

1. GROWING UP AND SCHOOL YEARS

It was on a 160 acre farm in western Lancaster County near the village of Malcolm, Nebraska that I was brought into this world on August 13, 1910. I was baptized by Rev. Brakhage of Trinity Lutheran Church, which was about 4 miles to the northwest of our home. There were two one-room schools in the congregation, one near the church and the other was 1/4 mile from our home. Each was maintained and supported by a separate school association. Our teachers were named Albers and Ehlers. They lived in a home next to the school, all part of a 20 acre farm.

After I finished 1st grade I was advanced to the third grade with my brother Erwin. As a result I was a year ahead of my age group.

One year our teacher became ill. For a period a student from the Seward Concordia helped out. But when he had to return to classes, we were sent to the nearest public school. Ours was a mile thru the fields to the west and north. There our 6-week teacher was Ella Vincent. She had considerable discipline problems with the older boys who felt much more free after the sternness of a male teacher. After 6 weeks Teacher Ehlers could return to his duties. Under his tutelage I completed the 7th grade. For discipline he carried a folded leather strap in his coat pocket where it was readily available as needed.

During my 7th year the old church had burned down. The segment of members who supported our school felt this was an opportunity to rebuild the church in the village of Malcolm, from which they could better serve the 11 mile area to the east between there and Lincoln. The members near the old church insisted on rebuilding on the old site, even though there were churches about 4-6 miles to the northwest and southwest of the location. The result was a division into two congregations, each group building their own church about 3 miles apart. After our St. Paul's church in Malcolm was completed, the first project was the construction of the one-room school.

It was in this school that I completed the 8th grade at the age of 12 in 1923, the same year I was confirmed. Our teacher was a new graduate from Seward named William Cholcher. To get an 8th grade diploma from the county we had to pass tests in 14 subjects with an average grade of at least 75. My average was 80. I was one of just two from our school who received a diploma. I faintly remember going to Lincoln for a mass county graduation exercise. My brother Erwin had to take the 8th grade a second year to get his diploma.

As we grew up on the farm we for the most part developed our own games or activities when we didn't have chores to do.

When we were younger the highway that ran along the south edge of our farm was rebuilt. We called it the SYA, because it ran from Lincoln to Seward, York and Aurora. For the road rebuilding farmers along the way could avoid a special tax by contributing the use of teams of horses to pull the large dirt moving scrapers. This project suggested to us our own miniature road building projects, including bridges, in a shaded area below mulberry trees west of the house. Also after observing the process of making hay stacks in a 40 acre field of native grass, used for horse feed, that was owned and managed jointly with two other farmers, we tried to imitate the process and built our own miniature hay sweeper and stacker.

We also fashioned harnesses for our two dogs and used them to pull heavier loads in our wooden wagon. For the wagon we had made side boards and end gates so that we could haul bigger loads. We also made a hay rack of a size and with a basic frame that fit into the wagon so that we could haul larger light loads, such as straw for bedding.

At one time Brother Louis had one of the dogs pulling him in the wagon on the way back from the mailbox, which was a quarter mile away.

As he neared the barn he wanted the dog to move faster so he sounded the order generally used for the dog to fetch the cows from the pasture. As he approached the barn the dog turned and went under the gate next to it, leaving Louis and the wagon caught at the gate.

One of our leisure-time activities was rabbit hunting. We could hunt two types of rabbits, jack rabbits and cotton tails. The jack rabbits lived in the open fields while cotton tails lived along creek beds, fence rows and brushy areas. When hunting jack rabbits we could spread apart and walk thru an open corn or wheat stubble field. Since the rabbits usually sat behind some stubble facing south in the warmth of the sun, it was best to approach from the north. Then they would not see us until we were almost upon them. Since they would run in a straight line along corn rows or in an open field, one would just aim a little ahead of them and shoot. Most of the time this would hit them in the head and they would roll.

I remember once Erwin and I were repairing a fence. Our dog chased up a jack rabbit in the field next to us and they were coming in our direction. He said to me, "Watch me get the rabbit." The rabbit kept coming down the corn row toward us, shifting his head from one side to another as he watched the dog behind him. As a result he never saw us. So all Erwin had to do was strike down with a tool at an angle as the rabbit came up to him to strike the fatal blow.

Erwin also preferred to hunt jack rabbits with a repeater rifle. Once the rabbit jumped up and began running in a direction, he just aimed a bit ahead of him and kept pulling the trigger until the rabbit rolled.

To show how a jack rabbit runs ahead of a dog but watches what's behind him instead of ahead, I recall watching the process in a small field near the barn. The rabbit ran toward a woven wire fence and ran into it so hard that the impact threw him back several feet right into the mouth of the barking dog. The latter was so startled that he failed to hold on and the rabbit started running again in another direction.

We never used the jack rabbits for human food because of a disease that some of them carried. But we were encouraged to hunt them so that they could be skinned and then hung in the hen house where the hens gradually cleaned the carcass of meat to get their ration of meat scraps. To supply this Mother offered to pay for the shells we used out of her egg income.

Hunting cotton tails required a different procedure. Because they ran in a quick zig-zag fashion when roused, it was almost impossible to hit them on the run. Usually we walked along one side of a creek bank and watched the other side to see where one might be in a little sheltered spot sunning himself. Then even a good rifle shot could get one.

Sometimes after a snowstorm one could walk about and see one sitting on a drift sunning himself next to a hole burrowed in the bank. A good shot from a distance could fell him. Or we could walk along fence rows and if we saw a hole in the snow near a post we could reach into the hole with gloved hand and catch the animal sheltered there. Dogs had difficulty catching them because of their way of running and because they usually headed for a hole somewhere near a pile of brush where they were protected. You never hunted them in an open field. Some of the cotton tails we caught were used for a meal after being skinned and cleaned.

Sometimes we had snow cover in the open pasture so that we could go sledding down the hills around the homestead. Especially if the snow was covered with a layer of ice we could travel quite a distance. But that always meant walking back up the hill for another try.

When there was no snow we sometimes rode down the hill on an old buggy frame on which the wheels were still sound. To steer the front wheels from our improvised seat we would use ropes tied to the two front axles. Sitting on a flat frame bottom a number of us could ride at once.

Ice skating was a rare enjoyment. That was because the creeks were usually dry and there were few ponds in the area that would freeze over. Besides the Nebraska weather was so

changeable that there might be usable ice for only shorter periods.

In summer our recreation was ball playing. Since we had daylight till about 9 p.m. for much of the summer, we usually had a game after evening chores in the open area between the house and barn. The side of the barn provided a good back stop and a few trees near the house protected the windows there. Or we played with a tennis ball instead of a regular baseball.

In wet weather in late spring when an end of the hay mow was about empty we devised a game there with a tennis ball. A good hit might carom off the beams or side walls to make the ball difficult to field or end up at times easier to field for a put out.

Sometimes sparrows would become so numerous around the place that we hunted them by hand. This could be done by walking about above the hay in the mow after dark and looking for their perch under the roof with a flashlight. After seeing where they sat we could turn off the light and catch the victim and destroy it.

Or we would go to the outdoor straw stack at night and feel into the little pockets where the sparrows would keep warm to find our victims.

For a time as we were growing up we raised tame rabbits near the hen house. This took up some of our leisure time feeding and caring for them. One time we were amused by a neighbor lady who didn't know much about rabbits. When she saw the droppings that were about the size of beans she asked in her favorite low German, "What do you feed the rabbits - beans?"

During several summers we had a business of selling watermelons. Since Dad loved watermelons we always had a sizeable patch. So we could pick a load on Saturday for our Sunday afternoon business. We had a buggy with a shaft for a single horse. So we used the horse that suited this task for transportation. We would fill the bottom of the buggy with watermelons and head for town about two miles away where a ball game was usually played.

There we'd sell the watermelons until about the 7th inning. Then we'd head for home so that we would be there to take care of customers who traveled by car and who'd stop on the way home for a purchase. There we could have them cold since we could clean them and cool them in a cistern next to the windmill and house, where the water was always cold. That cistern water was always cold because the windmill pumped water into it near its bottom and from there it would rise to about a four foot level where it would drain and flow by gravity across the farmyard to the cattle tank. So this cistern always served as a cooling tank. In fact, we could pump cool drinking water from it into the kitchen sink.

When we made hay and hauled it into the barn's mow, we often took a break after a load to enjoy a cold watermelon which we had placed into the cistern ahead of time. This was especially enjoyable in the warm, late summer when our watermelon were plentiful. In my youth you couldn't buy shipped-in watermelons until about the 4th of July.

Mentioning the 4th of July reminds me of our fun on that day. We usually had a supply of various-sized firecrackers. We'd test their power by putting them under a tin can and lighting them to see how high they would blow the can. Often the can would be blown apart after several tries, thus calling for a new can. In the evening we'd usually gather together with neighbors for an evening of fun, fellowship, fireworks and homemade ice cream and strawberries. Our favorite neighbors were a family who lived a half mile west of us where the 8 children were of an age similar to ours. They were first cousins to Norma, my brother Lorenz's wife.

For a while we had one bicycle between us. This enabled us to take turns riding it to the mailbox or the neighbors while the other would ride one of our horses, that was quite fleet of foot. The bicycle period came to an abrupt end when one of us failed to put it away properly and left it lie where Dad bent it out of shape backing the car out of the garage, having not seen it there.

We also enjoyed watching a variety of birds in the orchard back of our house that was surrounded by a planting of shade trees. Dad loved to try a variety of apples and even tried peaches and pears. The various trees provided an ideal habitat for many types of song birds. Since the trees were apart far enough, the space between them could be cultivated and kept free of weeds.

Normal morning chores included milking the 15 or so cows, feeding and harnessing 6-8 horses, feeding the hogs and chickens, hauling water to the chickens plus running the milk thru the cream separator.

Evening chores included milking the cows and feeding them, unharnessing and feeding the horses, feeding the hogs and again running the milk thru the separator. We also had to bring a supply of corn cobs from the shed near the house to the kitchen box for firing the range for cooking and hot water tank attached to the stove. Mother always cooked and baked with corncobs.

Once a week we had to clean the chicken house and horse barns of manure. The cow barn was cleaned as needed because the cows were outdoors most of the year. The manure was hauled out into the field in a manure spreader where it was spread immediately.

One time we saw a coyote run along the fence line along our property to the north. That was in the middle of the section of land. He was headed west. So we assumed that he would continue in that direction. So we got into our Model T Ford with Erwin, gun in hand, riding the front fender, and drove the 2 1/2 miles around the square mile section in hopes of seeing the coyote reach the west crossroad. As we neared that spot, he saw us coming and speeded up in hopes of crossing that road before we got there. However, it was almost a tie and my brother from his position on the front fender shot him just as he crossed the road. From his speed he rolled into the field to the west from which we retrieved him for the prized pelt.

At another time we saw a man walking along the same fence line in a westerly direction.

Since a convict had reportedly escaped from the State Penitentiary near Lincoln, we phoned authorities. A group came to the area and began searching from the west and found him in the neighbor's cornfield where he had eaten some corn that was just in the right stage of growth for eating. So that mystery was quickly cleared up.

For most of our growing years we farmed just 160 acres. But while I was away at school and 3 other boys at home (2 of them younger than I) Dad bought the 160 acre farm to the north of us to keep the boys busy. It was a convenient layout since the pasture land of both were side by side for easy access from either way. The tillable land lay along the north side of the section. A rather deep drainage creek ran mostly from west to east thru the center of it. In the early thirties Dad had extreme difficulty making the payments on the extra land without losing the whole farm to foreclosure.

Most farmers had their own herd sire or bull. Whether we had one at the time I don't recall. But the neighbor's sire had jumped the fence somewhere and mingled among our cows in hopes of expanding his influence. He mingled freely with our cattle and followed them into our corral. From there Louis got him coaxed into the barn with some enticing grain. There he got his head into a stanchion so that he could strap around his belly a wire to which he had attached tin cans with rocks in them. As the bull was freed he began to run in hopes of shaking loose the noise next to his body. In so doing he scared some of our cows into a fence as he went by and they breaking off a post or two. But he kept on running out into the pasture, jumped a fence again as he headed for home and never stopped till he got there. The neighbor said that at least a week went by before he could get near enough to the critter to remove the tin cans around his belly.

On another occasion one of our horses, whom we had named Bill and who was bought at a neighbor's auction, practiced his usual curiosity. He wasn't the best and was easily winded, but he filled a spot where needed. However, if there was a hole in a fence or some other uncommon opening, he was the first to find it.

One day he found an open gate near the barn when Erwin and I were home alone. Inside that gate he found the open door to the calf barn nearby where we stepped in to feed the calves grain and hay. He could get in only half his body but he could reach the feed. When we saw this, Erwin said, "I'm going to teach him a lesson."

So he took a small shotgun shell, removed the lead shot and refilled it with wheat. Then he slowly walked up behind the horse and let him have the load which spread out quite a bit so that the wheat kernels really stung at various places. At the impact the horses' hind feet slid about 6 feet forward while his front feet had nowhere to go. Then he hurriedly backed out and headed out into the open cutover cornfield from which he had wandered. He ran quite a distance before he stopped to turn around to see what might have happened. For some time he was wary of that gate and area. When Dad curried him the next morning, preparatory to harnessing him, he couldn't understand why Bill was sensitive at that part of his anatomy.

Incidents such as this kept our growing up years from becoming boring. I recall that when at times we walked the quarter mile from school toward our lane, the north wind was really bitterly cold. So we'd walk backwards a distance, then forward another distance into the wind, and then crouch down in the ditch alongside the road to warm up a bit before going on. We were glad the distance wasn't any greater.

Harvesting of oats and wheat was a longer process in my younger days before combines were used by smaller farmers. It began usually early in July when the wheat was ripe. Harvesting began by cutting the standing grain with a binder that was pulled by 4 horses. The binder, a machine with a seat near the rear for the operator, would cut the grain, roll it into a bundle about ten inches in diameter and tie it with twine before dropping it onto a carrier. Every 4 or so bundles the carrier was tripped by the operator to release its load, usually in rows.

The next step was to set up the bundles in what was called shocks. A shock was made up of 6

bundles leaning against each other so that they would remain standing as the wind dried the straw in them. Dad usually ran the binder and we had to set up the bundles into rows of shocks.

After a week or two of drying in shocks the grain was ready for the threshing process. In our neighborhood about 8 or so farmers had formed a cooperative. In some neighborhoods a traveling machine crew would come in. In our case one of our neighbors owned a machine and tractor for power. When all in the cooperative were ready the threshing crew of the participants moved from farm to farm to complete the threshing.

The crew was made up of one man from each farm, except larger farm owners usually supplied two men. In our case we usually supplied two men and a hay wagon. One year I recall that Erwin and I took the place of one man when we were in our early teens. As we became stronger each of us took his place in the crew as a regular worker as needed.

There were usually six wagons to go into the field in turn to gather a load of bundles and then by two's unload them into the threshing machine, which was set up near the farmer's barn, so that the straw could be blown into a pile near it. Then the straw was easily accessible for animal bedding in the barn for the year, especially winter. The farmer whose field was being cleared usually supplied a grain wagon to haul away the threshed oats or wheat for storage in his granary.

As long as the shocks were dry each day began at 7 a.m. and ended around 6 p.m. since all had morning and evening chores to care for at home. In case of rain, the process was delayed until the shocks were dried out again for efficient threshing.

Only the noon meal, plus a midmorning and mid-afternoon lunch, was served by the farmer at whose place we were working. The round was usually completed in a couple of weeks unless there were longer rain delays.

I recall being part of such a crew for a number of summers. When I wasn't there one summer my mother wrote that the crew missed me, especially at the dinner table, where delicious food was abundant and pies were plentiful for ravenous appetites.

I happened to be a member of the first class to be confirmed in the new church in Malcolm, as I related earlier. I still remember our class hymn, "Ashamed of Jesus", and the pastor's sermon text, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes."

About six months after confirmation, at age 13, I was enrolled in St. John's Academy at Winfield, Kansas. There I completed high school in 3 years as did all others, since the State of Kansas for about 6 years recognized our 16 required credits for graduation. Then I had 3 years of college, acquiring 96 credits toward the 120 needed for a BA degree. But that was the church educational system at the time and the unique arrangement at St. John's. There was no concern about academic degrees.

While at St. John's I participated officially in two sports, tennis and basketball. In tennis I was on the college team for three years. In my second year my partner and I managed to beat the state college champions in a match. They were from the college nearby in Winfield called Southwestern. My partner won his singles match and together we won the doubles match for a 2-1 victory.

In basketball I first began playing as a college freshman or 4th year at St. John's. At the time I was only 16 and quite tall but skinny. But I made the team as center the last two years, playing most of the time. During the last season my point average was 15, which was quite high in the days when there was center jump after each score and time-outs were not so carefully monitored. There was no record kept of rebounds, etc. We belonged to no conference and played only about 14 home and away games in a season.

To travel to Winfield each school year we had to take the Rock Island train from Lincoln with

a transfer at Kansas City. It was always an overnight trip, sleeping in the coach seats as best we could. My belongings were packed in an old round topped trunk and we furnished our own bedding, paying a yearly rental for a mattress.

Another school activity was participation in the college chorus or glee club and as the bass member of a male quartet for two years. Each year we made a bus trip for several days over a weekend. One year we had a concert in Nebr. about 40 miles from my home. In my senior year I recall one concert at Linn, Kansas. After the concert we had visited with our genial hosts and were about to retire for the night when someone came to the door and asked for the other two members of our quartet. They would like us to come to sing for a golden wedding gathering. So we got dressed and sang for a while before we returned to our host's home for a shorter night than planned.

An interesting feature of school life at St. John's was the tradition of having classes on Tuesday thru Saturday with Monday as our free day. Seemingly the object was to give students a better chance to study and prepare for the next day's classes than was normal if classes were held on Monday. But this did open up the possibility of some part time work in the community on Mondays when other students were not available.

Our curriculum was heavy with languages. We had English every year, German for four of six years, Latin for at least two years as well as two of Greek and Hebrew. How well one progressed in the languages depended on the method of teaching and the course content. I recall that German was to me a waste of time. So much time was spent on reading or studying the classics like Goethe and Schiller. As a result one never learned to converse in German. The main usage was with Biblical or religious terminology. Since I was able to read German before I started, I never felt that I advanced a great deal in the use of that language.

At any rate I managed to graduate in due course. For my graduation in early June of 1929 my parents drove the 350 miles of gravel highway

to attend. When we drove home we had my trunk shipped, and I recall that we ran into some rain-soaked roads which were only covered with gravel, and not black-topped or concrete as today.

In the fall of 1929 I enrolled at the St. Louis Seminary. I remember that when I registered at Dean Fritz's office, he in his course manner said, "You're pretty tall. Do you need an extra long bed?" So I declined saying that I had always slept in a regular-length bed.

My roommates at the Sem were Behnken and Burgdorf on 3rd floor of Dorm C. Since Burgdorf's home was in mid-St. Louis, we often spent Sundays at his home, sometimes even over night on Saturday. We attended their home church, Grace, and sang in the choir which was directed by William Heyne, who also directed the Seminary chorus.

Having played basketball at Winfield I tried out for the Seminary team in late fall. I ended up as the starting forward since there was a fellow a little taller who played center, his favorite spot. We had no gym for practice so we had to ride the streetcar about half way to downtown to the Armory where we held our practice sessions and played most of our games. We played all of our 10 season games in St. Louis and never traveled to other schools the first year. One of our opponents was Iowa U. which had been banned from competition in the Big Ten for some rule violation. Their team was one of our victims that season when we ended with an 8-2 record. Our coach was Dr. Simpson, who rendered this service as a hobby.

For our second basketball season the local universities, St. Louis and Washington, yielded to media pressure and included us in their schedules for a kind of city championship. So some of our games were played in their gyms. However, I was scholastically ineligible for the first half of the season since I had slipped below B in one subject, called Propadeutics in the second semester of my first year. This subject dealt with study and office organization and use of libraries, etc. In that subject I dropped to a C+. However in mid January I was able to join the team again as a starter. I recall beating both

of the local universities. One game against St. Louis we won with the fat score of 25-24. A lot of time elapsed around the center jump after each score. So with 20 seconds to play, to which I was alerted from the sidelines and the score 25-22, carefully avoided fouling the man I was guarding lest he make a basket and have a chance at a free throw to tie the game.

Another sport I participated in was tennis. There was a school tournament in this sport the first fall, which I succeeded in winning. Another such tournament was held in the second year, which I again was able to win.

For my second year at the Sem our triumvirate of B's split up and I shared a room with my cousin named Inselman. This room was in Dorm E, next to the west dining hall, On one occasion someone wanted to play a trick on me and put some limburger cheese between napkins in my pillowcase. But I never found it until I changed pillowcases, when its moisture had been absorbed by the napkins. Apparently my sense of smell was not too great at that time already. In later years my wife maintains that it is very poor.

Since graduates in 1931 were receiving only a limited number of calls, the administration was encouraging second year students to voluntarily accept assignments for a year of in-service training or vicarage. I was one of those who accepted such an assignment.