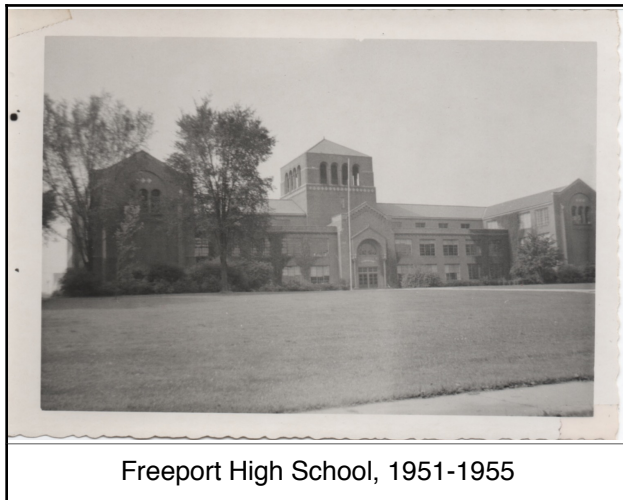


Chapter 4

Later Farm Years - Freeport High School

Freeport high school was my first exposure to the wider world. I began to notice the strengths and weaknesses of both my teachers and fellow students. Our Freshman class of 1951 was the last Freshman class to study at Freeport high school. In the consolidation process, the new junior high accommodated the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. So no more Freshmen.



Mom helped me register. The faculty advisors were Ferne Kuhlemeyer from mathematics and Mabel Bowers, the Latin teacher. Since Ms Bowers assured us that no respectable college would admit students without a Latin background, I signed up for Latin. Also, since I was a farm boy, I signed up for Agriculture. In addition I took English, Mathematics, and General Science.

Don Knauff, one of the football coaches, was my homeroom teacher. Homerooms were the first session of each day and were

where announcements and school policy were discussed. Mr. Knauff was also my General Science teacher. He had a biology degree from the University of Wisconsin.

Perhaps the most discouraging event of my high school career took place at the beginning of my Sophomore year. All during my Freshman year I bugged Dad to let me sign up for sports. He finally agreed that I could try out for football. I was overly optimistically confident that, as a farm boy, I was tough enough for the sport. The first day of the 1952-53 football season, the coach had us run around the practice field a number of times. This so exhausted me that I dropped out of football and never took up another sport. Slinging bales of hay and carrying buckets of corn are no training for football!

By my Sophomore year I began to question the value of the Agriculture class to my long term professional plans. So this was my last year in Agriculture, and in Latin. Cicero was enough. I have valued the two years of Latin as the basis of many of the Romance languages. However, I discovered two subjects which intrigued me and which I enjoyed greatly.

The first was mathematics with Rueben Baumgartner as teacher. I studied geometry, college algebra, trigonometry, and solid geometry with "Mr. B" during my last three years of high school. He was humorous and a very engaging teacher. He ex-

plained math concepts in a crystal clear manner. Towards the end of each course he introduced us to the slide rule, a much appreciated skill for college. Our trigonometry book was identical to that used for the beginning math course at Manchester College. Because I had had both college algebra and trigonometry in high school, I was able to begin my college work with calculus.

The second course which I loved was debate. I understood that if I took debate I could skip the speech class required of all students. I took debate the second semester of my Sophomore year and the last two years of high school. I will return to the influence debate had shortly. However, first I want to describe a strange, bureaucratic event that greatly benefited me.



Bausch & Lomb Honorary Science Award

My classmate, Jason Seubold, had slightly better science grades than I did. But Jason had not taken Biology as I had. The science curriculum included General Science, Biology, Physics and Chemistry, all of which I took. So, upon graduation, I was awarded the Bausch & Lomb Honorary Science award as the top science student of my graduating class. So Thanks, Jason for skipping Biology. It was pretty gruesome, cutting all those worms and frogs! Jason went on to M.I.T. to study aeronautical engineering.

It's hard to understand the influence debate class had on me, and even harder to describe all the interactions that developed. The following photograph illustrates some of this complexity. The first/fourth finger signal indicates the in-group camaraderie



Ralph Engstrom and me discussing project

symbol and is also suggestive of the pitchfork with which debaters pitch their b**lsh*t. Loren Madden's middle finger salute indicates bad taste.

Perhaps the main reason I liked debate class so much was the tremendous sense of self confidence that it developed in me. I liked my class mates and they seemed to like me. Mr. Engstrom had a straight-faced sense of humor that made him very popular among his students. There was an honorary society, the National Forensic League, available to the debaters, and I was elected President my Senior year.

Our tournament schedule was quite demanding. In addition to debate, the tournaments featured extemporaneous speaking and declaration. I volunteered (or was chosen) for both debate and extemporaneous speaking. The "extemp", as we called it, involved carrying a suitcase of U.S. News and Time magazines so that we could research assigned topics. The contestants were all given an hour or two preparation time and a random, current events topic. Preparation was very nerve-wracking!

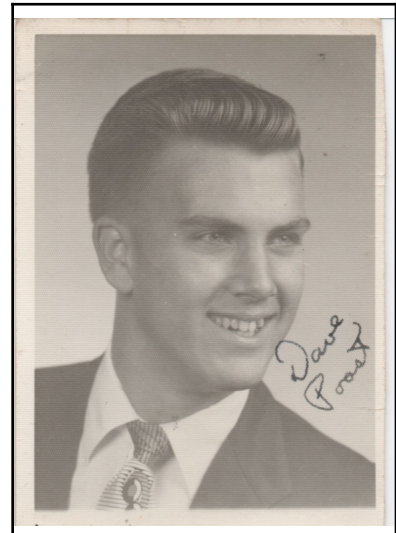
The debate topic my Junior year was "Resolved that the President of the United States Should be Elected by the Direct Vote of the People". My debate partner was Voight Smith. My Senior year the topic was "The Federal Government should Initiate a

Policy of Free Trade among Nations Friendly to the United States". My debate partner was Louis Landau, and we had tremendous fun preparing our positions. Our schedule included at least fourteen day trips debating in high schools and colleges in Southern



Louie Landau, 1955

Wisconsin, Northern Illinois and Western Indiana. My Senior year involved the Freeport Invitational in which I helped organize and register contestants. The year book reported that we won 46 debates and lost 16 my Junior year, and we went down state (University of Illinois-CU) both years. The senior debate team won second place in the state my Junior year, and I am not certain how well Louie and I did my Senior year.



Dave Poast, 1955

Debate class helped me make friends with two of my class mates, Louie Landau, my debate partner, and Dave Poast, my debate classmate and chemistry lab partner. We have remained friends over the years, but our only contact seems to be our class reunions.



Debaters at Work

Louie was not only my debate partner, but also a farm boy. His Dad and mine had dealings in the cattle trade business. Dave and I not only overlapped in debate and chemistry but in numerous other classes and activities. We were both "projection operators", one of the few extra curricular activities in which I was involved. This involved threading and showing 16 mm

films selected by teachers for their classes.

Before my Senior year Mom met with Dorothy Nelson, the choir director, about my joining the A Capella Choir. Mom had been giving both Doug and me piano lessons, so I had some understanding of music and the ability to read it. She thought that this experience would give me a better understanding of music and an introduction to classical music. Ms. Nelson was a marvelous musician, and I thoroughly enjoyed singing. I continued singing with the A Capella Choir in college.

This choir experience allowed me to be chosen to sing *Halls of Ivy* with fifteen other A Capella Choir boys at our graduation. I was also selected as one of four Seniors to speak at graduation. It was a pretty bad speech.

Farm work continued all through high school. In addition to the chores of feeding the animals, field work in the warmer months consisted of mowing, raking, and baling hay, plowing corn, and working up the fields for corn and oats by plowing, disking, and dragging. Sometime during my high school years Dad decided that I should get a job to raise money for college. So he arranged for our neighbor, Clarence Bittner, a farmer two miles southwest of our farm, to hire me for 60¢/hour to plow corn. I used his small Allis Chalmers tractor and was so pleased that every five minutes I had earned enough for a candy bar which cost five cents at the time.



Driving township truck

Dad was also good friends with Ted Bennett, the township road commissioner. As the corn plowing job disappeared, he got me a job with the road commission running a shovel and ax near culverts on newly rebuilt roads. It turns out that the county caterpillar could only do so much near such objects as culverts, and it was necessary to finish the job by hand. It was dirty, hot work, but the salary was \$1.00/hour, so I got a forty cent raise on road commission work.

One of the benefits of working for the road commission was that I got to drive the dump truck and even, one time, the big Caterpillar road grader.

The summers before and after my Senior year, Dad arranged for me to work for the Frederick G. Smith Concrete Block and Ready Mix Concrete Company of Freeport. Dad had bought many loads of concrete from Mr. Smith, so he “owed us one”, and I got a job at around \$2.35/hour. One hitch was that I had to join the Teamsters Union since the company was a union shop. However, they had a “student rate” of summer membership of only \$25, so it was not much of a financial strain.

I realized that the work at the plant would involve handling concrete block. So on my first day of work I wore a sturdy pair of leather gloves. Our first job was to stack

concrete blocks off the pallets as they came out of the kiln into six foot high piles in the supply yard. The hot concrete blocks completely ruined my leather gloves the first day, while the soft, orange, fabric gloves of my coworkers showed hardly any wear. I quickly learned my lesson - the second day I wore soft, orange, fabric gloves which served me well the rest of the summer.

One of the memories that stick most firmly in my mind was the off loading of concrete. A train had delivered a quarter car's worth of concrete in 80 pound bags and it was the responsibility of one of my coworkers and me to carry them from the train to the Frederick G. Smith truck and then to the plant. The work nearly killed us, but since my coworker was a good friend, I had to keep up and do my share.

The second year working for Mr. Smith was a lot easier. He called me in to his office and verified that I was a farm boy. He had a horse farm on the Pearl City road, and wanted some fencerows sprayed for weeds. Since I had done similar work for Dad there was no problem. He then suggested that I do only work for him around the farm and help baby sit his two kids. This was considerably easier than my previous work at the plant unloading cement blocks, and I really enjoyed it..

A not very significant event, but one that resulted in a very pretty farm picture, occurred during my last years in high school. I had always been interested in planes,



Our farm, 1955

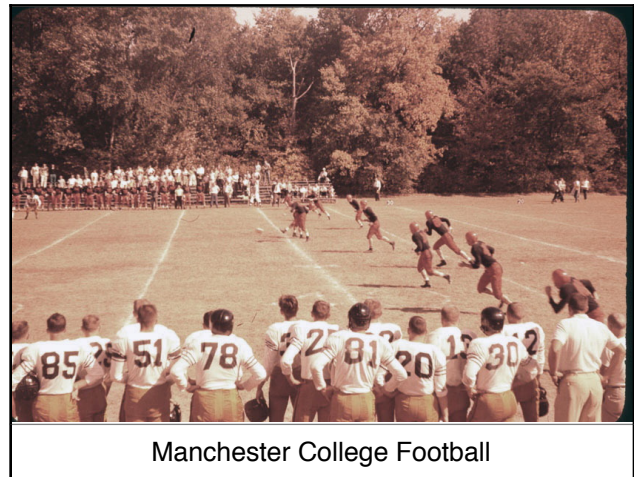
and the Albertus Airport was just south to town. So I offered them \$25 to fly me out over our farm. They agreed, and we have a fine photo of the farm to show for it.

Two other family activities which were important during my high school years were visits to Manchester College and CBYF activities, including camp Emmaus. In retrospect I now realize that

Doug and I were being "programmed" to attend Manchester, Mom's alma mater. We usually went to the college's Homecoming, and I was able to meet Bud Tully, son of

Robert Tully who knew my Dad. Bud and I would become roommates the first two years of college.

In 1950 my involvement in the Church of the Brethren Youth Fellowship (CBYF) and the church camp, Emmaus, really picked up. Reverend Fike took our junior high class down to camp at the recently opened camp. We all stayed together in the general purpose building since the boy's and girl's dorms were not yet opened. From then on, throughout high school both Emmert and I attended camp and made many friends.



Manchester College Football

One of my clearest memories was the trips the camp made in the ton and a half camp truck in which Rev. Fike drove us to the Mt. Morris swimming pool. The camp pool had not yet been build. Twenty or more campers in an open truck with foot and a half guard rails would be a cop's nightmare and presently illegal.



Dick Slabaugh and Friends in camp

But that pool was where I learned to swim. All the kids played games, and the water was pleasantly warm. To compete I had to learn to swim. This compares to the Freeport YMCA in which Emmert and I had been enrolled in swimming lessons. All I can remember of that experience is that both our lips turned blue from the cold water, and little learning occurred.

An interesting sidelight on the pool is that by the last years in high school the

camp pool was built. One of the first life guards, a year or two older than me, was Roger Martin. In the early 2000s our son Steve was at the township waste disposal station, and the attendant said "Hi, Mr. Firebaugh". It turns out that Roger overheard this conversation and introduced himself. Steve introduced us to Roger and his wife, Pat, and we have since become close friends. They have recently moved to Mt. Morris, and we visit with them on our trips to and from Florida.

Partly as a result of friends from camp I was elected to the District Youth Cabinet. This involved traveling throughout Northern Illinois to cabinet meetings, and I got acquainted with both fine friends and excellent youth leaders. At the local level, our CBYF met every Sunday evening and sponsored swimming parties, hayrides, and skating parties.

My Senior year a distant cousin, Royal Johnson, and I made a church-related bus trip throughout the Eastern United States. We stopped at the New Windsor, Maryland, relief station, Washington, D.C., and New York. This was my first experience to the “really big” city. In Washington we met with Senator Paul Douglas and the House of Representatives Chairman of the important Ways and Means Committee. We attended a session of Congress and the Supreme Court. I had a new Argus C3

camera and got some excellent time photos of the Capitol at night. We visited the Government Printing Office in Washington and the United Nations Assembly in New York.

Emmert Johansen was my very first and closest friend. We were born in the



District Youth Cabinet



United States Capitol, 1955

same hospital, and I was five days older. We went to Sunday school, high school and three years of college together. He left Manchester after our Junior year to attend Northwestern University medical school.

He finished his internship in psychiatry the same year I finished my Ph.D., and we began our professional careers at the same time - his as a psychiatric doctor in Chicago and mine as a post doc/instructor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

He was an excellent student and an outstanding pianist. He gave concerts at

our church and was the accompanist for the high school A Capella choir in which I sang. I can remember that, at about age ten, I announced to my parents that, when I grew up, I was going to marry Emmert since he was my best friend. I still remember the look of surprise and shock on their faces as they reminded me that men marry women, not other men! It was my first experience with anti-gay sentiments.

Unfortunately, Emmert died a strange and tragic death early in his professional career. He failed to show up for work one Monday morning and was found dead in bed. It was diagnosed as a fast acting pneumonia. Had he been married, his wife could have possibly detected his distress and prevented his death. Unfortunate too, is that much of his medical school tuition fell on the shoulders of his family. We were on vacation, returning home when my parents informed us of Emmert's death. But fortunately, we were able to make it home for his funeral.

During my high school years, as with all young men, my interests turned to love. I don't know how we met, but somehow I learned to know Nellie Mease. She



Emmert, Robert, Vera, & Charles Johansen



My friend, Emmert

lived between my grade school and the Pearl City road. She was a beautiful, intelligent, and very clever girl. And she could dance and volunteered to teach me how.

Nellie had a sister, Mary, and a brother, Bunky. Doug soon became good friends with Bunky. Our families became friends, and my parents approved of Nellie as a very nice girl. We practiced dancing at her house, and I dated her at several of the social events at high school. How and why the relationship ended are still a mystery to me. Perhaps some of the reasons are given in the following photos. Tragically, I got a call from Mom early in my college career telling me that Nellie had died from brain cancer.

Rita Jean Peters was a lovely girl who I met, possibly through the connection of the Freeport and Lena CBYFs. She was about my age and, according to handwritten notes in my Senior yearbook, she and I dated to some high school social functions. Again the relationship never got serious and probably ended with the timely appearance of Julene Wright my Senior year at Freeport High.

Julene transferred from York Community high school our Senior year. Her Dad had been promoted to President of the Freeport State Bank. She played flute and had been first chair at York. She continued playing with the Freeport high school orchestra, and, since we had so many fine



Nellie Mease



Rita Jean Peters

flutists, became third or fourth chair. It turns out that we had several mutual friends at York. In fact, we learned in later years, that both she and Joyce, my wife, played in the York band together.

Julene was a good friend and a fine scholar. We had many good times together, including high school dances.

Only one tragic event



Julene Wright

occurred that year. I had driven Julene and Emmert, her accompanist, over to Rockford to play her flute in the regional State Music Contest. We were in her family's new Buick. On the way home I swerved to avoid a truck in a



Julene's Photo in my Study



Ms Nelson Practicing the Triple Quartet

We visited with her about once a year till 2015. At that time we lost track of her and haven't hear from her since. We are very perplexed.

Finally graduation day approached. I was one of four Seniors to address the crowd, and I worked on my speech till it was memorized. Twelve of the boys from the A Capella choir also sang. Here is Ms Nelson, our A Capella choir director, practicing our group on the *Halls of Ivy*.

railroad underpass and crashed the car into the concrete abutment. The car was totaled and both Julene and Emmert were slightly injured. Fortunately her Dad forgave me, stating that he was relieved we all survived.

At my fiftieth high school reunion we met Julene again. We were becoming snow birds, and she told us she lived in Clearwater, Florida. We said we would look her up on the next trip to Florida, which we did.



My Address at Graduation



Class Photo

Our class consisted of approximately two hundred students. Mom and Dad took several pictures of the graduation exercise. While it is a little dark, here is their photo of my speech.

It is probably appropriate to end the chapter with a class photo.