

Chapter 2 Move to the Farm

The first several years on the farm, from age three to six, are fairly indistinct. Again, I remember them primarily through the narrative Mom gives in her diary. The principle challenge was to make the house livable. The east wing was the original log cabin, boarded over, and the whole house was a mess. With the help of Grandpa Firebaugh the east wing was removed, a concrete basement was poured, and the whole house rebuilt and sided with asbestos.



The original house had no electricity, phone, or running water. Light was by a kerosene lamp, but within a month of our move on March 1, 1941, the community was wired with electricity. This allowed the purchase of an electric stove for the kitchen, a furnace and electric pump for the basement, and a septic tank in the front yard, although war restriction on metal slowed things up.

One of my first clear memories was the marriage of my Uncle Ralph Hauger with Ann Robinson in Stanley, Wisconsin. To get there we had to drive up what is now U.S. 94 past the bluffs of Camp Douglas. I was tremendously impressed by these “mountains”, the first unusual terrain I had ever seen. The rolling hills northwest of Freeport and the vast prairie lands from Freeport to southern Illinois just didn’t have the appeal that those shear cliffs and rocky bluffs had. This experience may have started my life-long love of the mountains.

One of the first animals we got for the farm was “Old Bird”, a sorrel riding horse who soon had a colt which my parents sold to a neighbor. Bird was useful for two reasons. When the winter weather snowed in our road, Dad rode her to work at the Burgess Cellulose factory where he worked in Freeport. Also Dad would take brother

Douglas and me to school on horseback in bitterly cold weather. This bare-back ride would help keep us warm.

Dad was a great builder. First he build a large hen house which could hold several hundred laying hens. One of my first farming tasks was to gather the eggs they produced. Next he build a hog house and later added a concrete feeding floor behind it. As farm machinery accumulated, a machine shed was built and later a huge addition was added. A lean-to was added to the north end of the barn, and a 30 foot tall silo was attached. It was from the Freeport Silo Company, a competitor of the Madison Silo Company. These two companies build almost all of the silos in the area. The final addition was cattle shed that served both for storing hay and as a shelter for the cows in bad weather. It was all built from oak beams and boards from trees grown on the farm. The wood was so hard that Dad had to use the electric drill to make holes for the nails.

The first commercial product of the farm was poultry. Wartime price controls limited us to 32 cents/dozen for eggs, and 22 cents/pound for ducks and fryers. We began by raising chickens, ducks, and geese for dressing and selling. Bill Dickman's hatchery sold us the baby chicks and bought our eggs for hatching. He also sold us poultry feed in beautiful print sacks out of which Mom made shirts for Douglas and me. Our farm continued producing poultry for sale well past our college years.

One of Mom's English professors at Manchester College was E.G Hoff. In 1942 he visited us on the farm and took many professional quality photographs.



Photo by Ernest G. Hoff



Photo by Ernest G. Hoff

Later he published a book of photos and poems, *Take Heart*, in which several photos of our farm appeared. We were awfully proud of making the "big time".

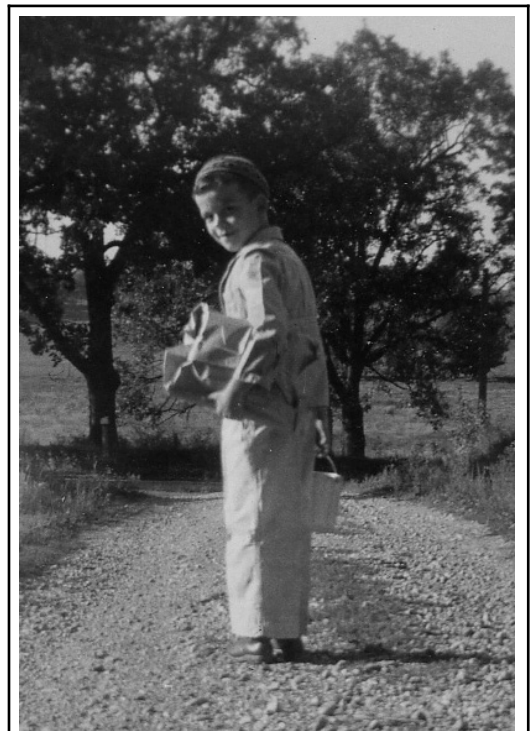
The duties of a farmer's wife constituted more than a full-time job. So Mom hired Dorothy Watson, the teenage daughter of our neighbor, to help with the canning and babysit Douglas and me. She could not come the second year, so Mom hired Mary

Ann Kuehl for the same duties. Douglas and I were both pleased with these arrangements.

In May of 1942 I had my only serious accident. We had a hand-cranked corn sheller with a heavy metal flywheel. By cranking up the sheller to high speed, one could shell several ears of corn before the flywheel died down. At the front of the sheller was the spout into which we fed the corn, and at the back was the exit out of which the cobs appeared. After shelling several ears, I noticed that a cob was bobbing along at the exit, but not coming out. So I reached in with my right hand to retrieve it, and the spiked sheller wheel caught my hand and shredded my little finger.

Mom heard my screaming and helped remove my hand from the sheller. She tried calling our minister, Rev. Fike, for help but could not reach him. Finally she got Estelle Guffy and her husband to drive out from Freeport and get me to the doctor. He took X-rays and three stitches and prescribed aspirin for the pain. This incident inspired my folks to think about a second vehicle for just such emergencies.

The years 1941-1945 were the World War II years. I still remember the worried expressions as the young men went off to war. Gerry and Ardis MacAdam, my uncle and aunt, were sent to New Jersey. But Gerry's brothers Fred and Greg were paratroopers in Europe, and we were terrified they would be killed. Fortunately, they all came back. The closest the war came to our immediate family were the ration books and blackouts. When Douglas and I wondered what the blackouts were all about, we were told that it was for our protection in case German planes came to bomb us. This was pretty unsettling!



My first day of school, 1943

In addition to family gatherings, the church continued to be the center of our family's social life. Hymns were accompanied by both the piano and organ, and Mom took over as the organist. Instead of using electricity, the church organ required pumping up a bellows by foot pedals. At first Mom drove into church to practice on the pump organ. But soon she bought our own pump organ so that she could prepare at home.

The year 1943 was very significant in our lives. Until then the farm work had been done with hired help. With a \$1000 loan from Minnie Cooper, our neighbor on Clark Street, we started buying farm machinery, and Dad gave his boss, Kenneth Meyers, notice that he would resign from the Burgess Cellulose company to begin farming on our own as of March, 1943.

That was also the year that I became six years

old in July. There were no kindergartens in our neighborhood, so I set out for first grade at the local school about a mile south of our farm. Mom took the following photo as I set out down the driveway on my “academic career” on September 7, 1943.