap onto which was pinned a large silver badge. It was a tremendous honor to be a patrol boy. I must acknowledge, however, that I was never so honored. I do recall frequent admonitions from the teachers, exhorting me that if I would just work a bit harder, I too could become a patrol boy. Alas, the persistent malingering spirit I had acquired during my long illness in the fourth grade remained stronger than my desire for that white belt and badge.

One of the classes I remember most from the sixth grade was religion, although that seems remarkable today. And, as I recall, attendance was not optional. At eleven o'clock one morning a week, everyone had religion. If your family had membership in a local church, you were released at that hour to attend a religion class at your church. If you had no regular church home, you remained in the classroom and a teacher from one of the local churches came in to conduct the class. My family did not attend church at that time, so I remained at the school for this class—and, I was by no means alone. There were apparently a lot of us whose families had resisted the outreach efforts of the local congregations. Although I don't have any recollection of disliking the class, the only thing I can remember having learned there was the names of the books of The Bible, which we were required to commit to memory…in proper order.

Two subjects in the curriculum of our elementary school were not taught by our regular teachers. They were physical education and music. I'm not sure about art. I can remember that art was taught occasionally in one of those extra first-floor rooms, but I can't recall how often or by whom. In fact, my only memory of an art class at Irving was one incident when I was perhaps in the second grade. We were doing spatter painting—a technique in which a cutout pattern is placed on a piece of paper and its image is highlighted by spattering paint over it. The spattering is achieved by dipping a toothbrush into paint and then rubbing the brush onto a screen over the image. When my turn came, I dipped the brush and started to spatter though the screen. When the teacher urged, "More elbow grease," I thought it was a funny name to call the stuff, but I followed what I thought were her directions and dipped the brush back into the paint. She quickly stopped me and clarified herself. "Just rub harder," she said.

Physical education (gym) and music were regular classes at Irving, but not daily. Both teachers were also responsible for classes at Lincoln School across the river. Miss Martin taught physical education, and if ever there was a stereotype of the classic gym teacher, Miss Martin was it—tall, skinny, short hair, severely dressed, decidedly lacking in feminine appeal. Walt Kelly, in his Pogo cartoon strip, parodied that stereotype in the character Sis Boombah. Yet, aside from that image of Miss Martin, I don't recall much about gym classes at Irving. Yet, I'm sure they were pleasant interludes from the rigors of those responsibilities associated with learning the 3 Rs.

I also don't remember much from our music classes, but Mrs. Lynch, the music teacher, was a memorable character. She was a short, plump matron with a very serious attitude toward her work that we (at least the boys) found easy to ridicule. It was unfair, to be sure, but most of the time we found her enthusiasm for the subject less than infectious. I can still see her sitting at the upright piano in the auditorium trying to teach us the notes of the scale or imploring us to sing along with what she was playing. Fortunately, teaching us to sing was not the full extent of her tutorial ambitions. There was also the rhythm band.

What I remember most about the rhythm band was that, although there were some really cool instruments included (most of which I couldn't name now), I was never chosen to play one. Mrs. Lynch's favorites always got to play them and I always ended up in the back row beating a couple of sticks together. Given that, I have to wonder how it was that I was chosen to play the

part of "Mr. Interlocutor" in the school minstrel show. Mrs. Lynch was certainly the prime mover behind that show. Perhaps, because this was primarily a talking part—and I was a prodigious talker—she felt that she had finally found an outlet for my talents.

There was one other group of teachers at Irving School that should be mentioned before I go on to the extracurricular things that we generally felt were what really made it worth showing up each day. These were the practice teachers. If you were a small-town kid—and couldn't boast of having a college in your town—then you probably have never experienced having a practice teacher in your class. Wartburg College trained a lot of teachers. As part of their training, each prospective teacher had to undergo supervised practice in one of the local schools. So it was that, several times each year, a Wartburg student would appear in our class and become one of our teachers. For the most part, my recollection of practice teachers is that we did not look upon their arrival with a great deal of enthusiasm. They were an interruption in the routine and frequently were not very good at what they did.

However, the real interruption in the routine came when Dr. Wiederanders, the education professor at Wartburg, showed up and sat in the back of the class to critique the student teacher. I knew Dr. Wiederanders very well. He lived just across the block from us. His kids were our playmates on the Wartburg campus and I learned to play chess watching him play the game with my dad. [As an aside, one additional memory of the sixth grade was if of once giving a demonstration of the game of chess with my friend, classmate and frequent chess opponent, Dwight Thompson.] Prof. Wiederanders was a little man with big bushy eyebrows. Yet I'm sure, to the student, he took on gargantuan stature as he sat in the back of the room, taking notes while she attempted to carry on her business (they were always females), all the while trying not to make it obvious that she knew he was there. You couldn't help feeling a bit uncomfortable in sympathy with her situation.

And, one final comment concerning one of the facilities in our school—the cloakroom. I had forgotten of the existence of this critical facility until my brother, Tom, told me the story of his own cloakroom experience at the school. Every classroom in the school had a cloakroom. Located directly inside the door into the room, it was lined with hooks and was roomy enough to accommodate a crowd of kids putting on or taking off snowsuits and galoshes. It extended all the way to the outside wall where there was a window—and it was sufficiently isolated that what went on there was not easily obvious in the rest of the classroom, which is important to understanding my brother's story.

I do recall that the cloakroom was a favorite place for teachers to march a misbehaving student and read him (almost always a boy) the riot act, out of earshot of the rest of the class. Tom's story had a slightly different twist. He is five years younger than I. Apparently, by the time he reached first grade, Miss Carey's memories of having members of our family in her class had faded sufficiently that Tom was assigned to her room. During the year, caught in some infraction of the rules, my brother was exiled to the cloakroom for the 1941 equivalent of a "time out." Having been given the opportunity not to be in class, he carried it to the logical extreme, dropped out the window of the cloakroom and went home.

I cannot write about what went on in the schoolyard before class and during recess without first explaining about the dry run. The topography of the terrain on which Waverly had been built was such that rainwater from the higher ground to the northwest of town had to be provided a way of getting to the river—without running down the streets and through people's yards. Hence, a channel had been constructed to route the water through that part of town. That channel became what we knew as the dry run. It began toward the east end of that pasture where

we flew our kites, next to the Great Western Railroad tracks on the north edge of town. It didn't really become much of a channel until it turned south a few blocks west of the river. There it made its ways behind the houses facing fifth and sixth streets until it disappeared underground at main street. When it emerged on the other side of the highway, it ran another block south and then turned southwest—right through a corner of the Irving School playground.

Most of the year, the dry run was exactly that…dry. When you drove east and west in our part of town, you simply encountered a considerable dip in the road between fifth and sixth streets, and sidewalks between those streets had footbridges over the channel. On rare occasions, it was sufficiently filled with water that it was wise to drive a couple of extra blocks to cross the run at main street. More rarely, it overflowed its banks and took a shortcut down the streets to the river.

For a kid at Irving School, however, the primary fascinations with the run came when the water in the vicinity of the school was deep enough to wade in—but not so deep that it went over the top of your overshoes—or in the winter when the slope from the schoolyard into the run was icy (or could be made icy with a little help) and could be used to demonstrate your prowess at sliding down the slope on your feet. The slope was too short—and too steep—for a sled, so the less daring would just slide on their backsides or would arrive with any of a number of different contrivances to help speed them on their way.

Having gone through that stage in my own life—and having reared a few kids of my own—I conclude that there is something fundamental in the human spirit that draws a kid to water that is deep enough to wade in, but not so deep that it is impossible to hide the fact that you have been wading. I can recall leaving home for school with strict and explicit instructions from my mother not to wade in the dry run. Too often the temptation was more than I could resist—and too often I would misjudge the depth of the water (water that was almost too deep was always the greatest temptation) and arrive at school with shoes and socks that were soaked. Sometimes I could hide it from my teacher, but never from my mother.

Whatever the attraction of the schoolyard before school, it was generally considered the place to be in the half hour before classes started. On the side of the school toward the dry run (opposite the side shown in the photo at the beginning of this chapter) there was a battery of playground equipment…swings, merry-go-round, see-saws etc. The schoolyard on the opposite side of the building was entirely open. There, students could find plenty of room to play softball, football or just chase one another. But, it was along the other two sides of the building that we found space for what I now seem to recall as our most compelling pre-class and recess activity…playing marbles.

Marbles was a boy's game and most of my male classmates arrived at school each clement day with his bag of marbles. They could be purchased at the five-and-dime store and usually came in two sizes…"shooters" and "laggers." The shooters were smaller, perhaps five-eighths of a inch in diameter. The laggers were larger, perhaps an inch or slightly more. All were made of glass, and each was uniquely variegated in color. How those colors were spread through the marble dictated its perceived attractiveness and, thus, its perceived value. We all treasured our favorites among the representatives in our collections.

One other kind of marble could be seen occasionally, although I'm not sure exactly how they fit into the hierarchy of value or how they were used in the games we played. These were called "steelies." In fact, they were nothing but ball bearings, but ball bearings that large were not all that common, so I do recall that they were quite highly treasured by those who owned them.

The two games we played with marbles each required a unique skill, and we tended to favor the one that best matched our talents. In essence, these were both gambling games; that is, there were always winners and losers—and the winners went home with the marbles. In the state of Iowa at that time, gambling was strictly forbidden. However, the law looked the other way if the stakes were symbolic rather than monetary. (I'll have more to say about that later.) In this case, the losers did in fact suffer some financial loss, because they had to go back to the dime store to replenish their supply of marbles.

The first of these games required "shooters." A circle about 18 inches in diameter was drawn—freehand—in the dirt along the side of the school building. Each participant placed one of his marbles in the center of the circle and each took a turn launching his shooter toward marbles within it. The shooter was held in the crook of the first joint of the index finger, with the thumbnail directly behind it…and aiming toward the intended target. Then the shooter was flicked forward with the thumb—making sure that no part of the hand violated the boundary of the circle. That was a foul and it caused you to forfeit your turn. Any marble that you were able to drive outside the circle was yours. Other details of the game I do not recall—mostly because it was not my game. I could never get that shooter to go where I was aiming. My game was the one that used the "laggers."

For this game, you dug a hole in the dirt next to the foundation of the school building, paced off a distance from the hole and drew a line in the dirt at that point. Each participant then contributed a marble to the hole and each took his turn tossing his lagger from behind the line toward the hole. The first person to get his lagger into the hole won all the marbles in it. This game took a lot less skill than the one with the shooters—and a lot more marbles changed hands—but it gave an opportunity to compete to those of us who couldn't shoot worth a hoot.

Irving School was torn down in the early '50s to make room for a more modern facility. I'm sure that the students who got their education in that facility have fond memories of their time there, but also I'm inclined to think that they missed something special by not experiencing that marvelous old former high school building.

Potpourri

As I was writing this volume, I kept thinking of things that I hadn't included and that didn't require a whole chapter, but still were worth mentioning. I made a list of these thoughts as I went along. This is what resulted from that list.

The Laboratory

In an earlier chapter, I acknowledged that I was not a particularly good student in elementary school—although my class standings did improve somewhat in subsequent years. And I expect that when Miss. Hooker prodded me with declarations that I could be a good student if I would only work at it, she must have seen in me some potential that was waiting for me to draw upon. I also expect that, more than anything else, that potential was manifest to outside observers as…curiosity. The fact is, I don't recall that I ever encountered much—in those days or since—that I didn't find interesting.

I mentioned earlier that our family owned a set of encyclopedias, which was unique particularly considering our family income and the financial obligations involved in maintaining a family of six. However, those volumes were not of recent vintage, with a copyright date sometime in the 1890s. Probably they had been acquired from dad's parents. They were the sort of thing my grandmother would have wanted to display in her home. She came from a good family and always presented a good family image.

Nonetheless, old as they were (and times didn't change so rapidly back in those days), these encyclopedias provided a pre-teen kid with a colossal wealth of information on countless subjects of interest. As I mentioned earlier, it was to those volumes I went to learn how to make hydrogen. And it was in them that I first learned about relativity.

Early on, I had been attracted to science and, possibly influenced by my electricity wizard classmate, Raymond Smith, experiments with volts and amps were among my earliest efforts to satisfy that curiosity. All I needed for some exciting experiments were a couple of dry-cell batteries, some copper wire and access to some common items that could be found in most homes at that time—at least in those homes in which the head of the house had to be a handyman. The dry-cell batteries we used in those days were enormous by today's standards—cylinders about six inches tall and somewhat over two inches in diameter. They had two terminals on the top each consisting of a threaded post and a knurled cylindrical nut. I don't remember what voltage they put out, but I assume it was 1.5V like most modern cells. They were routinely available at the local hardware store because they were used for a lot of residential and commercial applications that required a low-voltage supply of direct current; doorbells, for example.

My laboratory in those days was a bench set up at the foot of my bunk, which was right under the west window of our bedroom. Some of the experiments I remember most involved making electromagnets by coiling insulated wire around a large nail or other pieces of iron and using that technology to make a telegraph machine. My most ambitious project with electricity was making an electric motor using a small wooden board, a cork, a wire rod (probably from a coat hanger), some insulated copper wire and a few nails. It was a most rudimentary motor…but it worked.

At some point during those years, I received a chemistry set as a present and began to explore that field in my laboratory. I don't remember much about the experiments specified in the set's instructions, but I'm sure they helped inspire me to investigate chemical reactions that

went well beyond those instructions. In particular, being a typical adolescent boy, I was most interested in things that go BANG! So, I went to my available source of information, the family encyclopedia, and inquired about how to make gunpowder. Voila! It not only told me the ingredients, it told me the exact proportions. So, all I had to do was accumulate the ingredients, which readily were available at Ed Meyer's drug store, and go into the explosive business.

I can still remember that, when I handed Ed my shopping list, he looked at it, scowled and inquired if I was aware that those ingredients (potassium nitrate, sulfur and powdered charcoal) could become a hazardous mixture if put together in the proper proportions. I must have assured him that I would be careful not to blow my head off, because he shrugged, disappeared into the back room and reappeared a few minutes later with my chemicals. In fact, even with the proper chemicals, it was unlikely that I could create an explosion, because I was still missing a couple of essential pieces of equipment from my laboratory. I did not have a mortar and pestle. To make gunpowder that works, the ingredients need more than simple mixing. They need to be ground together into a fine blended powder. That's the business of the mortar and pestle. And, as a matter of fact, it is probably just as well that I was missing that equipment because I read reports that some individuals had generated a spark while grinding and had blown off a finger or two.

However, even without the blending, the mixture did produce a delightful pyrotechnic. First I had to make a fuse. This I did by soaking a length of cotton string in a concentrated solution of potassium nitrate and then letting it dry. This was not like the sputtering fuses you see in the movies. It just produced a small spark traveling down the string. But it did the job. If the fuse was connected to a small container of my gunpowder mixture, it didn't whoosh like the gunpowder my brother set off with the match, but it flared brightly for several seconds like a mini fireworks display. At the time, I considered it a pretty impressive display.

One final project with things that go bang used a chemical that could be found in any kitchen at the time—in matches. In those days, the head of a regular match—what I call a kitchen match—came in two parts. The tip of the match, usually colored white, was the part you could rub on any rough surface—even the leg of your jeans—and ignite the match. The rest of the head could not be made to ignite without the help of the tip. Both parts were made of phosphorous, but the tip was compounded to be much more unstable and that was, of course, the property I was looking for. I discovered that I could cut off he tip with a sharp blade, put it on a flat surface, hit it with a hammer and produce a minor explosion.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that if one match tip would produce that much noise, then a bunch of them could make a bang worth talking about. But, how was I to produce such a bang without endangering vital parts of my anatomy? The obvious answer was to be well separated from the bang when it happened. Without the possibility of using a fuse, I had to come up with an alternative. What I came up with was two short ¾ inch bolts and a ¾ inch nut. If I screwed one bolt part way into the nut, I created a depression into which I could put a whole bunch of match heads. Then, when I screwed the other bolt into the nut, compressing the match heads—but not too much—I had one big-bang missile. But, how to set it off? The high school building in Waverly was a large three-story brick building with a western wall without windows, and it had an abundant expanse of lawn on that side. Accompanied by a number of my friends, similarly armed, we attacked the wall with our missiles, staying as far back as possible to avoid flying shrapnel.

One other venture into chemistry I can recall from those days took place in the quiet tranquility of my workbench. It was during World War II and, although we didn't have a car till

late in the war, I was aware that rubber was scarce and tires were being rationed. When I began to hear about the possibility of synthetic rubber, I set to work to discover a source. The people across the street had a couple of locust trees and every fall our street was covered with the seed pods from these trees. When I dissected these pods I discovered that each seed was embedded in a pair of rubbery protrusions that I collected in quantity in hopes of using them to make synthetic rubber. Obviously, it was a naïve idea, but it was a significant step in my preparation to become a more serious scientist in later years.

Chores

I am hard pressed to remember where I got the money to pay for movies as I was growing up—or to buy lemon phosphates at Meyer's Drug Store—but I assume I was allotted some kind of allowance from my parents for my contribution to maintaining family life in those days. We all had family chores, but several stand out in my memory, either because of how much I hated them or because of how unique they were as we look at them today.

The worst was mowing the lawn. I'm sure kids today still hate mowing grass, but their task is nothing like the one I faced when my older brothers left me with the job. As I have explained, we had a very large yard, with an abundance of trees and bushes—and dominated by an elaborate rock garden. We also had an old, heavy reel-type push mower (power mowers were rare in those days and definitely beyond our means). I'm sure my dad tried to keep the blades sharp in that old mower, but by the time I'd finally exhausted all my delaying strategies, the grass was usually so high that it was a major effort just to cut a small swath—even in the open stretches of lawn. Cutting around the many plantings—and those odd-shaped islands in the rock garden—was pure torture.

Like most houses in those days, our house had hardwood floors. This meant an abundance of "throw" rugs. The rugs were all made by our mom from the contents of her always overflowing ragbag. To make them, she tore the rags into strips, sewed them together end-to-end and then crocheted them into patterns using an enormous crochet hook. There was hardly a vacant space in the house that wasn't covered with one of these rugs (except the kitchen and bathroom, which had linoleum flooring). When they needed cleaning, we had no vacuum cleaner to use for the job—although my mom, like most homemakers in those days, did have a carpet sweeper—so, we took up the rugs, hung them over the clothesline and beat them with a carpet beater. The beater was made of heavy wire and shaped something like a tennis racket. It was an opportunity to work out some frustrations, but it was still hard work.

These days, it's rare to see wallpaper in a house—except possibly in a bathroom or perhaps a kitchen—but I don't recall a room in our house that wasn't papered on the walls. Over the years, that wallpaper would inevitably accumulate a coating of dirt and, whenever that coating began to dull the finish sufficiently that my mother couldn't ignore it any longer, she would acquire several cans of wallpaper cleaner, muster the troops and put us to work attacking the walls.

The wallpaper cleaner, as I recall, was pink in color and roughly the consistency of plastic modeling clay. Each of us would be assigned a portion of a wall and would wipe it down with a handful of the cleaner, folding the dirt to the inside of the blob, and continuing until the cleaner was too dirty to continue. Thereupon, we would get a new handful of the cleaner and go back to work till the assigned spaces were all clean. My recollection is that the walls always looked noticeably brighter when we had finished.

French Fries, Fudge and Buckwheat Pancakes

There was an interesting division of labor in the kitchen at our house. My dad always did the grocery shopping and my mom did the cooking—with a few notable exceptions. And, for the most part, those exceptions really were notable.

Take for example his french fries, for which he was always on the lookout for new equipment to make them. From my earliest recollections, Dad always made what we called "waffle fries," Long before I ever sank my teeth into a restaurant french fry, we were

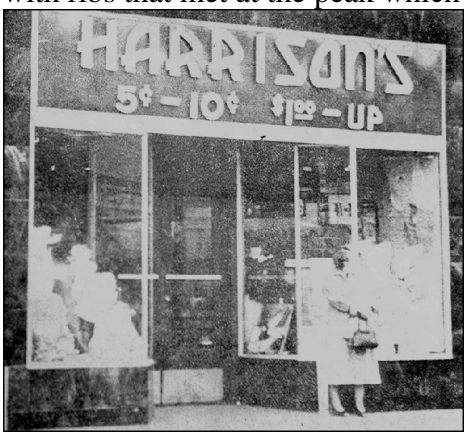
eating them regularly at our house—and my dad was always the cook when they were on the menu. Originally, the potatoes were cut using a hand slicer, like the one in the photo above. To make the waffle fries, Dad had to repeatedly rotate the potato ninety degrees with each cut in order to generate waffle-shaped slices like the ones shown above. Later on, he found a slicer that made preparations a lot less labor intensive. It was a hand-held platform made of wood, with a fixed corrugated blade—like the one above—(set at a height above the platform to make ideal waffles) and a sliding holder for the potato. All you had to do, then, was push the potato in front of the holder across the blade, rotating it ninety degrees with each push. It made the job quick and easy and I can recall creating a lot of raw waffle potatoes with that device.

I can still picture the basket he had for immersing the raw potatoes into the hot grease. It was made of wire with a looped handle and a wire hook along the base under the handle to hang the basket on the side of the kettle to drain the grease. I'm sure that similar baskets are still available today, but I haven't seen one in years. As I recall, the grease he used was Crisco. We must have had salad oil in the pantry, but I have no memory of it ever being used for deep-frying. Dad's french fries were always a treat to be anticipated…usually with hamburgers, for which he was also the cook.

My dad had a bit of a sweet tooth. Two favorite items I can recall his bringing home regularly from his shopping excursions were "foolish cookies" and "chocolate stars." He bought the cookies in packages at the grocery store. They were made using a sugar cookie as the base, with a generous marshmallow topping and all coated with milk chocolate. I don't know where the name "foolish" came from. It was not on the package label so I assume it was one that Dad's dreamed up.

The chocolate stars came from the candy counter at Harrison's five and dime store (a block to the west and across Bremer Ave. from the publishing company…and shown on the following page). That counter had a number of glass-fronted bins displaying different candies that could be purchased in bulk. Among these were the chocolate stars, drop-shaped confections

with ribs that met at the peak which give them the shape that I assume was the reason, at least in our family, for the name "chocolate stars." They were not the consistency of milk chocolate, being much grainier—and they were not individually wrapped. They were simply scooped out of the bin, into a bag and weighed. We were always delighted when that bag showed up on Tenth Street.



I can recall Dad in our kitchen making candy of different kinds at different times over the years, but the project I always most looked forward to was his production of fudge. I even have a letter I wrote home from Korea during the war requesting a shipment of that fudge. Having tried it myself a few times, I can witness that making good fudge is no easy job. You have to have a knack for it. Dad had it. His fudge was always perfect. One of his secrets was in the kind of nuts he used in the fudge. He never used anything but black walnuts.

In those days, you never bought black walnut meats in stores. You scavenged walnuts in the fall of the year from under the ubiquitous walnut trees in and around town and saved them in a burlap sack (in our case, back in the shed) till they were needed. When needed, you cracked them open with a nutcracker and dug out the meats with a nut pick (like the ones shown here—although we never had any two-pronged picks). It was tedious work…but worth the effort. I don't recall many families in town when I was growing up that didn't have a nutcracker and a bunch of nut picks. When we were too small to squeeze the nutcracker, we would take the nuts out to the back porch and break open those hard shells with a hammer. To this day, I don't consider fudge the real thing unless it contains black walnuts.

You don't seem to encounter buckwheat pancakes much these days, either in restaurants or being served in homes. And if you do run across them, they will not likely be like the ones that used to be served on 10th Street. I did find a recipe for them in one of my wife's cookbooks under the name "Raised Buckwheat Cakes," but I don't recall ever encountering anyone that had eaten them. At our house, they were almost as common and traditional hotcakes.

They started in a small ceramic crock—perhaps one or two gallon—the night before they were first due to be served. I say "first" because I seem to recall that the batter in the crock was always greater than even our family of voracious appetites could consume at one sitting. So we usually ate "buckwheats" for breakfast at least two days running and possibly more. I do recall, after that first morning, seeing Dad tweeking the batter and experimenting with samples on the griddle till he was satisfied with the recipe.

The reason the batter needed tweeking was that these pancakes were made with yeast. rather than baking powder. The recipe for raised buckwheats requires that the mixture be allowed to sit overnight to ferment; that is, for the yeast to act on the ingredients to produce the carbon dioxide that makes the cakes "raised." I do recall watching when he uncovered the crock in the morning and seeing the batter slowly bubbling. Of course, fermentation in an open container produces some acid along with the bubbles (and possibly some—but not much—alcohol). As a

result, these pancakes tended to have a bit of a tart flavor. So, the tweeking Dad did was usually the addition of some baking soda to neutralize any amount of acid he considered excessive.

I really liked those buckwheat pancakes, but I never thought they needed any sweet syrup or jelly. I always just smeared them with butter which, to me, brought out the best in their unique flavor.

Home Remedies

This is a term you don't hear being used much any more, but when I was growing up on Tenth Street, these were the most common treatments I can recall when I needed medicating. I don't remember seeing a doctor very often in those days, although my diagnosis with scarlet fever in the fourth grade was a notable exception. That, of course, was more than just a diagnosis; it was a sentence to isolation. In those days, scarlet fever was considered a highly dangerous communicable disease that had to be reported to the health authorities, who came and plastered a "QUARANTINE" sign on your door announcing that the home was off limits to anyone but family members and health professionals.

Except for that experience—and a tonsillectomy at about age six—most of my "sick care" came from home remedies. The ones I remember most were hydrogen peroxide, olive oil, boric acid and quinine. The peroxide and the olive oil were typically used as part of the same procedure—the treatment of earaches. I may well have had the kind of ear infections that occur in young children typically before age three, but if I did, I was too young to remember either the condition or the treatment. However, the earaches I recall occurred during the summer when I was an adolescent and spent much of my life in the swimming pool. These painful experiences happened when earwax accumulated and the pressure of underwater swimming forced the wax into contact with the eardrum.

The home remedy for this was a two-stage process. First, my mom would put hydrogen peroxide into the ear, which ate away at the wax with significant foaming. When the foaming finally subsided—usually with the extrusion of considerable debris from the ear—the pain usually subsided and I was ready for the second stage, which usually took place at bedtime. At that time, Mom would warm a small volume of olive oil and add a few drops to the affected ear. Then she would get me a hot water bottle covered with an old towel and put me to bed lying on the towel. In the morning, the towel was invariably covered with a splotch of brown earwax and I was off to the swimming pool when it opened that afternoon.

Our medicine cabinet always contained a bottle of boric acid. It did not come from the drug store. My mom made it on her kitchen stove. She got the boric acid crystals from the drug store, but she measured them in proper proportions into boiling water and, when they mixture cooled, she put it into the bottle that sat ready in the medicine cabinet. Ready for what? Ready to rinse out any eyes that had been invaded by debris or other irritant. It is very likely that, when Ted blew up the gunpowder in his face, Mom rinsed out his eyes with boric acid before the doctor arrived.

Another regular occupant of our medicine cabinet was a bottle of quinine tablets. After it was first discovered as a constituent of the bark of a tropical tree, quinine was used to moderate the fever caused by malaria. My parents used it for a similar purpose—not for malaria but for colds and flu. I don't remember the dosage of those tablets, but I do recall my dad reciting what Ed Meyer, the pharmacist, recommended when you got a bad cold: "Take a shot of whiskey, two quinine tablets and go to bed." We never got the whiskey, but the quinine seemed to do the trick. I can recall waking up without a fever and with my pajamas soaked from sweat.

Holidays

For a kid growing up in a small town in the 1930s, any holiday was an event to look forward to, particularly if it happened during the school year. Yet, my most memorable holiday occurred during the middle of the summer. Shortly, I'll relate why the Fourth of July produced my most enduring memories, but I first need to mention some things I remember about how we celebrated other holidays in those days. Because we were not a church-going family, religious holidays—Christmas and Easter—were anticipated only because of the secular traditions associated with them: hunts for colored eggs (and candy) and a decorated evergreen that was the location for the Christmas elf to deposit long-anticipated presents (and candy). And, on the subject of candy, Halloween as I was growing up was never associated with a plea for goodies as I rang doorbells in the neighborhood. I will document those Halloween activities in a later chapter, but I would like to include here what my dad had to say on the subject as he was writing the stories that became his book, "No Greener Pastures." This story never made it into the book:

> *People's attitudes and actions regarding Halloween have changed remarkably over the past 60 years. For example, we now leave our charcoal broiler and lawn chairs on the back porch on Halloween without concern for their safety. In the 1920s such a thing would have been correctly considered to be the height of stupidity. Anything not under lock and key would disappear before morning, probably never to be seen again--although there was always a chance of finding your lost property some remote place, usually in a battered condition.*
>
> *For the very young, Halloween today is very much the same as it was then. The children visited their neighbors' houses carrying jack-o-lanterns, and received treats, such as apples, cookies and candy.*
>
> *The boys in the next age group, probably from ten to fourteen, were the most mischievous. They would take off with anything that was not tied down. But, their main mission was overturning outdoor toilets. Although indoor plumbing had been installed in the majority of houses at this time, these outdoor facilities were still very much in evidence, especially at Halloween, when they became a source of great temptation to the youngsters.*
>
> *Usually traveling in small groups, the boys stalked the outhouse, bent on destruction. The owners of these buildings were aware of the danger, and protected them as best they could, so the net result usually was a few overturned outhouses and numerous captures of the culprits. These captured evildoers were usually taken to their fathers, who in most instances took the boys to the woodshed, ending the night on a painful note.*
>
> *The older group, mostly high school boys, seemed to have a penchant for removing wagons and machinery from nearby farms. On the morning following Halloween, the town would be littered with wagons, corn planters, cultivators, and other agricultural tools, all left in ridiculous places. Once I even saw a bobsled adorning the front porch of one of our churches. Bobsleds are very heavy, notoriously short of wheels and, in the absence of snow, are almost impossible to move. The ambition and motivation of these dedicated youths was often nothing short of extraordinary.*
>
> *The Washington Irving High School, a three-story building, became the scene of a most remarkable Halloween stunt. Some unknown parties, suspected by*

some of being students of this very school, obtained a manure-spreader, took it apart and hoisted it with ropes, piece by piece, to the roof of the building. As each part of the spreader arrived on the roof, it was reassembled.

The next morning, when daylight appeared, the completely assembled manure-spreader was visible to all in its lofty and precarious position. Naturally, the display attracted a great deal of attention. People came to the school in droves as the news spread. The culprits were never officially apprehended, but I believe were known to a good many friends, who considered them as heroes of a sort.

How the spreader got back to earth I do not know, but I imagine the same way it went up, a piece at a time. While I certainly don't condone this dangerous and somewhat stupid stunt, I must say it was the most spectacular Halloween prank I ever witnessed.

You will find a photo of that school building (Irving Elementary School in my day) in the chapter on School Days. There you can see the challenge it presented to those Halloween pranksters.

I don't recall that Thanksgiving was a particularly momentous holiday at our house. We did not have extended family that lived nearby, so we enjoyed the time off from school and ate a meal (probably roast chicken) that was not all that different from Mom's normally sumptuous main meal of the day. This is, no doubt, why I have little recollection of Thanksgiving as a particularly special holiday.

My memories of the other patriotic holidays—Memorial Day and Armistice Day (now Veteran's Day)—relate mostly to the parades, particularly after I became a member of the high school marching band, which provided the music for those occasions. As I mentioned earlier, the down side of being in the band on these holidays was having to endure the speeches at the cemetery. Nonetheless, they were memorable experiences. Here is a photo of the Memorial Day parade, probably in 1946, when I would have been in the ranks of the band on that day.

I'm sure that the main reason the 4th of July stands out in my memory among the holiday celebrations of my youth is that, at that time, there were few restrictions on the purchase and use of fireworks. Fancy fireworks were not in my budget, but firecrackers were cheap and plentiful…and guaranteed a full day of noisemaking, experimentation and…sometimes…mischief. The firecrackers we typically obtained were of two types. Mostly we used the regular, everyday size of about an inch and a half long and perhaps a quarter of an inch in diameter. These could make a substantial noise, lift a tin can ten to twenty feet in the air and—as my brother Don once discovered—blow the back pocket off of a neighbor kid's overalls.

The other ones we used were called "lady crackers." They were not much bigger around than an insulated wire and about three-quarters of an inch long. They were packaged in bundles of perhaps twenty or thirty and were sold with their fuses intertwined, so that they would explode

in rapid sequence. You have probably seen them being used in motion pictures of Chinese street celebrations, pop-popping at the feet of an ersatz dragon. The problem with these was that they made a lot of noise—but only over a short period of time.

I should mention what we used to light the fuses on all of these fireworks. Unless you wanted to strike a lot of matches, you needed something that would keep an ember glowing for a long period of time. The answer was a piece of punk. I don't know where the idea came from, but somebody figured out that a piece of rotting wood, before it totally disintegrated, assumes a kind of porous consistency that, if held briefly in a flame, creates an ember that will continue to burn slowly if you simply blow on it occasionally. Thus, in the days before the Fourth, we would search out an old stump or rotting tree branch and recover several good-sized pieces that would become punks for our day of lighting firecrackers.

Some of the kids would have cherry bombs—spheres about the size of a marble that would explode when you threw them against a hard surface—and very large firecrackers that became known later as M-80s, but I don't recall ever having access to them, probably because our parents considered them too hazardous. That was probably wise because, as I recall, almost every year there were reports of kids getting injured with fireworks on the Fourth, sometimes seriously. I also don't recall ever having any rockets. Our primary entertainment after dark on the Fourth came from sparklers, although we may have had an occasional Roman Candle—a tube that shot out luminous colored balls wherever you aimed it.

Whoopee Pants

My list of afterthoughts contained a notation about this garment. I don't have much to say here on the subject except to define it as evidence that every family adopts some weird terms to describe some common objects—in this case, corduroy trousers. Corduroy is defined in the dictionary as, "a thick cotton material with velvetlike pile on raised ribs." It was the raised ribs that gave rise to our family's adoption of the above term to describe them. When you walked, those ribs rubbed against one another, making a whoop sound with each step…making them "whoopee pants."

Train Wreck

This entry does not fit into the timeline of the other stories in this volume, but it involves the best photograph I ever took as an aspiring amateur photographer, and I haven't found any other place to publish it. In my late teens, I became interested in the potential of 35mm photography—mostly through the inspiration of my friend and classmate, Dick Swensen—and I acquired a 35mm camera. Over the years, I have taken a lot of photographs with that and succeeding 35mm cameras, but none as good as the one shown here.

In the spring of 1949, two steam locomotives—each pulling a string of freight cars—collided at

the crossing of the Illinois Central and Chicago Great Western lines just northwest of Waverly. You can see that crossing point in the aerial photograph of Waverly in the first chapter. You can also see that times have changed since I took that photograph, because nowadays spectators would not be permitted anywhere near an accident site such as this. I don’t remember, and I can't tell for sure from the photograph, but I think that my dad is one of the closer observers shown.

That's Entertainment

Following the repeal of the Volstead (prohibition) Act in 1932, individual states began legislating how the consumption of alcohol would be regulated. At that time, the state of Iowa became a "dry" state; that is, no alcoholic beverage was allowed to be served "over the counter" except for beer with a maximum alcohol content of 3.2 percent. All other alcohol available in the state was sold in state-owned liquor stores—and the amount any individual could purchase was tightly regulated through the use of "liquor books."

Adult residents of the state were entitled to apply for one of these liquor books, which were just small, pocket-sized, serial-numbered volumes of blank pages. To purchase a bottle of liquor, you had to present this book at the state liquor store and have the attendant record the purchase in your book. I assume that this system was used both to assure that the purchaser was an adult and to monitor individual consumption. During the war, my mother was employed for a time in the bindery at the publishing company where my dad worked, as they had been given the contract to print the state liquor books. I can recall her stories of how carefully they were supervised to assure that no unauthorized books were printed.

This may seem to be a strange way of beginning a narrative about being a kid in Waverly, but it provides some necessary background for my story about The Nautical Club…and other institutions in town where people assembled.

The Nautical Club was a nightclub. A local farmer named Jack Deinema had seen the potential of such an establishment—and he had the ideal location for it. His farm was just on the north city limits of the town—directly across the Great Western tracks from our kite flying field. There he built the Nautical Club just off his barnyard, where parking was ample and neighbors were sparse. The club is shown above in an expanded view of northwest Waverly from the aerial photo in the first chapter. It can be seen just to the right of the smoke coming from the engine of the train on the CGW tracks.

Jack couldn't serve liquor at his club, but he could serve soft drinks— called "setups—into which liquor could be added by the customer at the table. This arrangement is the link to my opening comments about liquor laws in Iowa. The liquor came from the trusty bottle (acquired by the customer at the state liquor store) that had been unobtrusively brought into the club and discretely concealed under the table. Of course, everyone knew what was going on, but the mores of the culture at that time demanded that kind of discretion—irrespective of what watering hole you patronized. I got to know about all of this because my parents were frequent patrons of The Nautical Club and always were accompanied by their bottle of gin. Their favorite setup was Pepsi Cola—a weird combination by most standards, but they both lived into their nineties so perhaps it was their secret to long life.

My own association with the Jack's club was not involved with what went on inside the place. In fact, I don't recall ever being in it. Instead, I became a participant in a project that the enterprising Mr. Deinema had conceived to make a few extra bucks during the summer. He had a boxing ring built in the open field between his club and the railroad tracks and he promoted (weekly, I think) a schedule of matches, concluding with a couple of reasonably prominent regional professionals as the main event. Of course, all boxing bills had to feature some preliminary events—and that's where I came in.

I don't remember know how I came to be on the bill. It may have been cooked up between my dad and Jack Deinema. Jack was dad's friend—but then, that could be said about almost everybody in town. We had boxing gloves at home and I recall having been tutored by my older brothers on the fundamentals required to acquit myself reasonably well in the ring. I was probably nine or ten at the time, so I'm sure my event was among the earliest preliminaries. When you think about it, it was a pretty shrewd idea for Jack to feature local kids in the preliminaries of his boxing bill. In a small town like ours, who isn't going to come see his kid (or his neighbor's kid) do combat under the lights in Jack Deinema's pasture?

However, "combat" is probably too severe a term to describe what on in the ring during those preliminaries. The gloves we used were close relatives of pillows. We did a lot of flailing, but we were too scrawny to put any force behind the punches and everyone always emerged unscathed. Our matches were limited to three rounds and always resulted in a draw. My only opponent that summer (I can only recall doing it one summer) was a fellow named Victor Platt. Victor and I did pal around some together as I recall, but like a lot of my early friends, he was gone by the time I got out of elementary school.

It's hard to imagine now that I was willing at that age to get up in front of a bunch of hollering adults in what had to be a laughable exhibition of youthful ineptitude. I do recall that we got paid for our efforts and that may have been sufficient incentive to overcome any shyness I may have harbored. I think we got paid fifty cents for each match. In those days, that was good pay for ten minute's work. As I think about it now, I guess that made me a professional boxer. If so, then I can honestly say that I retired undefeated.

One other place in town that was off limits to kids—but to which a kid could achieve peripheral association—was a tavern or pool hall, as they were called; in my case specifically, The Farmer's Friend. There were four such establishments in Waverly when I was growing up; three on the east side of the river—Maxfield's and the Tall Corn Tavern in addition to the Farmer's Friend—and one on west Bremer Avenue called the Town Tavern, more affectionately know by its patrons as the Town Pump. The reason I was allowed in the proximity of the Farmer's Friend was that Howard Bogan had his barbershop in the front of the tavern, facing main street. To get into the barbershop, you had to enter through the door to the tavern. Maxfield's may have had a similarly located barbershop, but I don't remember.

The reason that Howard Bogan was my barber, rather than one of the several other tonsorial artists in town, was that my dad played cards on Saturday afternoons at the Farmer's Friend. This was typically the day of the week when area farmers came into town to shop, to sop up a few beers and to play pool or cards. My dad was not a pool player, but he loved to play cards and he was very good at it—and most Saturday afternoons he made that into a profitable enterprise.

As I explained in the previous chapter, gambling for money was illegal in Iowa. But, of course, that didn't prevent enterprising Iowans from making it possible for local citizens to arrive home following a Saturday afternoon at the pool hall somewhat shorter of cash than they were

when the noon whistle blew. Their way around the law could be found in little yellow cardboard "chits" imprinted with "5¢" in bold type followed by the name of the establishment where this ersatz currency could be redeemed in trade. The chits could be purchased at the bar of a given tavern and were only redeemable there. By some strange kind of logic, the Iowa legislators (most of whom at that time were farmers themselves) did not consider it gambling when you wagered those little yellow pieces of cardboard in a poker game or a game of eight-ball.

I think that my dad looked at his Saturday afternoons at the Farmer's Friend much the same as Willie Mays is reported to have said about playing baseball; namely that he couldn't believe that they were willing to pay him to do what he loved most. As I said, dad was a very good card player. The card game preferred by the Saturday afternoon crowd at the taverns in town at that time was called Shöpskopf, which is German for sheep's head. (Waverly was a predominantly German community in those days. In fact, in the thirties, the local Lutheran church still conducted a German language service.) Interestingly, although his regular winnings demonstrated how well he played the game, he never taught any of us how to play it…nor was it a game I ever remember him playing at any other time…nor do I ever recall him frequenting a tavern at any other time. He never was a beer drinker and his favored card game—played for real money in the homes of his cronies—was poker (although he did love to play cribbage and taught all of us to play the game). Shöpskopf just seemed to be something he did on Saturday afternoons—for fun and profit.

It was the profit that connected me to the enterprise, because Saturday evenings would routinely find my father in possession of a stack of the yellow chits imprinted with the name of the Farmer's Friend. So, whenever I needed a haircut, eight of those chits were extracted from the stack and I would be instructed to go have Howard Bogan "lower my ears," as my father used to say. Haircuts at the time cost 35 cents. The extra chit he included in the stack was for me to spend for a bottle of pop at the bar in the tavern—which I could buy there, but had to drink outside. As I recall, this routine became a ritual in our family for many years.

Although, as I was growing up, Howard Bogan was just the guy who cut my hair, my dad describes the barber in his book, *No Greener Pastures*, as one of Waverly's more unforgettable characters. Apparently this opinion was also shared by the man who was editor at dad's publishing company in the late 1920s. His name was Frank Gruber. When the Great Depression hit, Frank left Waverly and went on to become a prolific pulp fiction writer and Hollywood screenwriter. I came across one of his novels once many years ago and was surprised to find that some of the action in the book took place in Waverly, Iowa, where one of the key local characters in the action was a barber who was fond of cock fighting. That would be Howard Bogan.

That bottle of pop from the Farmer's Friend on haircut day was always a welcome libation, but the two places for refreshment more often on my itinerary—and that remain most fondly in my memory—are Roy's Place and the soda fountain at Meyer's drug store. Roy's Place was a diner on West Bremer Avenue. It was about four blocks from the river, which at that time was about the end of the business

district on that end of main street. But it was only about a block from the high school, at the junction of two highways and close to the population center of the town, so it was always a busy place.

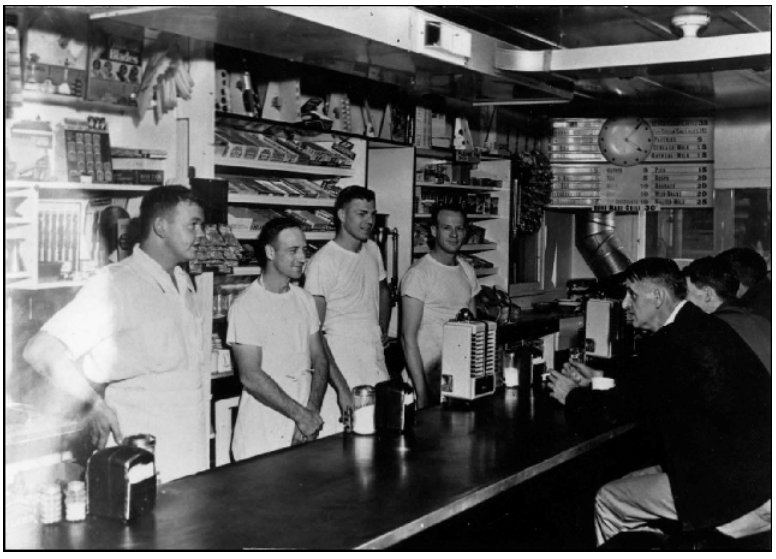
My father mentioned Roy's Place briefly in his book, but from my perspective as a kid, the institution requires a bit more than a passing comment. For me, hamburgers were the main attraction at the diner, which had a most unique method for preparing them. I can't describe that method more graphically than Dad did in his 1989 book:

"…Instead of a grill, a large pan, probably 3-feet by four feet, containing about two inches of hot grease, was the answer to all the cooking.

If you ordered a hamburger, a ball of beef was tossed into the grease, flattened with a spatula or turner, and when done picked up by the turner and held against a half bun while the excess grease dripped back into the pan. If the order was for a tenderloin, ham sandwich, or even an egg, the same routine was followed. The egg sandwich was the most interesting. The cook dropped a raw egg into a cup, stirred it briskly with a fork, and slid it into the grease. The egg immediately swelled to about five times its normal size. In almost no time at all, it was ready to eat--whereupon the cook folded it twice, once each way, and held it against a half bun while it drained. The real test for the cook was when someone ordered cheese on an egg sandwich.

The only exception to this routine was at breakfast time, when the order was for sausage, ham, or bacon and eggs. These orders were prepared in the back room, probably in a more conventional way. But, although the deep grease method may seem odd, and although Roys Place had several different owners, the old method of frying hung on until quite recently."

Those greasy hamburgers were a staple in my "junk-food" diet for most of my growing-up years—at least whenever I had the 15 cents in my pocket to buy one. (Actually, as I recall, the price with tax was 16 cents. Iowa had instituted a 2 percent sales tax soon after I was born, but the grand poobahs in Des Moines were smart enough to realize that, in the 30s—when you could buy enough meat to feed a family of six for a quarter—most of the money spent in the state would accrue no tax, so they fudged the numbers requiring all purchases above 14 cents be taxed a penny until the 2 percent rule kicked in.) A bottle of soda to wash down my burger cost a nickel more or, if my pocket really jingled with change, a 15-cent malted milk fashioned from Roy's Place homemade ice cream was always the beverage of choice. The malts were so large that they would overflow the serving glass, so the counterman would leave the extra portion in the big metal mixing vessel and



drop it on the counter in front of you. That counter—and the counter crew—are shown in the photo above. The grill my father referred to was under the clock and menu at the far end of the counter. This photo was taken a decade or so after my days hanging out there.

Roy's Place ice cream was a big attraction—and I think it was generally considered to be the best ice cream in town. Across from the lunch counter in the diner there was an ice cream counter, where one of the countermen would appear whenever someone wanted service there. This service was typically to fill one of two kinds of orders: ice cream cones or hand-packed cartons of ice cream. You could get a single dip cone in a fairly large variety of flavors for a nickel or a double dip for a dime. Hand-packed Roy's Place ice cream was always a treat for dessert at home. However, except for the malts and milkshakes available at the lunch counter, I don't recall that the diner offered anything that would be considered "soda fountain fare." For those treats, I made my way across the river to the soda fountain at Meyer's Drug Store.

Most often, my budget did not allow for the more exotic creations available at the soda fountain, so my preferred selection became the lemon phosphate—a very tart drink created by the "soda jerk" using flavoring, seltzer water and something to make it sour, probably phosphoric acid. In my youth, it became a challenge to see how much of the acid could be added before my taste for it rebelled. As I recall, I became tolerant to record amounts, and all the soda jerks in Ed Meyer's employ delighted in taking up the challenge. I'm surprised that my teeth did not erode away before I reached adulthood. The photo on the right shows the drug store adjoining the Waverly Theater. Its soda fountain (shown below) was always a popular place after the early show in the evening.

Finally, no account of gathering places in Waverly would be complete without a few more comments on its two movie theaters. In the 1930s and early '40s, small-town movie theaters were really central to community social life. For most adults, a night out on the town was a night at the movies. For teenagers, date night or a night out with your friends was typically spent at the movies. For younger kids, weekend matinees were always a major attraction. And, of course, in summertime, the theaters were the

only public gathering places in town at that time that were air-conditioned—which tended to make them popular even when the billing was not first rate.

Typically, the "Waverly Theater" carried first run "A" movies; that is feature films starring major Hollywood actors. Of course, small-town theaters were never among the first to get major films after they were released. As I have indicated, if we wanted to see a film earlier after its release, we traveled to Waterloo. However, all of the feature films made it to our town eventually. And, as I look back on that era now, I consider it a distinct privilege to have been a kid during what was the golden age of motion pictures.

The Waverly Theater always featured a single film with typical evening show times at 7 and 9 pm. Weekend matinees were typically at 1, 3 and 5 pm. Movies at that time were usually around 90 minutes in length, so we could always look forward to being entertained in the early minutes of the show with any of a variety of "short subjects." Our favorites, of course, were the cartoons and the comedy sketches—most notably The Three Stooges. Newsreels were common, especially during World War II, but they were not a favored "short" for most kids. The ones we dreaded most, however, were the travelogues. Inevitably, we also had to sit through previews of coming attractions.

For me, feature film highlights that remain firmly in my memory from the 1930s were "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," which was the first ever full-length color cartoon feature, released in 1937, and "The Wizard of Oz," in 1939. I'll never forget the feeling of awe I felt when Dorothy opened the door after the cyclone and revealed that spectacular Technicolor view of Munchkinland. Technicolor movies were still rare in those days. In the 40's—in addition to movies about the war, which I'll discuss in more detail later—my fondest memories of pictures from that era relate mostly to fantasy love affairs with a multitude of young starlets.

Although I don't think I was ever a participant myself (I believe only patrons with adult tickets were included), I do remember "Bank Night" at the Waverly Theater. It was every Wednesday, as I recall, and featured a drawing for a cash prize. The drawing took place after the first evening showing, at about 9 pm. I don't remember many of the details, but I do recall sitting in the audience and watching Vern Hagemann, manager of the theaters, turn up the house lights, mount the stage, draw a ticket from some kind of container and announce the lucky winner. I don't think that Bank Night—which was apparently a common practice in theaters during the depression to encourage attendance—endured into my later teen years. In the previous photo showing the theater marquee (taken in 1950) bank night is announced with a prize of $300.

On the other side of Main Street—and a block to the east—was the Bremer Theater, shown on the right next to George Kerwin's men's store. I have already mentioned this institution in describing my youthful fascination with cowboys—and the comment from my brother's friend that the expected billing at the theater would be "…a cowboy and another good one." For me, favorites among the "other good ones" were adventures of a hero called The Falcon, starring George

Saunders at one time and Tom Conway later…or vice versa, the detective Charlie Chan, starring Sidney Toler and Boston Blackie starring Chester Morris. And I should mention that not all cowboy movies ended up at the Bremer Theater. Gene Autrey and Roy Rogers were sufficiently big names that their films would be featured across the street at the Waverly Theater.

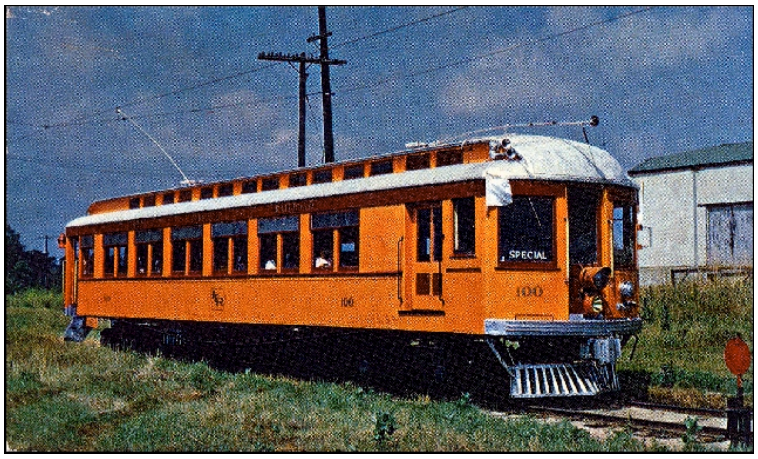
Finally, one of my most enduring memories of the Bremer Theater did not have to do with the movie that was showing, but what happened as I came out one night after the7 pm show. It was the fall of 1944 and I had just begun my Freshman year at the high school. Waiting on the street outside the theater that night were two Sophomores, Paul Cornils and Everett Stafford, who corralled two of us from the Freshman class (Jim Mooney and me) as we emerged. Hazing of Freshmen was discouraged at the school as I recall, but neither of these two guys was likely to do us any serious harm. Paul was the son of a professor at the college and, in earlier years, had been numbered among the pack of kids that played games on the campus. Everett was not a close friend, but a couple of years later we did play together on the football team. So, I don't recall that we put up much resistance when they led us over to Everett's '37 Cheve, parked nearby on the street, and headed out of town to the east.

Whatever our two captors had in store for us, we probably considered it more of an adventure than a peril—and it really was. Our fate, as it turned out, was a long walk. The old Cheve cruised down Highway 3 to the Washington Creamery, about three to four miles from town. There it pulled over and we were invited to disembark. It headed back to town without us. An hour or so later, we were back where we started, passing under the marquee of the Bremer Theater on our way home—a bit late but otherwise unscathed.

I doubt that kids who grew up in later years would credit movies with an impact on their later lives that I feel they had on mine, but the times were just right for this medium to influence the culture in very significant ways. They were, indeed, the golden years of motion pictures.

Excursions

Waverly was the largest community in Bremer County—and the county seat—but I have pretty well described the limits of social life in the town. Opportunities for shopping were similarly limited—although my mother's ubiquitous Spiegel mail-order catalog greatly increased her purchasing choices. When greater action was desired (which for us kids translated into more recent movies or the chance to eat in a cafeteria), Waterloo—22 miles to the south—was the place to go. For those families that owned automobiles, that was a pretty short hop. For us, however, it required the use of public transportation. In Waverly, that boiled down to two possibilities—the bus or the WCF&N —the trolley. Earlier in its lifetime, the trolley line had run all the way up Bremer Avenue to the west end of town. When I was growing up there, however, the trolley terminus was on East Main Street directly across from the courthouse; just a block east of the publishing company. Adjoining is a photo of the trolley as it was in those days.



Unlike the steam locomotives that ran on the Great Western freight line nearby, the trolley was a single car powered by an electric motor. The electricity came from overhead wires. To connect the car to the wires, the trolley had a pair of spring-loaded rods with pulley wheels on the ends and ropes that the motorman could use to engage or disengage the pulley wheel from the overhead wire. Depending on which direction the trolley was going to travel, the pulley wheel at the rear of the coach was engaged by the motorman just before the trolley left the station.

I'm sure that, for people who grew up at that time in big cities, what I just described would have been a most familiar sight on their streets…just an everyday streetcar. But, for us, getting from here to there—and using something other than shoe leather—was anything but an everyday happening, and a ride on that trolley car was always an exciting experience.

I don't remember what it cost in those days to ride the WCF&N to Waterloo, but it wasn't very much. Good thing. I was never very well funded and I needed all the coin I could pocket to finance the dreams I carried with me to the "big city." At the time, Waterloo probably had a population of no more than a few tens of thousands, but it offered resources far more extensive than I could find on Main Street in Waverly. In particular, in addition to the big theaters with first-run movies and Bishop's cafeteria, there was a department store with a book department.

My fascination with books was one of the things I had acquired from my father. He was not an educated man, but he was an inveterate reader. Of course, as a typesetter, he read a lot during his work, and I have already mentioned how his expertise in raising chickens had come from that reading exercise. However, he was also an avid reader of good literature…not the classics necessarily, because he tended to favor short stories, but his choices were typically well-written and timeless narratives. He particularly enjoyed to stories of William Sydney Porter (O.

Henry), and he owned a volume that included the complete works of this favored author. He also enjoyed reading the stories of Edgar Alan Poe and Damon Runyon.

Early on, he infected me with the short story bug and I soon shared his fascination with the writings of all of these authors. In fact, my purchases at the department store in Waterloo included my own copies of the complete works of both O. Henry and Poe Regrettably, neither of these volumes has survived in my library, although I recently replaced the works of Poe.

Another author I recall being encouraged by my father to read was Frank L. Packard. Books by him were not readily available in bookstores that I haunted, but copies of some could be checked out from the public library in Waverly. At first glance, it might be thought that a fascination with Packard's writings violated dad's preference for short stories, but although Packard's yarns were published as novels—and the plots from chapter to chapter were connected—they were essentially collections of short stories. Because Packard is not as familiar an author as the others I've mentioned, it may be of interest to note that his protagonist, Jimmie Dale (The Grey Seal), became the prototype of a number of later double-life heroes, such as Batman, Zorro, The Shadow and The Green Hornet.

One final author for which I shared a passion with my father—and that drew me to the bookstore in Waterloo for copies—was P. G. Wodehouse, creator of the bumbling British aristocrat, Bertie Wooster, and his remarkable butler, Jeeves. Wodehouse was the one exception I can recall of a favored author of my father that did not prefer to write short stories—although I have discovered recently that he did write quite a few. He had simply captured The Old Man's unique sense of humor. When dad died, I happily acquired his Wodehouse collection to add to my own.

For families that did not own cars at that time, the only other public transportation out of town was the Jefferson Bus Line, although I don't recall riding the bus very often. Why the interurban (as it was known) was usually the preferred conveyance, I can't say, but when the Waverly High School basketball team made its second successive trip to the state championships—this time in Des Moines—I did have an adventure involving a bus trip that is worth relating.

I have mentioned my trip on the interurban with the high school band to the state basketball championships in Iowa City when I was in the eighth grade. Although the band was not invited to follow the team to Des Moines the following year, I did get a chance to attend the tournament. However, before I can relate the details of that adventure, I need to introduce the kid who was my best friend at the time (and remains a pal in our dotage).

Jesse Dwayne Chapman and I met very suddenly in the summer of 1942, when he swam in front of the diving board at the local swimming pool just as I entered the water from the tower above. We didn't collide, but it was close. He was a new kid in town and didn't yet know the rules about staying out from under the boards. How that encounter blossomed into friendship, I can't recall, but I soon learned that he and his family had just moved to Waverly from Canada. His father had been hired to resurrect the abandoned sugar beet processing plant in town.

Apparently, there had been a time in Waverly's history when it had been profitable for area farmers to grow sugar beets, and the processing plant had once flourished—but never in my lifetime. For me, that big old building was just one of the interesting curiosities to be found along the river during youthful explorations. No doubt, it was the availability of cane sugar at lower cost that had doomed the plant to the graveyard. However, with WWII now in full swing—and cane sugar becoming a more rare (and rationed) commodity—beet sugar was being considered as a viable alternative, and the beet processing plant was being re-commissioned.

By the spring of 1945, Dwayne (as he was called then) and I had become bosom pals and had spent many leisure hours together. I don't recall who hatched the plan to attend the state basketball championships that year after Waverly won in the district playoffs, but we decided to go and we got our parents to agree. In fact, Chapman's father did more than give his permission, he used his considerable clout to get us a room at one of the better Des Moines hotels. That was no small accomplishment when you consider that "March Madness" had long since co-opted every nook and cranny in the city.

We were fifteen years old and, although we were both good students and were considered by our parents and teachers to be responsible kids, it remains a mystery to me how we ever got permission to undertake this adventure. It was 120 miles to Des Moines and, if our team went on to the finals, we could be there for some three days. As I mentioned earlier, I had traveled some on my own at an even younger age and Dwayne had spent his pre-teen years living in a larger city (Winnipeg, I believe). So, with blessings from our families and with youthful self-assurance, we set off on the bus for the big city.

Most details of that adventure are now obscure, and our visit in Des Moines was a short one because Waverly's basketball team was eliminated in the first round. The only thing I can remember from that game was watching with increasing disgust as one of the referees continually called one of our guards for "double dribble" because of the way he palmed the ball as he moved up the court. Now, as I watch NBA games, I see the players do the same thing all the time. We had less than charitable opinions of that official, who had left us with no option but to return home on the next bus.

However, because of how late in the day we left Des Moines, the bus line did not schedule a stop in Waverly for that bus till the next day, so we ended up in Cedar Falls, fourteen miles short of our destination, at about ten o'clock at night. Our only options were to spend the night in Cedar Falls or walk home. Mustering our youthful self-assurance, we opted to walk and set out down Highway 218 toward home. I have no doubt that we could have completed to trek, although it would have probably required over three hours, but when we were perhaps three to four miles up the road, a car passed us and then pulled over. When we got to the car, we found that the driver was one of the custodians from our high school, who had been at a movie in Waterloo with his wife. He had recognized who we were as he passed us on the road and stopped to see what in the world we were doing out there. As I said earlier, people in town were always good about keeping an eye on other people's kids. We were, of course, very grateful for the lift. A photo of the two of us a couple of years later is shown on the right.

While I am on the subject of my friend, Jess, as he likes to be known now, I should mention that he answered to a slightly different name when were in high school. In fact, as evidence that he referred to himself by that name in those days, I recently found a picture post card from him postmarked from Chicago on August 8, 1946. The picture was of a scorpionfish from the Shedd Aquarium and the message was very short. It said simply, "The charming Chas. Adams," and was signed "P.B." Charlie Adams was a friend and classmate who, in fact, was somewhat better

looking than the fish. But there is a story to tell behind the initials that my friend employed to sign the card.

The summer he showed up in town, 1942, we were 12 years old, about to enter the seventh grade…and eligible to become boy scouts. In fact, we did join the scouts—and we began attending meetings, which were being held at that time in a small ersatz log building on the west bank of the river near Main Street. Appropriately, the building was called "The Boy Scout Cabin." Looking back on it, I can't imaging why anyone would want to spend an evening herding a bunch of boisterous adolescent boys, but apparently a couple of the older scouts in the troop were assigned on those evenings to maintain order. On the evening in question (and, interestingly, it is one of the few episodes in my short career as a boy scout that I can still remember with clarity), Chapman was being particularly rambunctious and one of the older scouts—a fellow named Bob Coonradt—finally had enough of it. Singling out my playful friend, he shouted, "Knock it off, you peanut brain." For some reason, the name stuck. To us, he was Peanut Brain through the rest of our growing-up years. However, lest you get the idea that this moniker accurately represented the quantity of gray matter between my friend's ears, he was already the best student in our class and went on to become valedictorian when we graduated from high school.

World War II…and a Big Change

One Sunday in December, when I was 11 years old, I was invited by one of my sixth-grade pals to go with him and his father to the city dump and spend the morning shooting rats. As I have already mentioned, ours was not a church-going family, so for us the Sabbath was just another day of leisure. As I remember, my friend's family were good Lutherans—but apparently not so good that the head of the house didn't mind skipping church to take two sixth-graders on a rat-shooting excursion.

I don't have any memory of how many rodents might have perished from our efforts that day—and I'm sure I would never have remembered that outing at all—if it hadn't been for the news my father had for me when I arrived home at about noon. He told me that Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Naval base in Hawaii, had just been attacked by the Japanese. Even at my age, I was aware that the world had been at war in Europe and Asia for several years, and it was not hard for me to figure that this attack was likely to bring us into it. Thus began a chapter in my life that dominated events for the next three and a half years—and, in many ways—much of the rest of my life.

I have already related some of the things that happened in the family during the war, but there are a few additional reflections from the perspective of a small-town adolescent living through those times. By the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, my brother Don had been in the U.S. Navy for almost a year and had seen sea duty aboard the heavy cruiser USS Augusta. In fact, he was on the Augusta earlier that year when President Roosevelt met secretly with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill aboard that ship in the North Atlantic. So, I was perhaps more aware than most kids my age that World War II was destined to intrude into the lives of families in America. The attack by the Japanese simply brought that destiny into reality in a few short hours on that December Sunday.

Although our country has been in a number of wars since that time, no period of conflict has had as great an influence on adolescent boys than WWII. In fact, a few years ago, when I documented my experiences a decade later in the Korean War, I speculated that my decision to volunteer for the infantry had its origin in lingering patriotic fervor fed by WWII propaganda. Wherever we went; whatever we did in those days, we were immersed in the culture of a nation at war.

The radio—already a dominant factor in my life—now became a critical link to influences that were shaping my budding worldview. Patriotism, of course, was at the heart of that developing philosophy of life. We, the Allies, were the good guys—the Axis were the bad guys. The dramas, the music—even the comedies on the radio pursued patriotic themes that inspired young minds to dream of heroic exploits on the battlefield. And, for a dime, I could go to the Waverly Theater on a Saturday afternoon and see those exploits played out on film by my favorite actors. It was an era of unwavering allegiance to national purpose…unexcelled before or since.

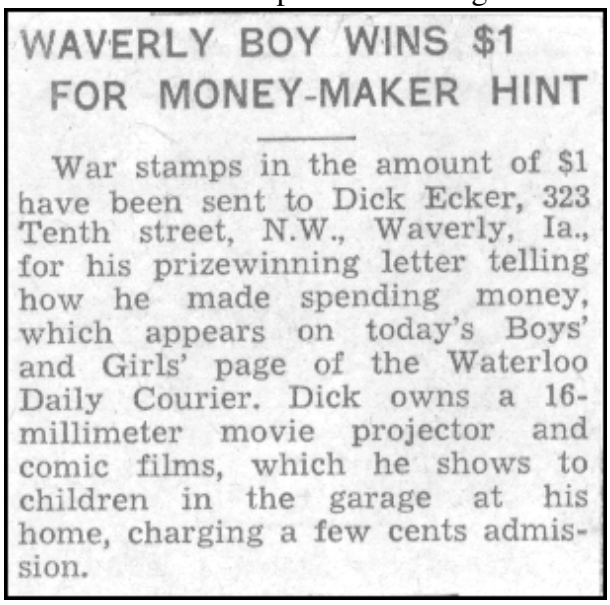
One very significant way that a nation at war benefits from pervasive patriotism is the willingness of the populace to sacrifice. For a kid, patriotic sacrifice probably took on a very different shape than what was experienced by most adults. In our family particularly, some of the things we had to do without really didn't require sacrifice. We didn't own a car, so the rationing of tires and gasoline didn't affect us. I was certainly aware of other rationed commodities, particularly certain food items, but I don't recall ever feeling that rationing was a big burden in

my life. Our family had only begun to recover from the Great Depression when the war started, so doing without things had been a way of life for most of my pre-teen years.

I have already mentioned that, for my father, meals without meat would always be viewed as a significant hardship, so I'm sure that meat rationing presented a real challenge for him. Of course, it was this challenge that inspired him to volunteer our family to nurse those two runt pigs…and to convert our garage/playroom into a chicken house. He also loved butter, which was a rationed item during the war. In fact, in all of his 90-plus years, I don't think he every knowingly ate any margarine…or even allowed it in his house. His solution to that challenge was simple. Cream wasn't rationed and butter was made from cream. So we bought cream and made butter. It was funny looking stuff without any coloring—but it was butter.

Looking back on those years, I find it difficult to separate memories of my adolescence from my memories of the war, because the war was such a dominant influence at the time. I have already related its dominance in the media. Its economic influence was also substantial, even for an adolescent kid. If you made money, it was expected that some of it would go for the purchase of savings stamps which, when enough had been accrued, could be converted to a war bond. War bonds were sold by the U.S. Government to help finance the war. Everyone was encouraged to buy the bonds. Entertainment and sports celebrities lent their influence to appeal for citizens to invest in the bonds as an act of patriotism.

I can still recall going to the post office for my first savings stamps. The clerk gave me a book and I dutifully pasted the stamps on the first page. To fill the book, I had to purchase denominations totaling $18.75, which then could be traded in for a $25 war bond—an obligation that would mature in ten years. I didn't have any regular employment through most of the war years, but I found ways to earn some change to help fill my book with savings stamps…or to purchase a lemon phosphate at Meyer's soda fountain. One way was to collect scrap metal and deliver it to Dorfman's junkyard, where it could be sold to help the war effort. Like most families at the time, we had a red wagon that I could use to haul the scrap—and also to go door-to-door in the neighborhood selling sweet corn from our garden in the fall of the year.



WAVERLY BOY WINS $1 FOR MONEY-MAKER HINT

War stamps in the amount of $1 have been sent to Dick Ecker, 323 Tenth street, N.W., Waverly, Ia., for his prizewinning letter telling how he made spending money, which appears on today's Boys' and Girls' page of the Waterloo Daily Courier. Dick owns a 16-millimeter movie projector and comic films, which he shows to children in the garage at his home, charging a few cents admission.

The story of one of my enterprises even made it into the Waterloo Courier newspaper. I found a copy of the article (shown on the right) among my mother's effects when she died. Although I had forgotten about my fleeting celebrity from the enterprise, I do recall very clearly the 16mm projector and some of the movies we had accumulated to show with it. Actually they were not my possessions as the article suggested, but something either my parents or one of my older brothers had acquired. By then, however, the novelty had worn off for most of my elders in the family and I was the one who remained fascinated with their potential.

The article was not dated—and I have no record of the letter to the paper that was the basis of my award—but the time had to have been sometime in the summer of 1942. We were in the first year of the war and the purchase of war bonds (and stamps) was all the rage—and

among the easiest ways to demonstrate your patriotism. By the following summer, the remodeled garage I used as my movie theater had become a chicken house.

The two movie subjects I recall from the collection I used for that enterprise were Krazy Kat cartoons and Our Gang comedies. Our course, they were all black-and-white films and had no sound, but in those days talking films had only been in use for about 15 years, so movie directors still were skilled at using actions to communicate the narrative. I'm sure these offerings got plenty of laughs from my pint-sized customers.

For some reason, one of my most enduring memories of the war years in Waverly was the Youth Center. As I have mentioned, the endurance of this memory probably had as much or more to do with my passage through puberty than the fact that there was a war on, because the two were so coincident in time. Whatever the case, the youth center was established in the early '40s, occupying an old two-story frame building a block south of Main Street on the east side of the river.

The upper floor, as I recall, was a single room with a polished floor that invited the youth of the town to dance to Big Band music from a jukebox. It was probably in that venue that I first learned to dance the two-step. Regrettably, my terpsicorian education ended there. Many of my classmates went on to become adept at jitterbugging, but alas I have spent my life as a minimally-accomplished two-stepper—although I could fake my way through a waltz.

The Big Band music of those war years left an indelible impression on my aesthetic tastes that endures to this day. The trombone of Tommy Dorsey, the trumpets of Harry James and Buddy Berrigan, the clarinets of Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw remain standards against which I continue to compare contemporary artists. The awesome arrangements of Glen Miller's band stand out in my impression as unparalleled in all the years since those golden days.

I don't have any recollection of the youth center after those war years. Perhaps it was discontinued or it may be that, after I entered high school, social activities found another focus for me. However, coming as it did at that pivotal time in my life, that institution remains a highlight I will always remember.

A couple of other memories of the war years in Waverly have stuck with me over the years and are probably worth mentioning. I don't know why in the world we would have had air-raid drills our little rural community, but I do remember we had them. We even had neighborhood air-raid wardens. I don't remember who ours was…probably one of the college professors…but I can recall pulling all the window shades, and hunkering down listening to the radio till the warning horn sounded the all clear.

I have mentioned several memories involving the canning factory in town. They canned green beans early in the summer and sweet corn later in the year…and, of course dill pickles. Both my mom and my brother, Ted, worked there at one time or another and I may have picked beans one year (which many of my classmates did regularly), but it was hard work and I probably found something else less strenuous to do with my time. Or it may be that the demand for my labor—such as it was—was diminished when the war began to produce German prisoners.

Prisoners of war were limited by the Geneva Convention in the kinds of work they could be required to do. Food processing was allowed, so Waverly—a predominantly German-American community and the location of the Marshall Canning Company—became the assigned home for a number of these prisoners. As we lived only three blocks from the factory—and not much farther to a number of the bean fields, I can recall seeing some of the prisoners on occasion, but we were never allowed close enough to fraternize.

I need to include the murder of Chick Winchell in my stories of WWII because, if it had not been for the war, Chick might not have been quite so available for the assault. At the time of the war, there had not been a murder in Waverly in recent history. That made it big news in town and what made it especially big news for me was that I knew the man. Chick and his family lived just a few block from our house, on 5th Avenue a block east of the Warburg practice field. Like the Everetts that I mentioned earlier, the Winchells had converted the front porch of their house into a small sundry store. So, when we were sent off for a loaf of bread or a quart of milk, we could go either to Everetts or to Winchells—and I can recall many trips to Winchells where I would be served usually by Mrs. Winchell, but sometimes by Chick.

In addition, the kids in our neighborhood got well acquainted with Chick every Halloween, because he was a part time peace officer who had duty on our end of town to keep the Halloween tricks from becoming too destructive. I can recall that part of the fun at Halloween was avoiding detection by Chick in his familiar Model-A Ford as he patrolled the neighborhood looking for malefactors. We were not malefactors (mostly we just rang doorbells and ran), but he was still the long arm of the law and we we were challenged to keep out of his way.

The reason the war became a factor in Chick's murder was that, during the war, he was the night watchman at the local power plant. Here is how the power company described the event in its page on the web:

> *Immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor, many communities hired guards to protect their municipal services. The Waverly City Council approved the hiring of guards two days after the attack. A local man, Glenn Winchell, was one of the men hired. He patrolled on foot, regularly checking the city fuel tanks, water pumps, reservoirs, and electric plant. For this he was paid about $70 a month. On the night of September 25, 1943, Winchell had just punched one of the clocks on his route and was proceeding west on First Avenue N.E. toward the light plant. As he reached the middle of the block, a man stepped out of the darkness and shot Winchell. The entire episode took only seconds, and Winchell was dead. The gunman ran down the block, jumped into a car, and took off down First St. toward the Bremer Avenue bridge. A number of people who were in the area heard the shots, several caught a glimpse of the killer and his license plate as he drove away. Rumors and fear spread rapidly, but it soon became apparent that the killing was not part of a conspiracy against any of the utilities. For nearly two weeks the gunman eluded lawmen. Stanley Kaster was finally captured near Clear Lake, Iowa, as he attempted to reach the home of a relative. When asked why he had shot Glenn Winchell, he replied that he had wanted his gun and holster. Kaster was convicted of murder and sentenced to death.*

A couple of things I remember from newspaper reports of this event was that Chick was shot with a 12 guage shotgun with double-ought (very large) shot, that the killer was an ex-con that Chick had helped put into prison and that the initial manhunt for the killer was centered in a wooded area just south of town.

My brother, Ted, was in high school when the war began and graduated in May of 1944. Earlier that year he had earned enough working as a mechanic at a local garage that he could buy a car—a 1935 Hudson Terraplane. I think he paid $150.00 for it. He had rented space for the car

in a barn/garage on the alley behind August Englebrecht's house, just down from the horseshoe pits that occupied the Warburg faculty on summer evenings. It was, in fact, in that garage that I left my clarinet after Ted had given me a ride home after band practice—and from which the instrument disappeared, never to be seen again.

Right after graduation that year, Ted and I climbed into the Terraplane and motored down to Burlington in the southeast corner of the state, where our aunt and uncle lived. While we were there, two momentous events occurred. First, news reports came in that allied forces had landed on the Normandy coast in France. We listened to those reports with rapt attention. One particular interchange between a U.S. based commentator and a correspondent with the troops in the attack has always stuck with me—most likely because of its bawdy implications. The correspondent was describing the scene of battle when a very loud explosion could be heard—obviously an enemy round landing nearby. The correspondent exclaimed, "Excuse me while I catch my breath." The commentator in the U.S. retorted, "I think I would have said, 'Excuse me while I clean out my pants.'"

The second event of significance was a telephone call from our father a day or so later, announcing that he had just purchased the local flower business from Jack Wright. He requested us to return home immediately to join him and mom in the enterprise. Actually, dad had bought only the retail part of the business to begin with and had obtained an option to acquire all of the greenhouses at the end of a year. So, I suddenly found myself not only facing my first job ever at the age of 14, but I was also facing a mammoth change in the nature of the family life to which I had become so accustomed for those 14 years. The war didn't become secondary with that change, but other things certainly become more dominant.

Greenhouse

When my father bought the flower business in the Summer of 1944, my brother Don was in the Navy, Ted was already employed full time as an automobile mechanic—and he would be eligible for the draft in a few months—and Tom was nine years old. So, it was clear that, although dad had been approved for the loan to buy the business at least in part because he had sired a stable of sons to be available to help in the business, there was only one available son at the moment…and I was it. As a condition of the purchase, Jack Wright had agreed to remain available to instruct my mom and dad on the retail end of the business. The greenhouses were attached to the flower shop and he continued to run the growing end of the enterprise, agreeing to sell to the flower shop whatever he grew, so he was around most of the time. However, he had recently converted one of the seven houses in the greenhouse complex into an environment for raising orchids, so he was devoting the majority of his own energies to the orchids at that time. This photo, taken in the late 1940s, shows the front of the greenhouse (facing 3rd Avenue), the flower shop on the left, with Ted standing in the service entrance. The customer entrance was between the green house and the flower shop. After my parents bought the business they decided that, because the business had carried the name of Wright's Greenhouse for many years, that the name should be retained. The photo below shows Ted and our dad in the workroom of the flower shop.

Jack Wright was a fascinating guy—although he was inclined to shift his interests at frequent intervals. In fact, I learned a lot from him. Of course, he was a close friend of the family—and a relative by marriage—so the greenhouse was by no means foreign territory to me. However, it was a bit of culture shock to suddenly find myself a scion of the new owner and charged with the responsibility to help run the place. That responsibility became a disquieting reality the following month when my parents—who knew little about merchandizing and design as it applied to the retail flower business—enrolled in a weeklong course in Minneapolis to begin to learn how to run the business. For that week, I was left in charge of the flower shop, with the assurance that Jack would be available to help in the event I had any problems. It was fortunate that July was a slow month in the flower business, because I don't recall ever seeing him once in the shop during the week I was "minding the store." However, I also don't recall encountering any problems that would have required my

calling on him for help…although I did enjoy reveling in all the fuss my parents made over me when they learned that I had run the business all by myself while they were away.

For our first year in the business, the family remained in the home on 10th Street, and dad continued in his job at the publishing company. The shop and greenhouses were just a few blocks down 3rd Avenue from our house, so it was an easy walk to get to work. I started high school that fall. The school was only two blocks from the flower shop, so a typical routine for me on school mornings—particularly if there was a funeral scheduled for that day—was to stop by the shop on the way and spend some time creating funeral sprays before I had to be a school at 9 o'clock. How early I had to get to work depended on how important a personage was being buried and, thus, how many funeral arrangements had been ordered.

In those days, the preferred funeral arrangement was a spray; a combination of flowers and fern fronds, all tied together and embellished with a bow of appropriately colored ribbon. Because any idiot could be taught to tie a funeral spray, I took my place at the design bench in the flower shop soon after we acquired the business…and maintained that place for most of the next six years. Never, in all my years at that bench, did I ever graduate to more complicated floral designs than the simple funeral spray—nor do I recall ever complaining about remaining an idiot spray maker.

Much of the business in the flower shop at that time was done over the telephone—and I still remember the phone number of the shop (108). Phone service then was still being conducted through a team of operators at switchboards in an office downtown. To make a call, you lifted the receiver of the phone, waited for the operator to come on the line and ask, "Number, please," and then gave her the number you wanted to call. Residences were typically party lines and were assigned three numbers followed by either a "J" or an "R"—such as 234-J. Businesses had private lines and were assigned just three numbers, hence 108 for flower shop.

Because the flower business at that time depended so much on the telephone, much of the trade was done on credit. People would call and say something like, "This is George Schmidt. I read in the paper that Sam Schwartz died and is being buried tomorrow. I'd like to send a spray of red and white carnations for about $3.00. Put 'George and Mary Schmidt' on the card and send me the bill." Of course, although funerals were a big part of the business, the same kinds of conversations were repeated for birthdays, anniversaries, graduations or whatever. And, although our fictitious Mr. Schmidt was certainly not a big spender, he could get at least a dozen carnations in the spray he ordered. Times have changed.

In addition, when people ordered flowers in those days, they were delivered without charge. And that's where Mrs. Ecker's number three son really earned his pay—at least when the weather permitted. At 14, I was still too young to drive a car, but Ted's big-basket bicycle (see the photo in a previous chapter) was eminently available, now that he possessed his own car. So, late in the afternoon each day, I would load up the basket of the bike, plot out a delivery route and deliver flowers to waiting customers all over town. As I recall—whenever the consignments were too large or the weather too inclement—Ted's car also served the delivery needs of the business for the first several years our family owned the business. (Six months after we bought the business, Ted was drafted into the Army and my parents became custodians of the Terraplane while he was serving in the military.)

When I started as a freshman in high school in the fall of that year, my father made it very clear that participation in sports was not going to be an option for me. My after-school time was going to be needed in the business. I did remain in the band, perhaps because it's practices were in the morning before school—or more likely because I was now an established member in

good standing (having become the bass clarinet section…and having outgrown my inclination to throw peanut shells into Ewald Mueller's sousaphone), so my departure would leave a noticeable vacancy.

Except for my responsibilities as a funeral spray designer, peddling that unique bike around town making deliveries and waiting on an occasional customer, I don't recall many specifics about my first year in the flower business. I do recall a fairly normal freshman year in high school, although I did miss joining my friends in after school activities. However, something happened the following spring that changed all of that. To understand that change, you have to understand something about the kind of influence small town sports boosters can have on otherwise recalcitrant parents.

That spring, the head football, basketball and track coach at our high school was also my Phys. Ed. instructor. One day in May, he assembled our PE class at the fair grounds, where the outdoor sports teams did their workouts. It was a nice day and the coach decided to have our class run sprints on the grass (the only track at the fairgrounds had a dirt surface and was constructed for horse racing or midget race cars). By the end of that class period, Mrs. Ecker's number three son was discovered to be considerably faster than everyone else in the class. The following conversation ensued…Coach: "Why aren't you out for track?" Student: "I have to work after school."

In a small town, high school boys who can run fast are viewed as potential contributors to winning sports teams, so my reason for being unavailable to make such a contribution was not accepted by the coach as the final word (and also by a number of business men in town, many of whom were boosters and shared membership in the local Rotary Club with my father). So, by the next day, dad had been convinced that he could spare me after school after all. He even encouraged me to honor the coach's request that I join the track team that day—although the season was almost over and only one meet remained. (I did run in the meet, although I did not distinguish myself.) Thereafter, I participated in sports with my parent's blessing—and even enthusiastic support. However, when they exercised their option to buy the whole greenhouse, my responsibilities increased accordingly. Assuming that a description of some of those responsibilities may be of interest to readers who don't know much about the greenhouse business (at least as it was in the mid 1940s), I offer the following recollections.

The greenhouse complex that became the family business included, in addition to the flower shop, a growing area "under glass" that totaled some ten thousand square feet (about a quarter of an acre), work areas for potting and transplanting and a huge coal-fired heating system. Heat for the complex was provided by a stoker-fed furnace, with a 500-gallon hot water boiler and a coal bin that could accommodate some fifty tons of coal. In addition, a two-bedroom apartment had been built over the work areas, the boiler and the coal bin. It was to that apartment our family moved later that year after Jack Wright transplanted his family and his orchid business to a new location he had established on the north edge of town.

There were seven greenhouses in our facility, with one large house (perhaps twenty-five feet across) along 3rd Avenue adjacent to the flower shop, and a group of four smaller houses behind it and running perpendicular to it. One of these opened into the flower shop and was known as the "show house" because it was there that potted plants were routinely displayed for sale. Two more houses, adjacent and perpendicular to the show house, extended to 5th Street on the west.

Most of the area under glass was occupied by benches, each about five feet wide and the length of the house it occupied (minus the space necessary to traverse the ends). Most of the

benches were constructed to be filled with dirt and in them we grew plants that would produce cut flowers for sale in the shop. The bread-and-butter crops I remember most from those days were chrysanthemums, stocks, snapdragons and carnations, all of which grew well at the nighttime winter temperature we maintained in the greenhouses—i.e., 50˚ F. And, of course, winter was the prime time for growing crops in the greenhouse because, in those days and in our neck of the woods, it was the least expensive—and often the only—source. Other cut flowers, particularly roses, were purchased from a wholesale greenhouse in Charles City, some 30 miles to the north. Some of the benches in the houses nearest the flower shop were constructed to hold potted plants, because we sold a lot of them—particularly bedding plants in the spring and others for special occasions, like poinsettias at Christmas and lilies at Easter. Shown here are a couple of benches of potted geraniums ready for sale in the spring.

Obviously, in an area where winter temperatures frequently dropped below zero, it was a major challenge to maintain 50 degrees inside with only a fraction of an inch of glass between our flowers and the outside weather. Daytime temperatures in the greenhouse were usually less of a problem, particularly if the sun was shining. The term “greenhouse effect,” of course, had its origin in the phenomenon I experienced almost every day working in our business. The sun provides radiant energy that passes easily through the glass, heating things in the interior of the greenhouse. That heat increases the temperature of the inside air, which cannot escape except through ventilation. So, on cold winter days when the sun is shining, the inside temperature can become very warm, sometimes even requiring the ventilators—built into the roofs of the houses—to be opened. However, although we welcomed the relief on the heating system the greenhouse effect provided, it also had a significant down side as well.

When I described the heating system earlier, I failed to mention that the heat from the boiler was transferred to the greenhouses by means of an extensive array of hot water pipes, primarily groups of four pipes running under each of the raised benches in the complex. The total volume of water in this array was some ten thousand gallons, twenty times the volume in the boiler. The water was circulated from the boiler by a series of water pumps, each controlled by a thermostat—normally set at 50 degrees. The temperature in the boiler was maintained at 180 degrees. Thus, if the day had been sunny and the greenhouse effect had dominated through the day, the situation when the sun went down could leave you with 500 gallons in the boiler at 180 degrees and ten thousand gallons in the system at perhaps 70 degrees. It doesn’t take a degree in physics to figure out that, if you waited till the temperature in the greenhouses dropped to 50 before the pumps began to circulate water out of the boiler, the furnace would never be able to catch up and the place would freeze up long before morning.

So, soon after noon on really cold, sunny days, we would have to go to each of the thermostats and turn them up to maximum temperature, causing the pumps to begin circulating water out of the boiler. This caused the furnace—which had been idle for several hours—to come to life and begin the process of heating all of the water in the system to a temperature high enough to keep the greenhouses at the minimum 50 degrees. It took a long time and, often, the

temperature in the boiler would never reach its maximum through the whole night. And, if we were tardy in turning on the pumps, we could see temperatures drop into the low 40s before morning, causing sleepless nights as the alarm system warned of impending disaster.

Meanwhile, that furnace was burning a lot of coal and creating a lot of clinkers (the congealed unburnable residue left from the combusted fuel). Left unattended, that residue could accumulate in and around the retort and block the flow of fuel and air into the fire. So, the fire had to be attended regularly with long iron tools that were used to pry the accumulating molten clinkers from around the retort and drag them to the side to cool. Later, that residue would be pulled from the firebox and shoveled to the rear of the furnace room. In winter, this routine dominated our lives. There was no escape.

There was also no escape from concern about the supply of coal to the auger that fed fuel from the coal bin to the fire. In the concrete floor of the coal bin was a steel hopper that led to the auger mechanism. When the bin was full of coal, an ample supply to the hopper was never a problem. But as the bin began to empty, we always had to make sure that the coal was piled up high enough over the hopper that the supply would last through the night. So, before retiring in our apartment for the night, one of us (usually I) had to go out and mount the ladder to the coal bin, climb the ten feet or so to the entrance and down the inside ladder to the level of the coal. Once there, I would shovel sufficient fuel over the hopper that we could sleep through the night in peace—assuming that something else didn't cause the system to fail. If the following day was cloudy and cold, that same routine might have to be repeated in the morning before school.

In response to the obvious question concerning how I could maintain any reasonable amount of personal hygiene spending so much time in a coal bin, I can only say that I'm sure I made efforts to wear old clothes, avoid coal dust as much as possible and clean myself up the best I could. Certainly, standards of hygiene at that time remained far less severe than they are today but, as I'll be explaining shortly, the facilities for maintaining personal cleanliness in the facilities we had acquired from Jack Wright were primitive even for those days.

The final chapter in the ongoing struggle to keep the flora under our care from falling victim to the winter weather took place every Saturday, when we had to deal with those clinkers that had collected in the back of the furnace room during the week. We also had to clean out the soot and scale that were continuously accumulating in the boiler flues.

The furnace room was some eight feet below ground and perhaps six feet wide, with concrete walls that extended all the way from the face of the furnace to the alley behind the building. At ground level above the back of the furnace room there was a door that open into the alley, and above the door on the inside there was a pulley with a rope connected to a large steel basket in the boiler room below. The pulley assembly and the basket were the means by which we disposed of the clinkers and ashes from the furnace. It was obviously a two-man job. One of us remained in the furnace room with a scoop shovel to fill the basket with ashes and raise the basket with the pulley up to the alley door. The guy in the alley outside grabbed it and dumped it into…

Before I proceed, I need to mention that, in addition to the various greenhouse (and living) facilities we acquired from Jack Wright when we purchased the business, we also became the owners of a 1931 Model A Ford pickup. For the next several years, that old pickup was in perpetual use—hauling everything involved in the business of growing flowers. On Saturdays in winter, cinders were a prime consignment.

I don't recall now whether the week's ashes could be accommodated in a single pickup load or whether we had to make return trips to the city dump. Whatever number of trips we had

to make, all of those ashes had to be removed as quickly as possible, because the boiler room had to be set up early enough in the day that the really dirty furnace-related job could be done before the sun went down. It was a job everybody loved to hate…and I drew the short straw much of the time.

The boiler was positioned above the firebox in the furnace, perhaps four feet above the floor, and situated so that the heat from the burning coal would flow from the rear of the boiler through a couple dozen flues and out the front of the boiler into the chimney. The flues greatly increased the surface area in contact with the water in the boiler. But, during a week of use, the flues would accumulate a coating of soot and scale, impeding the transfer of heat. So, the last furnace-maintenance job of the week involved the scraping and brushing of the flues to remove the offending substances.

First, the furnace had to be shut down and then a scaffold was erected in the boiler room to allow access to the front of the boiler, which had a heavy steel door that was hinged at the top. When the door was opened, the front of the boiler was visible and the flue openings could be accessed by someone standing on the scaffold. Then "the sweep," as the guy who drew the short straw could appropriately be called, had to run a tight-fitting scraper on a long pole several times through each of those flues—followed by a repeat performance with a stiff wire brush. The result of all of this effort was a generous accumulation of soot—both in the front of the boiler and all over "the sweep"—that had to be removed. The soot that avoided "the sweep" was collected into a bucket and put aside for the next trip to the city dump. Removing the accumulation from person of "the sweep" involved a more complicated process.

Anyone who has ever lived where Jack Wright was the previous occupant (and I have done it twice) has had to experience the strange configurations that resulted from his "quick and dirty" approach to the business of plumbing. I had to deal with one of those configurations every Saturday afternoon after cleaning the furnace flues. The fact is, the apartment our family acquired from him did not have a water heater. What it did have was a pot-bellied, wood burning stove with a water jacket that was connected to the hot-water outlets in the apartment. When you wanted hot water—at least in the quantities required for a bath—you had to start a fire in the pot stove…and wait for the water to heat. That's what I did every Saturday preparing to make myself presentable for whatever recreational activities might be awaiting me that evening.

The pot stove sat on a small concrete pedestal in a catch-all area adjacent to the inside wall of the coal bin. That area was covered with a high, sloping glass roof that extended from the gutter at the end of the north-south greenhouses to the south side of the apartment. It was well that the roof was a high one in that area because Jack Wright was notorious for plumbing with overhead pipes. Those pipes provided cold water into the bottom of the water jacket on the pot stove and hot water out of the top. So, with a bit of patience, sufficient quantities of hot water were finally available so I could fill the bath tub in the apartment to an acceptable level to make me into a presentable citizen for the weekend. Fortunately, I was just starting high school when we bought the greenhouse, so I got a daily shower there in Phys. Ed. or sports participation—and I didn't have to fire up the pot stove during the week. I assume that my mom got hot water for washing dishes—and my dad for shaving—by heating a teakettle on the stove…and I'm sure that I wasn't the only one in the family to fire up that old stove when a bath was called for.

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When our family moved into the apartment over the greenhouse, Jack Wright moved his family into an old farmhouse across the Great Western tracks on the north edge of town, where he had purchased 10 or 12 acres for his most recent enterprise—a greenhouse for growing exclusively orchids. Eight years later, he decided to move to Colorado to undertake a new venture, so he sold the orchid houses and most of the property to my parents. At that time, I was recently married after a tour in the army during the Korean War. Assuming at that time that I would make a career in the family flower business—which I looked upon as a great improvement over being shot at by Chinese regulars—my new wife and I took advantage of the opportunity to buy Jack's house on the property. The house included about three acres of property and cost us $7,000.

The property was beyond the city water system, so it had its own well. Water from the well was supplied by a pump, which fed an expansion tank that assured constant pressure in the system. The expansion tank was in a utility room that had been built onto the back of the house. Also in the utility room were a water softener (which hadn't been recharged in years), a water heater and a Bendix automatic washer. Jack had sold us the house with the understanding that he would keep the Bendix.

Not surprisingly, the plumbing in the utility room bore clear evidence that Jack Wright had been at work there. Across the middle of the room, from the expansion tank on one side to the water softener on the other, there was a water pipe about five feet above the floor. The only way to get from one side of the room to the other was to duck under the pipe. So, after work one Saturday after we were settled in the house, I set about to reroute the water pipe and to remove the useless water softener and the automatic washer Jack wanted to keep. The ordeal that followed was truly unforgettable.

It seemed at the outset like a pretty straightforward undertaking. Plumbing was a routine part of life for a guy in the greenhouse business, and I had all the tools and equipment I could possibly need just half a block away where we had several new greenhouses under construction. All I had to do was remove current connection of the offending water pipe to the expansion tank and reconnect a series of new pipes that followed an out-of-the way route along the wall. The new pipe would bypass the water softener and reconnect to the water heater. Simple…or so I thought.

Virtually all household plumbing in those days was done using galvanized iron pipe. The galvanizing protected the pipe from rust—but that protection was eliminated at the ends of the pipe where they were threaded for fittings. So, as it happened, while I was working to disassemble the offending pipe, its connection to the expansion tank broke where the threads had been weakened by years of rust. And, try as I might—over an extended period of time—I could not find a way to remove the broken end from the opening in the tank. The tank was equipped with an additional opening on the opposite side—which could be accessed by removing a plug—but that still left me with a hole in the tank with its threads obstructed by the corroded end of a broken pipe.

Having exhausted all other options—and with the hour approaching midnight—I finally retrieved an acetylene welder from the greenhouse and painstakingly filled the raw opening with melted brass. It was my only option at that hour, and we were not going to have any water in the house till I had an expansion tank that could endure fifty pounds of pressure. The rest of the plumbing was pretty uncomplicated—but time consuming, as I had to take each measured piece

of pipe to the greenhouse to use the pipe vice and threader. So a couple of hours later, I had the major plumbing job completed and only faced the removal of the automatic washer, which should have been no problem. However, again I had underestimated Jack Wright.

The Bendix, one of the earliest of automatic washers, was neither a top-loader nor a front-loader. Its tub was on an angle of about 45 degrees, which probably made it a challenge to balance—at least Jack must have found it a challenge, because when I tried to move the washer, it didn't budge. He had cemented the feet of the machine into the concrete floor of the room. Ever hopeful that that I could overcome Jack's methodology with a minimum of effort, I got a crowbar to see if I could pry the feet out of the concrete. The machine still didn't budge. So I went to the boiler room in the greenhouse and returned with the ten-foot long, one-inch diameter steel rod we used to stoke the furnace. All I accomplished with this massive pry bar was to bend it. The machine remained firmly in place.

Left with no other alternative, and with daylight beginning to streak the eastern sky, I turned to the acetylene welding outfit I had used to braze over the opening in the expansion tank. Included in that equipment was a cutting torch. If I couldn't get the feet of the washer out of the floor, then I would cut them off and let Jack worry about getting new feet for his washer. However, he had saved his best surprise for last. When I began to cut through the first of the feet, I was overcome with a pungent vapor coming from the area of my cut. As I fled the room to escape the fumes, I knew instantly what I was dealing with. Many years earlier, included in the education I received from working with Jack Wright, I had discovered some of the properties of the element sulfur, for which he had a great fascination. Among the properties of this element is a relatively low melting point (a little over 400ºF) and the formation on cooling of a rock solid crystal. For some applications it makes an ideal cement. However, it will begin to burn at a temperature only slightly higher than its melting point, forming sulfur dioxide—a highly noxious gas.

Jack had used his favorite element to secure the Bendix to the floor and I had ignited the sulfur with the torch as I was cutting off the legs. I don't recall now how I avoided asphyxiation as I freed the washer from his ingenious method of securing its feet, but I do recall that it was five in the morning before we got to bed. Then, to top off the experience, we had a knock on the door at nine a.m. from out-of-town visitors who had come to see our new home.

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With perhaps a mile of heating an watering pipes in the greenhouses, plumbing was one of the earliest skills (except for tying funeral sprays) that I acquired when I became an employee of the family business, but it was by no means the only one. The term "jack of all trades" applied particularly well to anyone who had to maintain a range of greenhouses. So, as my tenure in the business progressed, so did my acquisition of maintenance skills. At various times, as needs arose, I became a carpenter, an electrician, a mason and, of course, a glazier. A glazier is defined as "someone who cuts and sets glass in windows." Our place had a lot of "windows," so replacing and resetting glass was a major component of maintaining the facility. However, as it is not my intent to write a primer on running a flower business, I'd like to highlight just one routine that, as a kid, became a memorable part of my life in the business.

I have already pointed out that most of the benches in the greenhouses were used for growing cut flowers. One essential property of these flowers, if they were to be of maximum use in the flower shop, was straight stems. To get them to grow straight, we had to provide a support system. In your backyard garden, you might uses stakes to support your flowers, but we had a

better system. All it required was a few lengths of old water pipe and a lot of baling wire and string.

In those days, new plants to be raised indoors for cut flowers were planted in benches separated by perhaps 8-10 inches in each direction—and before they had grown enough to begin to require support, two vertical pipes were attached to each end of the bench and extending several feet above it. Then a horizontal pipe was wired to the verticals at whatever level above the surface of the bench was going to be needed to support the growing plants. Between the horizontal pipes on each end a length of baling wire was stretched tightly, extending along the length of the bench and between each of the rows of plants. To complete the support matrix, two of us—one on each side of the bench—would tie a length of string across the bench, looped around each wire and between the plants. Typically, this process was repeated two more times as the plants grew to their full height—requiring something for the stringers to stand on to reach across the bench at the higher levels. All kinds of plants—chrysanthemums snapdragons, stocks, asters and carnations—all required the same kind of support system when they were grown. A couple of benches of carnations, reinforced by three layers of wire-and-string supports, are shown here.

Although my youth didn't end abruptly when my parents bought the flower business, it certainly changed unalterably. Family life was now dominated by the business—as was my personal life, although I don't recall it ever being so dominant that I was deprived of the opportunity to be a pretty normal teenager.

In the matter of being a teenager in the flower business, there is one more story that should be told. One of the things I developed from regular contact with Jack Wright was an interest in growing orchids. He not only encouraged that interest, he gave me several orchid plants to start a collection. They became prized possessions and I nurtured them with the same dedication that Tom and I had committed to those "uneaten" chickens some years earlier.

One of my plants was a Cymbidium species, a plant that produced, when it bloomed, a stem of medium-sized, yellowish-colored blossoms. As it happened, the plant bloomed in the spring of my junior year in high school, just in time for the Junior Class prom. Although I did not date much in high school, I did find a date for that prom, and I had my mom assemble the seven blossoms from that Cymbidium into a corsage for that young lady. I'm sure I did not impress her with my footwork and my small talk, but she certainly had the fanciest corsage in the gym that evening.