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*To my immediate family of origin, to my deceased wife  
and new wife, and to my children, my grandchildren  
and whoever comes along on the tree of life.*

*To all who encouraged me to write this book and  
especially Bruce Stenhjem, who gave of his time to edit  
and organize the script. And to my daughter Lora, the  
writer of the family who provided encouragement and  
knowledge to accomplish this project.*

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# Spilling Over

An autobiography by Florian Ledermann

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# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
1. Childhood Days.....	6
2. Teenage Years .....	20
3. The Fateful Night .....	25
4. Making Better Men .....	29
5. Going Blind .....	36
6. HEP 1,2,3,4.....	38
7. Two Holes In One .....	46
8. Family Explosion .....	49
9. In Sickness And In Health.....	52
10. A Servants Heart .....	59
11. Fall Entertainment.....	63
12. Big C Means Change.....	65
13. Occupational Hazards.....	66
14. The End Of The Beginning.....	67
15. A Spiritual Awakening.....	71
Appendix (Some Veterinary Stories).....	77

# Introduction

This is a story of a life filled with all sorts of twists and turns that invigorated this human occupant of the planet earth to be energized to a level considered by some to be a little “over the top” or maybe even “spilling over”!

So why does one feel compelled to write a book, much less, about their own selves? Especially if this certain one, is the same one who barely passed the Creative Writing course in college, that was a prerequisite to completing his pre-veterinary curriculum. And that only occurred after pleading with the professor to have mercy on this poor farm boy who just wanted to be a vet and not a writer.

If you believe we should all live in this world not just to partake, but also to give, then perhaps you can see why a person would want to put one’s philosophy of life into conversation with others, and maybe even in book form.

Another reason to maybe write a book, may be to share one’s life experience to help others through difficult times, which are inevitable for anyone living on this earth. But since these serious times may not be the most interesting or entertaining for others, an urge to include a little humor exists in this manuscript in the hopes that the reader will actually want to finish reading the entire book. Comedians make their living by allowing people to laugh, even about serious matters.

The stories contained herein are historically correct insofar as my memory can recall, but I have always maintained that history doesn’t necessarily have to be 100% accurate, but it has to be interesting, or nobody would every delve into reading, hearing or seeing recorded historical events. We all know how recall can get embellished as our minds age and how the desire to tell the story in an interesting or humorous manner can outweigh the serious need to be accurate....

it's only human. So we all have a story to tell and who knows, maybe someone, somewhere, will benefit from hearing your story.

Some names have been changed to protect the innocent (a take-off of the Dragnet TV series) as I certainly wouldn't want to harm reputations of other either the dead or alive.

## Chapter 1. Childhood Days

It was Friday, the 13th, when it all began. Traditionally known as an unlucky day, which happens only about once every seven months on the calendar, turned out to be just the opposite for me. To be born into a family that provided the opportunity for me to live life to the fullest certainly was not close to being unlucky!

When I learned in later years that my father revealed that his third son reminded him of a tadpole at birth, I was a little annoyed at his description. Little tiny legs and arms that protruded from a large round torso were certainly quite similar to the looks of an immature frog, but being associated with an amphibian was not really appreciated. However, after realizing I could never swim fast or efficiently, that maybe my dad's analogy was quite accurate!

It was 1940, the Second World War was about to unfold, and for families everywhere, there must have been anxiety about bringing children into a world of uncertainty. Already Dad had experienced several years of drought on this little rural Minnesota farm, lost the first love of his life to tuberculosis after only three years of marriage, farmed out his first daughter for three years to be raised by her grandmother and remarried my mother.

Being the last sibling to be born at home with assistance from a neighborhood "midwife", I now realize how quickly life changed from bare necessities in those days to modern risk-eliminating childbirth which at least most Americans now experience.

Life was not easy in so many ways for Dad and Mom in those early years with losing my older sister to a heart defect shortly after birth and another younger brother to a stomach valve disorder at only months of age. But what I remember is, life went on, we survived and even today I feel blessed to have four of my siblings still reasonably healthy and involved.

Even though we had few amenities living on a small dairy farm in the forties, I've never felt deprived or cheated and could honestly say that life was good. Simplicity and lack of material goods were really never considered a detriment to having good quality family life. Love, companionship, security, room to romp and play, and enough food to eat, were paramount to having a happy childhood.

We all had jobs on the farm, many of which could become mundane, but none that seemed to be detrimental to our physical or mental development. My parents of 100% German heritage were engrained in the work ethic that needed to be passed on to the next generation as it was from their immigrant grandparents and American born parents. So chore time never deviated more than a few minutes as did meal times or wake-up and bedtimes. Regimented life is what we knew and expected as children.

The 160-acre farm was surrounded on three sides by small Scandinavian farmers and on the fourth side, a quarter mile of beautiful lakeshore. When Dad purchased the farm in the late 20's, lakeshore was not considered to be an advantage for small dairy farms as each year the borders of the property had to be fenced into the lake to keep the dairy cows from wandering off to other lands. This was no small project as putting barb wire fence into a lake far enough out to keep cows from swimming around it, means anchoring posts into the gravelly sandy bottom from a small boat. Then every spring to redo it as the winter ice would always crush and disintegrate the fence during ice-out. We did occasionally go fishing in our 14' wooden boat and 3 horse Evinrude outboard but mostly only if it had rained and put farm work on hold. Walleye still fishing with spools and line or sunfish fishing with 16'

cane poles was the equipment of the day and I do remember some nice catches. But the highlight of having a large clear Minnesota lake beyond the back cow pasture was coming down to the shore on a Sunday morning after mass. Those free hours of being alone as a young boy enjoying the pristine waters were precious even those using dried up cow pies on a big hook seldom resulted in catching a big nasty fighting carp, the no-good bottom feeders that even the pigs wouldn't eat. It was also a place to dream of what lie ahead, what I would become some day or more often just happy to be alive and have a family to call mine.

The fact that Mom and Dad were sure I would be born feminine, as they were so positive the odds favored a girl after two sons in a row, always made me wonder about their probabilities reasoning. So when I was determined to be a boy (and not a tadpole), there was no boy names in the plan. After much discussion and disagreement, Gramma was delegated to have naming rights ... and hence the somewhat common German name Florian was proclaimed. To this day, having a name that few have heard in our modern country society, begs me to see about changing it yet to Tom, Bob, or Joe so I wouldn't have to repeat it and spell it at every encounter with a stranger!

Animals have always interested me from very early childhood but little did I know it would someday lead to a life as a veterinarian. Whether it was laying on the belly of a sleeping milk cow on a cold winter morning during downtime from a chore, or raising pigs, chickens, ducks and calves for the 4H projects, being around animals was my "cup of tea"!

Sometimes that got me in trouble like when I had brought three big roosters into the house to show Mom that they were ready to butcher. She was on the phone with her sister and since it was harvesting grain time and the threshing crew was coming for dinner, she had placed three hot lemon meringue pies on the kitchen table. The phone conversation got rather long so I decided to push the pies aside and place the roosters in a spot next to them. I had long ago perfected the art of getting chickens to fall asleep by laying them on their side and



tucking their head under one wing, sleeping so soundly that I could let go of their feet as I waited. But as the minutes wore on, one became restless and began to get up, at which time I grasped for its toes, which excited the whole flock. As I grabbed the other two bird's toes and hung on for dear life, the churning floppy roosters got into the pies and proceeded to spread their contents in every which direction in a wild flurry of cackling, flopping and mother screaming bloody murder! My sentence was washing dishes for more days than I could count. I don't even remember what the threshers got for dessert but I know it wasn't pie and neither did I for what seemed like ages.

I was also a cat lover and we had plenty because of all the mice that seemed to populate the barn and granary. Sometimes a bout of distemper would breeze through the farm and annihilate the population but a few months later the prolific females had filled in the gaps.

It was a hot summer afternoon when the project was to clean up brush and branches that littered the backyard from a recent storm. I seem to remember being very lazy at the age of ten and would look for any reason to get out of mundane work like piling scratchy prickly ash and dead branches on a pile when I could be fishing. So as my brothers kept piling on the brush I happened to notice one of my black and white cats getting buried deep under the pile. I persuaded them to hold off while I went to rescue her from the weight and entanglements. As I reached deep into the crevices and got a grip on her back I started the retrieval process. Half way out I noticed my kitty was striped white with black rather than spotted white with black. My nose told me I had made a grave mistake and in a sudden panic I realized it was a stinking skunk! Instinctively I released it and my guffawing brothers picked up my stiffened body and set me free. Of course telling me I deserved this because of my laziness but fortunately didn't tease me about getting rabid from it.

It was rare for my parents to leave the farm for a day trip even on Sunday so I would badger them to go somewhere..... cousins, discover, or just somewhere for adventure and excitement, a desire and trait that

has not lessened even in these senior years. But once a year it was to visit Aunt Betty and Nel in St. Cloud, a two hour trip. But now being a 12 year old and old enough to be responsible for caring for the animals on the farm, my duty was a few light chores and switch the rotation-grazing lots for the cows.

It was then I got my first experience as a boyhood vet for a cow in trouble. Buelah, our blind cow that always broke hot electric fences because she didn't see them, would frequently free the herd to new pastures before it was time to rotate the lot. But today she broke through for another reason ... looking for privacy to deliver her calf. To my amazement, as I watched her in labor, instead of the normal front feet presenting out the vagina, there was a tail. Knowing that wasn't right and that the family miles away, I graduated myself to being a vet and tried the only logical thing to do. Grab the tail and pull. And pull some more with all my strength to the point of hoping not to de-tail the baby. Low and behold the calf came out and nodded approval as it took its first breath. As I relayed my heroic deed to Dad on his return, he said that was an impossibility and maybe never really believed me but commended my efforts anyway. To this day and after thousands of deliveries in 43 years of practice, I never experienced or attempted it again as its nearly impossible for a calf to be born in a "sitting dog" position in the womb. But it happened and maybe activated a small germ of professional endeavor that was to become a wonderfully interesting life as a veterinarian.

What we become in life is so much related to what we experienced as small children. Growing up in a wide open countryside was not so unusual in the '40's as a large segment of the population still resided in the country. Wide View School District 48, two miles from our farm house was typical of country schools around the nation where two acres of each township was set aside for erecting a one-room schoolhouse to educate the rural children.

To have our school given the name Wide View probably wasn't so much that the intent was for its students to be broad-minded but that

sitting on a little knoll, you had an excellent view of the countryside as you gazed out its windows. A mixture of mostly German and Eastern Europe origin Catholic and Protestant students made up the thirteen kid roster, with my class being the largest at three.

Lucky for me, the first three grades of schooling were taught by Mrs. King who made learning fun and exciting. The basic educational foundation had been laid and the desire to continue a life-time of learning was already firmly in place. To this teacher, I shall always be indebted. It wasn't so true of those that followed in District 48. So as to keep anonymity, their names have been changed. Bullying, mischief, and disrespect was common. Miss Larson, at the young age of 19, had lost control of all discipline and of course, we took advantage wherever and whenever we could. From turning the schoolhouse into a gymnasium most of the day to the whole student body leaving the school when our water supply large crock jar broke as result of our horseplay and anarchical environment.

Of course the school board reacted in time and hired another teacher, Mrs. Jensen, who was a good teacher but struggled with diabetes and obesity so often fell asleep during reading class. That prompted us to quickly skip several pages and giggle when she awoke and discovered she was way behind.

Then because she wasn't the best driver of her big Pontiac and could barely see over the steering wheel even with sitting on a pillow, traversing up the narrow in-drive incline to the schoolhouse was an experience we enjoyed watching when she arrived late on a snowy morning. She much appreciated us older boys when she couldn't waddle through the deep snow and needed a big boy on each side to get her guided safely to the schoolhouse. The day of a typical Minnesota blizzard found us again waiting for our late arriving teacher, so that from the school room we could see her slide into the ditch with two wheels. We knew it would be a fun day of shoveling and pushing her in deeper to assure that it would be a full day of getting her out. Interestingly, she trusted our tractor-driving abilities and gladly handed

us the keys to drive it out of the ditch. But of course we used the opportunity to floor the accelerator pedal and listen to the big engine scream as the rubber tires smoked from grinding on the ice and gravel. After a few hours we finished the job and dedicated the remaining rest of the day to book learning.

One of the more pleasant memories in country school was all the games we could play in recess that in recent decades have been outlawed in most schools because of the our propensity in today's society for zero-risk in all we do so that we can be "safe"! So it seemed the more dangerous these games were to our bodies, the more fun they were. Games like Red Rover that gave me a broken nose; Take Away, a more intense game than Rugby that resulted in a broken wrist after being crushed by the heaviest kid falling on me; Deer, that caused more than one swollen ear after being beamed by a hardened musty bean bag; and Ante Over, with a volley ball knocking our legs from under us as we tumbled on the hard ground.

Then there was the ever-present bullying which I hesitate to mention in light of all the repercussions that can result later in life. Being named Gooseneck by a bully that would lift us up by the head to stretch our neck enough that we would fulfill the naming reason. But somehow, we survived and grew up with an understanding of how bullying can do permanent damage to a young child.

The walk to and from school was an experience in loitering for me on the way home because I knew once we arrived home, it was a quick snack and then chore time. So daydreaming, watching gophers scatter ahead of us, and kicking stones was the pastime as we trudged along. One afternoon, however, was different as watching a neighbor rolling his own cigarettes with tobacco from the Prince Albert can, always made me curious what smoking would be like. So using our ingenuity, my friend Lenny and I came up with the idea of rolling our own using peat from the slough along the road, toilet paper and matches from the schoolhouse to make our own cigarettes. But even though tobacco and peat look similar, I can tell you the smoke will nearly kill you with one

big inhale! That nearly cured any craving for a cigarette for at least until high school.

Compared to what young children of today experience, versus our life in mid-century 1900's, you could surmise that it must have been boring to grow up as a child in a rural farm setting. But to me, I remember those childhood years as living in the present with maybe dreams of growing up some day to raise a family, to follow our parent's footsteps, but that was not front and center. Entertaining ourselves by playing games of basketball all winter long outside, taking turns riding our one shared bicycle over jumps and around a dirt track, and teasing or taunting brothers was common. Although it was no fun to be on the receiving end from older brothers, taking it out on the younger siblings seemed to balance it out. With four boy siblings and over a ten year spread in ages, being "fair" in disputes was difficult at best, so somehow we grew up well-suited for the world that isn't always fair.

One of the more exciting events in this nine year old boy, was harvest time on the farm. Still in the days of harvesting small grains like oats, wheat, barley, succotash (a blend of oats, wheat and barley) with a grain binder that kicked out bundles that were tied with twine, was always a fun time of year. The smells of freshly cut grain, the shocking of bundles into neat little tents so they could dry, and the driving of tractors, were things little boys looked forward to. But my future-thinking dad would eventually squelch the need to have any boys drive tractor for pulling the binder, by using a contraption of ropes, rods and pulleys that allowed him to sit on the binder and drive the tractor from there. That of course, eliminated the need for any of boys to drive and hence instead, be the shockers of the bundles. Needless to say that made me sad as it was more fun driving the little Farmall B Cultivision and seeing the grain neatly fall from the sickle onto the rolling canvas and pop out in a neat bundle behind. The butterflies, the bobolinks, the fluttering locusts and the floating thistle-down all bring back wonderful memories of those special boyhood days.

It was normal social etiquette to have noon dinner at whoever's farm you were working on in the neighborhood during summer farm work. And since we either rented land from our Scandinavian neighbors or provided young labor and machines to help them with harvesting, the occasions to eat dinner in their house presented frequently. Being a child who always wanted adventure, whether cuisine or travel, when these opportunities of welcome came from the neighboring farmers, I was all for it.

Emma was not the most beautiful woman on the planet, with her long straggly gray hair, teeth missing, and a football-sized goiter hanging from her neck, but the old dark kitchen was so intriguing. She still had the big old iron wood stove for cooking and her specialty was homemade lefse. Since we were purebred Germans, lefse was never on our menu and for some reason a butter and sugar-topped flap of this potato delicacy was a real treat for me. I didn't mind the warm half-sour milk with the fly floating in it as long as there was a hunk of lefse to devour. A real treat was the lutefisk with its creamy slimy quivering appearance and loaded with butter. Somehow my dad and brothers always seem to come up with excuses when the invitation came from Emma or any other of our colorful neighbors.

My curiosity about lutefisk was satisfied one day as a preschooler on a trip to town to deliver the cream and get supplies. Dad was raising fancy roosters for sale and needed to deliver the small crate of birds to the train depot for shipping to his customer. At the corner of the depot outside on the tarmac was a stack of a brown awkward-looking tied bundles of an unrecognizable item that prompted a curious question from Dad as to its identity. "That's lutefisk, a dried and cured fish" Dad responded. "Can we get some of that for to eat?" I inquired. "No son, that's for the Norwegians and we don't eat them. Besides, all the dogs in town have been marking them." I wondered about that and why the Norwegians could eat them and they seemed to be all right and healthy people, yet we couldn't. A few years later, I got my chance.

Part of our boyhood savings came from a \$1 per week allowance

from Mom and Dad that we were encouraged to save in our piggy bank and only once in a while spend it for a treat. But another source of income for us came from trapping pocket gophers, collecting the feet and preserving them in a can of salt until taking to the township supervisor to collect our twenty-five cent bounty. So we got to build a little nest egg of savings if we had a good year of trapping. Of course on our small 160 acre farm, it didn't take long to rid the whole farm of these dirt mounding gophers that made rough riding and nuisance for our machinery. I got a lesson in economics when I was offered a quarter for each gopher from Mr. Helgeson next door in addition to the quarter from the township. Besides, his whole farm was dotted by mounds so close together that the gophers must have been inbred. And since he was slow to harvest his hay fields and meadows, there was always plenty of dead grass to cover a trap embedded in the deep entry of the gopher hole.

George must have stored up quarters for years as he was dirt poor but always had a big handful of silver in his bib overhaul pocket at payday. Or maybe it was because he got free rent from my generous dad for using our machinery and seldom returning it until Dad begged him. Anyway, his gophers seem to be wiser than the average, and the big males would soon figure out how to avoid the Victor trap jaws and proceed to block the hole with dirt instead. Despite the challenge that presented for the trapper, it wasn't a bad economic situation, as that meant that by the end of the season, there was always enough big old smart gophers to breed and saturate the earth with newcomers the next spring. A self-perpetuating gold mine for this young entrepreneur!

The gopher hunt was also reimbursed by Mrs. Melby, a widow living just east of our farm deep in the middle of a hardwood forest bordering a twenty acre plot of land that my dad rented from her. She was very poor but always had a friendly smile and a wavering voice that probably never got enough exercise as seldom did she have anyone to talk too. Her appearance was what would maybe frighten the average person with her long flour sack dress and long gray hair put up on a bun under her little doily hat. She also had to contend with the dreaded

goiter condition as apparently she wasn't privy to the information that iodine could prevent it.

The gophers on this farm were mostly of the thirteen-striped kind that didn't produce mounds but were open holes scattered about the wild grass prairie on the edges of the farm field. They were pretty easy to catch but their bounty was only ten cents from the township. But Mrs. Melby liked me and when I appeared at her rickety screen door with a gopher dangling from a trap, she would come up with a quarter for my efforts.

Her house was typical of little cottages built in the early part of the century by descendants of the first settlers. It is doubtful if the siding ever saw a coat of paint and the cedar shingles has long since passed their lifetime. It was small with only a kitchen that consisted of a three foot square blue wooden table, a small iron wood stove for cooking and heating, a couple of hanging cupboards and a creaky rocker. There was a bedroom somewhere behind a squeaky wooden door that I never had privilege to enter but once got a glimpse of the gold posted bed when she went to get some quarters for me.

The squirrels had chewed through the roof and always seemed to scurry back into the attic when I walked up to see her. They didn't have far to jump from the trees as there were several six inch diameter ash growing into the roof. Of course Mrs. Melby didn't have any grass mowed but you could see a broken down rabbit fence around a little weedy garden. An old iron pump jack was sitting over an abandoned well slowly rusting away as she got all her water from the lake below her house.

Dad always worried that Mrs. Melby would burn up some cold winter morning because she used old newspapers that she glued to the walls for insulation in the wintertime. On those frigid mornings, I can remember him gazing to the East from our barn door, to see if any big smoke was rising into the sky from the woods a half mile away.

Some years later, Aggie and I would tell stories of our childhood to



our children at bed time and one of them I tried to dramatize was about Mrs. Melby. I would describe the creepy house and then say how the floor was so rotten that one night she fell through into the fruit cellar and died. This would always produce a nervous squealing giggle and not the best for children's bedtime.

Once on a trip home to see Grandpa and Gramma, the kids wanted to go see this mysterious house so we drove back through the woods to see if it was still there. The house was still standing but to my amazement, the kitchen table was still as I remembered it, with a partial jar of peanut butter, a container of homemade jam and an undisturbed plate setting for one on top of a red and white checkered linen table cloth. The kids wanted to go behind the house to see that gold bed frame in the cellar and to my amazement, there it lay, fallen through the floor, partially broken with the spring attached and a decomposed mattress.

Some of the walls of the house were fallen out exposing the newspaper layers which we could peel off and read about life in the 1920's! It was a visit to be remembered and lend credibility to at least one of the bedtime stories.

As I contemplate all the events of childhood, 99% of it all lived in the area of three miles square, I'm grateful to have had parents who were always there and visible to us a pillars of strength and endurance in good times and bad. It prepared us well for many of the events we would experience in our future years.

My father, besides having a large frame with hands twice as big as any other man, was the kind of gentle, kind person anyone could love. Slow to anger and steadfast in principle, he was a model for all of us. Even in pending hardship, such as watching a severe hailstorm wipe out our crops as he watched from the open barn door, triggered only a tear sliding down his weathered skin but no outburst of despair or anger at God. Only acceptance and a strong resolve to keep on! I remember trudging behind him through the snow on the way to the barn and trying to stay in his overgrown footprint and recalling the country western song "Who's

Gonna Fill His Shoes?" I wanted to be just like him!

Doing the Monday washing of the many piles of clothes in the basement of our small farmhouse with my mother, for some reason allowed deep conversations with her about life. She saw the opportunity to reveal to her pre-school son, some of the details of her experiences with losing babies through miscarriages. My curious scientific mind wanted to know all the details of these events and how many other siblings I might have had. Mom rarely talked about these setbacks but it was good for a young boy to learn that life on the female side had lots of challenges that males didn't always realize.

Mom was a very devout and religious person and did her best to teach us children good moral character. Her commitment to be a good wife for Dad and provide all the necessary needs for the family were obvious but it seemed she wasn't always the happiest person in that role. After moving to town in later years, she became the social person she always wanted to be, and lived out her life much more to her liking.

I distinctly remember riding with her to the nearest clothing store which was in Alexandria, and feeling the car rocking as we sped along and occasionally hitting the water drains along old Highway 52. She didn't seem to mind as she had a destination in mind that she loved and her mood was positive. On the way home, it wasn't so much!

Another lesson of childhood that impacted me was to realize the potential we all have if we have the resolve. This was from my brother Ade. Our hay mow opening, from which we threw down hay was 8' above our heads with only one rung of ladder at the top. The bottom had long since been removed to clear the alley in front of the cows to make it easier to feed them. My brothers Jerome and Adrian could easily jump and reach the rung and pull themselves up into the mow but my 4' body wasn't tall enough. So after months of begging Ade to lift me up to reach the rung, he finally gave in, and then let me go with my legs dangling and a hard concrete floor awaiting my downfall. My screaming for help, to push me up and into the hay mow, went unanswered as he told me to just lift yourself up, which I just knew was

impossible for my undersized arms. Our heated exchange of “I can’t” and “Yes you can,” ended up in his final words of “There’s no such word as can’t!”, and he walked away. My choices were clear. Fall and break your body or do the impossible. I did the latter and it was an event I never forgot many times in life when it didn’t think it was possible to go on. I can thank my brother Ade for that valuable lesson!

## Chapter 2. Teenage Years

Graduating from the country school and actually getting to ride a bus to school was a big new challenge for this teenager as this opened up a whole new social world. Although the Brandon High freshman class only numbered 24, it was threatening to me and I became quite withdrawn. Many of these kids I had not ever seen before and deciding who I was and who to associate with was difficult. But time heals and soon life was back to the comfort zone.

The desire to be noticed and to become an adult, caused my buddies and I who had not yet shaved our faces for the first time, to take the first steps into manhood. By applying black shoe polish to the peach fuzz under our nose and on our chins, we could enter the school each morning with evidence of our new masculinity. It was short-lived however, as Mr. Anderson, our principal, took note and gave us an ultimatum to wash it off or go home.

We made good use of our noon hour by slamming down our soup and sandwich within 5 minutes and racing downtown three blocks away to the local pool hall. It was time for the testing of our pool shooting skills and be cool with a cigarette in our mouth that we would bum off some of the regulars. I was very careful not to inhale after the peat smoking experience in grade school. This smoking experience sold me on the idea that it was only an experiment and not a life desire which fortunately I never pursued except for an occasional cigar and a short span of lighting up my grandpa's old pipe I inherited. I think, like so many times for children, if it was illegal or taboo or against parental

rules, we had to try it.

My parent's rule that we couldn't date in high school never seemed fair but then the only girl I ever wanted to date, started going steady as a freshman anyway so the rule was mute. But I was allowed to go with a girl to the Prom with the restriction that it be with my cousin. My mother worried a lot about dating and marriage and/or bringing children into the world as teenagers. So, awkward as it seemed, my cousin was my one and only date in high school. I was also allowed to go to the monthly parish dance in Millerville as since that was a Catholic Church event it was considered safe. There I could learn to dance with my aunties and enjoy socializing with women of all ages. But dancing with young girls my age required more courage than I could rarely muster.

One event, I feel can be made public now as time has allowed the statute of limitations to come into play, is the sulfur-burning event. I really enjoyed chemistry in high school and was so interested in the chemical reaction that resulted from elements interacting. It was also because of the superior teaching of Mr. Anderson, our principal, who made it interesting. I liked it so well, I had asked my parents to get me a chemistry set for Christmas. Since we were studying sulfur compounds I got the bright idea to manufacture a human fart and catch and contain it in a baby food jar I found in the basement. So, bringing it to English class, I convinced my buddy to unscrew the cap and release it when things got boring during class. I never liked the teacher as he mostly flirted with the girls and paid no attention to us or even called on us. So once the aroma started drifting amongst the classmates, finger pointing and giggling began but it was short lived as the fart was pretty weak and the teacher never figured out what was happening.

The effect wasn't dramatic enough for us so the next day my buddy Leon and I, stole a chunk of sulfur from the chemistry lab and proceeded to light it in our little jar during pre-noon choir practice which was also taught by our English teacher.

This time the effect was more like a mini- nuclear bomb, much

more than we expected, and caused pandemonium in the choir room so to cause choir to be canceled for the hour. Still no one knew who and where it was coming from as we had secretly kept it hidden in the back row under our long pants. Much to our surprise the smell wafted into the ventilation system and permeated the entire school for the whole noon hour. This prompted Mr. Anderson to announce in our home room at 1 p.m. that chemistry class would be canceled for the rest of the year unless who ever stole the sulfur would confess.

A revolting development was at hand which caused my buddy and I to confer numerous times in the afternoon about our next strategy. Admitting our guilt would not look good on our record, not admitting would cancel Chemistry, our favorite subject and jeopardize any vision of college prep. So after careful analysis, our plan was to interrupt Mr. Anderson as he greeted students leaving on the buses, and ask him “You didn’t think it was us who stole the sulfur, did you?”. Quickly he answered with the peculiar backward nod of his head, “Oh No!” We quickly marched onto the bus feeling extremely fortunate to have that behind us. The next day Chemistry continued as usual and we never did find out if he knew it was us, but took into consideration our “good student in class status” and let it pass. We never did ask him again, even at our 25th year reunion.

I often wonder if teachers realize how much they can influence students during these critical formation years of their life. Many times I credit my selection of a pathway in life to one or more teachers who made constructive comments that kept surfacing in my brain during those years. Comments like “you have this or that talent ... or you have real potential and should pursue further education after high school”. Mr. Anderson’s advice always stuck in my mind, even to this day: “You’re never any better than anyone else, but you’re just as good!” A philosophy that stuck in my head ever since. A great lesson on managing one’s ego so you can have a good self-image but not an arrogant superior attitude. A philosophy that you need to love yourself before you can love others and yet phase out the “It’s all about me”

attitude and gain happiness by serving others. I wished many times, I had searched out Mr. Anderson and told him how much he meant to me as a young teenager, but now I can only hope his Spirit knows what's in my heart.

As I approached midway in my senior year, an opportunity came about to ride along with our principal to a college recruitment day on the U of M campus in Morris. That was not on my radar at all especially when Dad would ask me what I was going to do in life. My goal was to have a good time with friends, learn what I needed to graduate and a secret yearning to hop the freight train that chugged through town everyday going somewhere unknown.

The love of travel and seeing the world away from home kept infiltrating my head and being a bum for a while seemed logical. When I actually told my parents my dream, there was an abrupt confrontation that I had three choices, and being a bum was not one of them. They were to get a job off the farm, stay on the farm which would require an expansion of land or cattle, or go on to school. None of the three seemed to fit well but Mr. Anderson's proposal to get a day off in high school and explore the outside world seemed worth a shake as what could I lose.

Another influencer entered my narrow view of the world and got my head to do some serious thinking as we sat under a big tree with other prospective students and talked about college. Mr. DeBoer was a friendly, smiling, and interesting guy who was the PR person for the campus. He seemed to strike the right key on my keyboard and got me seriously wanting to become an Ag teacher just like my Brandon teacher Nick Bressen, whom I admired. I would discover a year later though that teaching was not going to be my career, mainly because patience was not in my make-up. As sometimes we can't explain how God works in mysterious ways, Mr. DeBoer reappears as my Pre-Veterinary medicine advisor in St. Paul.

But there was an event that occurred during my early high school years that I purposely have left out of this life story until this point because it is so difficult to tell. However, since revealing one's own trials and tribulations may help someone else find comfort and peace in their life, I have decided to share details that allowed me to recover and move on with life.



## Chapter 3. The Fateful Night

It was a beautiful late August evening as my family and myself climbed into our 1951 two-door Ford headed for the county fair where my younger 12 year old sister Elaine was to take part in the 4H Dress Review in front of the Grandstand. The fair was a highlight for us kids as we loved the chance to exhibit our projects such as gardening, sewing, animals and the arts. 4H was founded in our county by T. Dad Erickson, who was considered the father of the movement that spread across the nation. It was and still is a wonderful way to teach children responsibility and give them confidence that is valuable in their future life. To pledge your head to clearer thinking, your heart to greater loyalty, and your hands to greater service, the 4H motto, opens the gateway to many young children to reach their potential.

There was a strong commitment to this cause in our family so when fair-time came, there was no hesitation to participate to the fullest. We finished our chores early and left my two older brothers to take care of things at home, besides there wasn't room for more than six in our family car.

I volunteered to drive since I was fifteen and had my farm driving permit for nearly a year. With my siblings in the back seat and my mom and dad in the front bench seat, we left the farm in no particular hurry as we traveled the gravel road toward Alexandria in plenty of time for the grandstand event.

The crossroad intersection just over a mile from home was already mostly “blind” from the tall summer corn stalks planted near the road. As was typical of country crossings in those days, traffic was rare and seldom were any of them signed for stoppage or yielding. So in approaching the intersection and noticing a car approaching from the left and leaving a trail of billowing dust behind it indicating a high speed, my first reaction was to get across before it was too late.

My only memory from that moment on was wandering around in a daze amongst moaning bodies scattered in the field with the strong odor of hot oil and antifreeze permeating the stillness of the evening. The realization of what had just happened would not come to pass for several days. I have no idea how long it took for ambulances to arrive or anybody to come on the scene. I just remember my two brothers and I being put in a car and left there unattended and forgotten in the maze of vehicles that had arrived in the dark.

There were two hospitals in Alexandria at the time and my next memory was the pain of a doctor suturing a large gash in the back of my head with no apparent effective anesthesia. There was conversation that many people were hurt and that we were to be transferred from the county hospital to Our Lady of Mercy on the other side of town where my family was. My mind went blank from then on until being awakened the next morning and told that my sister had died at midnight, a man had died at the scene and my mother and father were unconscious in the hospital where I was.

The events that followed that night were to severely test my ability to overcome and recover from this tragedy. There was the guilt I carried knowing that my inexperience as a driver and the poor decision I made, resulted in so much harm and loss for so many others. Yet, I knew I couldn't reverse the judgement I had made and somehow life had to go on. Why would God allow two cars to meet in that intersection at exactly the same time and which would not have happened even a split second earlier or later? That question would never be answered and remains a mystery to this day, but I eventually learned that I needed to

accept what happened and move on with life.

My mother's words after regaining conscientiousness were the only thread I could hang on to in those days immediately after the tragedy. "God spared you from injury and death because He had other plans for you in life". And my father's words I heard after coming out of a two week coma, "I'm glad I am the one who has to bear the pain and not you, son, as I have had fifty-six years of a good life and you have just begun your life". Those expressions of true love were enough comfort to pull me through the next 5 years.

The counseling services that are so essential in dealing emotionally with tragedies of this magnitude were not known about or readily available in the culture of rural living like they are today. Today, thankfully the response of the mental health teams is so gratifying in helping victims cope with these extreme life challenges. Just to have someone to talk to and understand one's grief are so important to anyone regardless of their age.

The law suits that followed for over 5 years, never allowed me to put this accident to rest in my mind. The memory still flashes before me if I pass that intersection but I have learned to let it go. The threat of losing the farm because of these suits was so great that our attorney insisted Dad should counter-sue or we could lose everything. This was an excruciating and painful decision for Dad as he never ever wanted to try to get back at anyone for anything. Fortunately, the cases were eventually settled some years later but the court appearances, attorney calls, and depositions that punctuated those seemingly endless years are not easy to forget and probably never will completely, but life must go on.

The total disability of my father which ended his farming career meant a life of physical pain for another 34 years, did not affect his steadfast commitment to be a loving and kind father. His encouragement and sound advice continued to boost my morale, even up to within a few years of his passing. Having experienced the loss of

his first wife, several children, and financial difficulty, never changed his wonderful ability to remain humble, kind and steadfast in his often pronounced parting comment: “Take good care of yourself”. This greeting always reminded us that in order to love others, you also need to love yourself. It was this philosophy that I vowed to try to honor for the rest of my life, despite the many times a poor self-image would handicap my way of serving others.

## Chapter 4. Making Better Men

Most people today would maybe doubt that joining a college fraternity could possibly make “better” men. The media’s reporting of fraternity hazing in the past few decades has brought into the open, some of the negatives of what can happen when an organization becomes over-zealous or even goes down an avenue where outcomes are not what was intended. Similarly, movies such as “Animal House” portraying drunken forays with free sex and blatant disorderliness have not given the fraternal life a good reputation.

When I arrived on the college scene and elected to live in a dormitory, I was overjoyed and excited about joining the life of being a student and away from home. But I missed family and wasn’t sure every kid I met was there for the same purpose that I was. My roommate, Richard Angus, was a good friend from summer Bible school in Brandon which helped a lot since our parents were good friends also. So when we were invited to attend a “smoker” at the campus fraternity houses, it spiked my curiosity. They were basically meet and greet affairs as smoking was not the focus.

It was at the Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity that the warm welcome of young men that all hailed from farm country like me, appealed immediately. I also sensed that most all of them would be good students academically, morally and socially which I still feel to be true today. This appealed to me since I had just been told in a freshmen orientation session on campus to look at the person in front of you and on either side of you, and realize all three of them likely will not graduate from

this university. That scared a young kid from the country but also caused a firm resolve to be not only the survivor of this test but also to thrive in this environment. And I sensed that in the men I met that night at the smoker.

Within months I had pledged, sold the dorm contract, went through initiation and moved in with forty-five students, all amassed in common purpose. The most amazing part of being a “brother in the bond” was that now I had myself surrounded with those of the same purpose and goals plus the opportunity to expand my character and personality. By living together, eating, sleeping, socializing, playing, studying, and self-governing, I learned tons about what constitutes success and happiness in life. We called out each other in our formal chapter meetings every Monday night when someone was not conforming to our common goals and discipline which seemed to resolve disputes quickly and effectively. That was the philosophy I wanted to carry over later in life when and if I was to raise a family.

Early on, my brotherhood family realized my inadequacies in voicing my opinions, speaking in front of a group, and just being comfortable with who I was. But instead of ridiculing or shaming me, they took it upon themselves to bolster my confidence by teaching and example. When living in close proximity with other students for almost six years, it created the environment for personal development that is hard to duplicate in dormitory or apartment living. It was easy for us to see what we could become in life if we resolved to follow what so many former members achieved in life. There was a long list of successful alumni we had the opportunity to meet who had the distinction of living out the goals and purposes to build better men!

It was in this fraternal environment that a major shift in my life’s profession occurred. My early dreams of becoming an agricultural teacher were being challenged by a lack of serious interest in courses like education, humanities and sociology. It was after dinner one night when one of the brothers enrolled in veterinary medicine questioned my field of endeavor and said “Ledermann, you should be a vet!” I can

remember thinking “Really, why would you say that?” What did he see that I couldn’t?

That comment sent my mind into a tizzy that night and I experienced what many would say “a vision or a calling”. In a matter of days, I went through an introspection privately that I cannot explain, but the light was clear and the path was obvious. I went home and sprung the news on my mom and dad. Mom’s reaction was very sullen and questioned why I wasn’t going into music instead, Dad’s response was a big smile and a quick comment “That’s what I wanted to be once!” And then added “At least you won’t have to worry about making a living!” Which fit with his occasional neighborhood good will call of helping deliver a calf or two and the fact our neighborhood vet was always busy and “well off” as far as he knew.

So off to the campus administration office, a quick change of courses, a summer plan of chemistry, math and physics and on a roll to become a deeper lover of animals and their welfare. I never turned around. I also pleased my mother when she learned I joined a dance band, took up song leading with my acoustical guitar and sang in several quartets ... the music career she sensed would fit ... remembering my days in the basement washroom as a child singing to her “You are my Sunshine”!

During the late 50’s and early 60’s, the predominant hair styles among young college men were flat-tops, crew-cuts, hineys, and duck-tails. And getting a haircut at the local barber shop was just another event to try to squeeze in during busy days. So the brothers were looking for a “short-cut” to traveling to the barber every few weeks and for a way to save beer money. Enter the barber from Brandon ... a local quack who saw an opportunity to practice a hair cutting skill that was sure to better the method his mom had done on this hairdo by simply putting an upside-down bowl on the head and cutting off what stuck out, or what was called a haystack cut!

After getting a few skeptic brothers to commit to a trial run, the

business took off. So much that, every Friday night was barber night in the bathroom and this kid was able to supplement enough income to cover all expenses except tuition throughout the college years. Of course, there was always the risk of being caught by the Barber Association but it never happened.

The “Yes, you can ... No I can’t” scenario of the hay mow incident of childhood days, resurfaced on the college campus and was a scary moment of pushing the limits. The Ledermann family genes included some pretty impressive genetics for running in track events ... genes that are still evident in the later generations with medals hanging on many of the bedroom walls. So often my blood family would see competitive racing going on in the farmyard with on-going challenges. My older brother Ade, became my idol to follow as his track records included becoming a star even in the National Senior Games in recent years.

So racing with fraternity brothers was a regular spring event, but unfortunately I was not one to want to train and preferred to just go out and put the “pedal to the metal” so to speak. It did allow me to win the St. Paul Campus 100 and 200 yard sprint events and get the opportunity to compete with the Gopher football players who were allowed to be in intramural events during the off-season.

The winner of the 200 yard sprint in their division (the dormitory league) was Billy Munson, a halfback for the Gophers, who had beat out Sandy Stephens and Carl Eller in the semifinals ... both stars on the National Champion Football Team that year.

The supreme challenge was at hand but my “I can do it” attitude from childhood days was bubbling over and at the gun, I discovered I was only a yard behind Billy by the 100 yard marker. The after burners went on, and I felt I was flying until reaching 10 yards from the finish line when my legs melted underneath me, my eyes when black, which apparently sent me crashing on the cinders while sliding over the finish line only getting third place!



I awoke staring at numerous sets of eyes glaring in anger at my corpse lying on the field of Memorial Stadium, trying to realize where I was. There was no praise being expressed by the medics in attendance, only a solid scolding about “You obviously didn’t train for this event”! And, “You should know better than to risk your body like that!” The next thing I remember is waking up in my room the next morning where every muscle in my body was like an oak board. A lesson I learned was, “Don’t let your mind get ahead of your body”, or was it, “Your optimism will get you in trouble some day!” It did a few more times in life but I must enjoy trouble or I wouldn’t court it so often!

The college days were not always lived in serious study and our veterinary class was always game for a little fun during our long hours of labs and lectures. Always being one to challenge some of the silly rules, sometimes created a serious risk on every getting the tassel at graduation. Like as juniors, when it seemed, our only reason for being in the clinics rotation, was to serve the seniors and exercise horses around the clinic corridors after surgery. Dr. Arnold never seemed to like me and always questioned my sincerity in learning. He was also the one to police our behavior during clinic duties and seemed to sneak around to catch us in our deficiencies. So when our squadron was convinced that he had joined the other faculty in the coffee room, I was persuaded by my classmates, to ride the neutered donkey instead of the boring 30 minute lead time. No sooner had I gotten the little beast to trot in royal fashion with my toes dragging on the concrete, Dr. Arnold appears on next corner. Of course, my buddies thought it hilarious but for me it meant a two year struggle to maintain the necessary “C” grade in any of his classes. I could have joined the club of thirteen who flunked out of our class of forty-six for various reasons, but would have been the first for riding a donkey!

We had our share of good-natured fun, with our rival fraternity on campus too. We had very competitive sporting events to win the “spittoon”, the cup cherished by the champions of each sport. But sometimes that serious competition led to more serious acts of mischief

like hoisting an outhouse onto the roof of the campus Student Center one night with the words “Farm House” painted on it (the name of their fraternity). There were the usual repercussions that usually cooled our interest in razzing each other. The most egregious act probably was stealing a small flock of research geese from the campus poultry barn, force feeding them the diarrhea-inducing castor oil, and dropping them into their chapter room carpeted floor during the night. Not a good idea if you want to create good feelings amongst your fellow students on campus. However, in spite of these attacks and counter-attacks as free-living students releasing some of the tensions of hard study, I’m pleased to say that still, some of my best friends in life, are ones that we mutually harassed on campus.

Pursuing the veterinary profession career and getting that important piece of paper saying you made it, was still front and center for my life but my mother’s desire for studying music also played a role in those college years. Being a member of the Gopher Marching Band for a whole two weeks was unfortunately not a good fit with my class schedule but it sure was fun to high step with upperclassmen in such a prestigious group.

Music has always been my love and almost all types will do. So when the accordion became second fiddle, the trombone fit well into high school music and then into playing in a small dance band for a couple years. But most of the time, acoustic guitar became the instrument of choice as two other frat brothers and myself played for parties and just relaxation in the style of Homer and Jethro corny comical. Vocal music was also fun and fraternity living provided several opportunities to be in quartets or spontaneous group singing at parties and pubs. Fortunately, all succeeding years after college were filled with opportunity to enjoy exercising the vocal chords, whether it be theatre, church or friend gatherings. Maybe my mother was right, pursuing a music career would have been fun, but then I would have missed out on the experience of immersion in the animal world.

My brother Ade's love of the mountains, rubbed off on me and younger brothers, which resulted in several of us brothers joining him for summer work in Glacier Park Montana. In my mind this is one of the most beautiful places in the world. Sandwiched between my years of veterinary school in the early 60's it became another lesson in life. Climbing mountains to their peaks and seeing the world from a new perspective of how God's Creation of magnificence has no boundaries, had a huge impact on my life. Fortunately, some family trips to Glacier Park sparked the same spirit in our little family so many of them now had not only taken similar jobs there in the summer, but chose to live their lives in a mountainous atmosphere.

Enjoying the beauty of the mountains was one benefit of working there, but hiking on mountain trails with other kids for day trips was the real test of what our bodies can do when challenged by heights and endurance. The rewards were seeing wildlife in its undisturbed environment of the preserved parks of our Nation and how we then gained respect for saving parts of our world just for them. The encounters with mountain goats, ptarmigans, marmots, and grizzly bears were sometimes scary but we quickly learned their habits and adjusted our attitudes toward them rather than challenging them. Sad to say as life has aged this body, the desire to climb high has diminished some and fear has replaced fun in that category. A natural progression of letting go and accepting that we too cannot live forever.

## Chapter 5. Going Blind

When the date of graduation from veterinary college started to look like it could actually happen, some thoughts about a future job began to surface. Also, the realization that it would be a single life if I didn't start to get any serious relationship with a woman. Deep down, the thought of being married and raising a family always appealed to me but the rigors of attaining a degree and fraternal life, were front and center. But since I had not really found anyone I thought would make a good life partner, the prospect of marriage was not imminent.

It was late November of my junior year in vet school, that my roommate, Rich, and good friend, asked if I would be interested in a blind date with his girlfriend's roommate. The timing was right and my answer affirmative. So a trip to Sauk Centre and a date for the New Munich Ballroom night of dancing became a reality.

Aggie was a farm girl, one of 14 Jennissen kids, and one of seven girls. I could tell from the moment we met that she was from good "stock", had a great personality and good looks to boot! Our outing at the dance also convinced me that she loved having good wholesome fun so we danced many dances, met many of her friends and became comfortable with my date very early in the evening.

Although I had seldom over-indulged in liquor by my 22nd year of existence, I seemed to have a "drinking to moderation" standard implanted in my brain from my German heritage. So the "Old Time" dances were cause for lots of laughter, whiskey and socializing that appealed to me and to my new acquaintance.

At the parting on the front porch of her rented apartment, I hesitantly had the first hint that maybe, just maybe, this would be the first kiss but not the last. As we wondered what was happening, Aggie said “This must be infatuation”. Since I was not good at English and barely survived any of my course work in the subject, I simply agreed with her and the romance started from that moment on.

After meeting her many siblings and parents, I was so impressed with their openness and warmth toward those outside the family. Those qualities cemented in my mind that there would be no turning around and this would be my choice for the wife of my life. Fortunately Aggie fell for me also and within a year and a half, we were married and on our honeymoon to Texas and Uncle Sam.

## Chapter 6. HEP 1,2,3,4

It was July 1964, and President Lyndon Johnson was preparing the country for war in Vietnam to stop the threat of communism spreading throughout Southeast Asia and beyond. There was a massive build-up of the military occurring and being of military age, healthy and no longer qualifying for college deferment, the orders came down from Washington, that Uncle Sam wants you and now.

We were warned by the Fifth Army Headquarters in Chicago in March that The Army Veterinary Corps was short of veterinarians, and that any of us who were eligible would be drafted that summer or soon after. So thirteen of our veterinary graduating class became what was known as “Drafted Volunteers”. Considering that becoming a country vet somewhere was my goal, the thought of starting in a practice situation and then get drafted didn’t seem like an idle threat and a high risk. Some of our class ignored the warning and then were drafted one year later.

The good news was if we were married, our wives could accompany us to our state- side duty stations and live off base. Also, because of our DVM degree, we were commissioned as First Lieutenants officers on induction. The more undesirable situation would be to be shipped to a combat zone and leave family behind for thirteen months or maybe forever.

Military life was interesting and I was fortunate to be sent to Louisiana to a huge training base at Fort Polk. This came after four weeks of basic training with MD's and Dentists in San Antonio and then eleven weeks of food inspection and public health in the Chicago area. Because Fort Polk had 100,000 troops and 30,000 training personnel, instead of being a base veterinarian doing food inspection and public health, I was ordered to mostly be a small animal practitioner for the many families that had pets in the area and no civilian veterinary services available. Captain Bark was my partner at Fort Polk who did most all the public health and food inspection and left the practice work to me, which I really enjoyed.

Living in rural Cajun country with my new wife and immersed in a different culture than our northern "Yankee" background, was very interesting and at times quite challenging. The Civil Rights Act had just been passed in Congress, but the people in rural Louisiana were not quite ready for that change in 1964. So even though slavery had been abolished for nearly 100 years, the black community was still being discriminated against everywhere.

Because our beginnings were white rural America in the far north, and we rarely ever saw a black person, it was quite an awakening for both of us. Witnessing The KKK burning a cross in our local town of Leesville one evening made us realize that change of attitude in the South was not going to come quickly.

Growing up with parents who taught equality of the races and respect for all cultures, made it hard to understand the reluctance of the South to change even after many decades since the Civil War. But then our heritage of not having that history of slavery in our communities didn't really prepare us to understand what was happening in the South.

One humorous event occurred to exemplify this situation, was when Mom and Dad took the train to Leesville for the baptism of our first son Jeffrey. We were living in a small rented house in the woods outside of town and had trouble with our water being so heavily loaded with iron that we couldn't wash our clothes there. So mom

accompanied us to the local laundromat for this weekly ceremony. On arrival, she noticed that the laundromat was split into two entry doors. One saying “Whites only” and the other “Colored only”. Since mom had never washed clothes outside of the home in her life, she was somewhat bewildered by these signs. So when we got out of the car, she commented that she had not separated the clothes by color in the baskets and we better do that on the sidewalk before we entered. We were amused but it clearly illustrated how our acceptance of other cultures can be easily expressed in words but to see it and live in an environment that different than our bringing up, can be challenging.

Everyone, military or otherwise, had dogs in western Louisiana. There was the house dog, lap dog, guard dog, yard dog, watch dog and the hunting dogs. Hunting wild boar and deer were common sports of the locals and dogs were used in almost every situation. The favorite breed was the Catahoula Leopard Stock Dog, which originated out of years of breeding in Catahoula Parish. It was a stocky, durable breed that could handle the summer heat and humidity plus was bred to chase wild boars by nipping at their jowls to get them to turn broadside for the hunters. Wild boar meat was a local delicacy and there were lots of them roaming the heavy woods and swamplands of Louisiana.

Unfortunately many of these dogs got injured or killed by the boars because of their sharp tusks that hung out of their mouth by three inches and were the boar’s only weapon. This would result in us having to clean and suture many hounds at our military clinic.

Because of the hot humid climate and many bayous in the area, parasites and mosquitoes were so prevalent that we would see upwards of fifty medical or surgical cases every day in our clinic. This made for a very interesting day and a real Mecca for a veterinarian fresh out of veterinary school.

Another duty our veterinary staff was required to do, was sanitary inspections of food plants that provided food for the thousands of troops on base. That meant driving to the various factories and shops that were in about a one hundred mile radius of Fort Polk and looking



for violations of food preparation and storage. We had the authority to cause shutdowns if sanitary conditions were serious enough to endanger the military troops.

The army wanted to create good public relations with the communities around the base, as after World War II, the military had moved out and the civilian population was severely affected. But with the start-up of the Vietnam War, businesses were popping up all over and their vitality was important to the military base as well for the local communities.

A real test of a young green officer from the North was to know how to relate to the southern way of life, especially when one held the key to their continuing in business. One such test was the local donut shop that produced 50,000 donuts per day in a little downtown store front in Leesville.

I was greeted at the counter by Jed the owner of the shop and immediately offered a cup of coffee and a donut. Since we of course were not allowed to take bribes by Army regulations, my refusal was not taken kindly. He informed me that the last inspector had enjoyed the southern hospitality and filled out the report right there on the counter and everyone was happy.

My commitment to live up to the standard I was taught by my parents of doing what we were trained and paid to do and not be swayed by temptation to take short cuts, prevailed. I informed the nervous Jed I wanted to see the back room and the kitchen area and it wouldn't take long. But then I scanned the high ceilings and noticed that windows were broken in the high store front allowing several sparrows to come in a perch on the water pipes above the donut racks and providing free frosting for the donuts. My trip to the back room revealed numerous open flour and ingredient bags loaded with scurrying cockroaches and totally unsanitary floors and dirty equipment for donut making. The workers apparently only changed clothes once per week. After recovering from the shock, I informed Jed that the Army was going to shut him down and no more donuts after today.

Because the Post Commander wanted to keep good relations with the locals I got a phone call from the General asking if I understood the consequences of my decision and the effect it would have. In the second breath, he asked how long will it take for him to clean up, and I said “three days”. So in three days I returned to a smiling friendly Jed who appeared to be proud of his clean and repaired donut shop and he never offered any coffee or donuts to me either. It reaffirmed my belief in doing things right rather than the easy way out.

Community relations were important but when the Judge Advocate, or justice department of the Army, was processing the third claim against the army base in a month, he got suspicious. Seems the local ranchers were in need of some easy cash and were able to haul a random collection of cow bones to the Claims office multiple times with the same pick-up load and no one until this point had questioned the integrity of the ranchers. So the order came down through the ranks that autopsies would need to be done before any claims were processed in the future and to be done on the site of the supposedly fatal wounds from artillery fire.

Sargent Bill was the game warden on base and also the one assigned to take the vet out to the mortar range to accomplish the mission of qualifying the claim. The next case claim came within a week and Bill arrived in his jeep to take me on the range to examine a dead cow on Mortar Range #2. The cow supposedly belonging to JD Hagan, a local Cajun rancher who would show us where he had found the remains a few days prior.

Firing was halted by Range officer as we followed JD into the dry dusty range lands of interior Louisiana, which was dotted with conifers, low-growing shrubs and saw palmetto bushes, and sometimes even a little grass vegetation that cows could find and amazingly do quite well on. The landscape was dotted with pock marks of exploded mortars and every so often, duds that failed to explode, lying on the surface and which were not always easy to

avoid. I was very uneasy as we bounced along for hundreds of yards wondering what would happen if we unknowingly drove over a dud and it came to life. I could see the headlines, “Army Captain killed on Mortar Range looking for Dead Cow.”

It was a hot muggy spring afternoon which would make fast decomposition for any dead animal. So JD pulled up short and pointed to one hundred yards in front of his pick-up and shouted, “There she is Doc, found her there last night at sundown and she’s pretty ripe! No need to get close as you can see the mortar shrapnel in her side from here!”

Being a young dedicated officer and sticking to my guns of doing the job we were called to do, I commented that her bloated smelly condition would not deter me from doing the autopsy. I told the pair to just stay upwind and I would be finished in 20 minutes or less. I sensed JD was not happy with my decision and I wondered why he should care about my angst to get the job done quickly.

The beast was literally twice the normal size from all the gaseous decomposition but interestingly, the skin was still intact except for a three inch slit in the shoulder and a similar hole in the rib cage. As I dislodged the piece of shrapnel from the shoulder wound, I could see there was no collateral damage and when I opened the rib cage, there laid a piece of shiny shrapnel against the lungs, again with no damage.

My immediate conclusion was, JD had found the animal a couple of days ago, slit the hide and stuck in the shrapnel, then let her get good and rotten before putting in the claim so I would choose not to do the autopsy. As I held up the piece of metal and foolishly proclaimed to the far off bystanders loudly that there was something suspicious about this situation, the ensuing response was immediate and predictable.

“You calling me a liar!?” With that he drew his pistol from his holster, which all of the Louisiana cowboys carried in the woods, and pointed it at me in anger. Sargent Bill confronted him immediately with his Mag 45, and I dove for the bushes, crawling away on my hands and

knees and scared to death. To be killed in action, state side, because of a dispute over a cow seemed crazy. As I lay on the ground listening to the exchange of anger between the two gunmen, gradually common sense prevailed and JD sped off in his pickup, obviously very angry.

I filed my report at the office, stating what I found and feeling that justice would be served. I had the feeling that I had disrupted a ring of false claims that ranchers were getting by with for maybe years, and that my security for myself, my wife and young child was in serious doubt.

The next day, a local rancher, appeared at our clinic front desk, asking to see the vet. My secretary sent him walking back to my office where I noticed him carrying a brown paper bag with something large inside. It was JD's brother and he had a present for me which he wanted to give me. With a friendly smile he said "Here. Take this and just forget about yesterday!" It was a jug of whiskey.

Needless to say, refusing the bribe was not what he wanted to hear, and as he departed angrily, my only feeling was that these last thirty days for Uncle Sam can't come too soon! Sometimes choosing to do what we feel is right can put one at risk but in the end in my mind, it's worth taking the gamble.

But the whole military experience, in spite of the negative opinion of many Americans about the war in Vietnam, filled a personal desire to serve our country in some way. Compared to today, when veterans and active military are respected and looked up to in their service to our country, many soldiers of the 60's were not treated with respect. In fact, whenever we could don civilian clothes, we did, so as to not be shouted at in public places like airports. I recall how when flying military standby, we needed to wear a uniform, but a quick change just before boarding the airplane avoided any harassment from the frustrated American public that freely expressed their dissatisfaction with our government.

President Kennedy's famous statement of "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country" still

rings in my memory like it was only yesterday. That has led me to believe that a mandatory one or two year stint of some type of civic or military service for every young American after high school would go a long ways to restore love and respect of our government and the freedoms we enjoy.

## Chapter 7. Two Holes In One

With the military service now a historical event, the next focus was to find a location to begin the practicing veterinary medicine career. I wanted a place to settle into community life, raise a family and serve the rural community somewhere.

Times were not good in the farm community with low crop prices and general depression in agriculture, so jobs were not plentiful for veterinarians on the rural scene and salaries were even less than the meager income of an Army captain. Now Aggie was pregnant with the second child, Lisa, and if we're lucky, she could deliver on Army time and eliminate our immediate cost of hospital and delivery expenses. Luckily it happened with eight days remaining on my army time and we were blessed with our second beautiful child.

Our chances of being hired to join in a practice were practically non-existent in the whole of the Midwest, so the next choice was either to buy a small practice or re-join the military for an extended career. The military was a serious consideration because of the financial security and opportunity to travel but not a good family plan with separation and constant moving. So the logical final decision was to buy a small practice in Southern Minnesota in the heart of the world's bread basket. A place where crop farming was king, soil was four feet of a black enriched medium, yields were unbelievable and no record of drought for scores of years. Because of the success of crop farming, livestock was rapidly leaving the territory in favor of a life style that

came to be known as “Corn, Beans and Florida” ..... not exactly the place for a future in the farm animal world.

But with school loans begging for pay-off and a Pontiac Lemans half paid for, our launching into the business world was high risk to say the least. But youth and exuberance are a wonderful pair and with vigor the new life had become a reality.

When one is loaded for bear in terms of book knowledge and military practice only, that first farm call seemed all too strange and bewildering to a young vet. The call was from a concerned farmer asking for help for his large Holstein cow that was in labor but not delivering. As was the custom for many young vets, a copy of the Merck Veterinary Manual lay next to me on the car seat which contained many answers to medical problems of animals. After all the years of schooling in obstetrical problems from book learning, I still was not prepared for the real life version of an “OB”. A quick search in the manual as I drove along, did not reveal the procedure to follow when arriving on the scene.

I shall not forget the feeling of trying to look professional for this new client and yet inside not sure where to start as the cow looked at me for assistance. One does have the choice of examining one of two holes on the rear end of a cow but in diagnostic procedures each has different advantages and disadvantages. The rectal approach is useful for assessing the position of the calf in the womb below and the vaginal approach is needed to actually do the delivery. So between two sets of tools, a water bucket full of disinfected solution, a rubber apron, latex sleeves, calf extractor and a bewildered look, I was ready for the delivery. I can't imagine what the farmer must have thought observing this confused and nervous novice and all the equipment lying nearby in waiting. After checking each hole several times, I made the brilliant but risky decision that she just wasn't ready. This dismayed the farmer, as in his years of experience as he knew she had to be ready.

So I left the farm with the intention of coming back for a recheck every hour or so. After the second recall and on my way for the third,

the farmer called and said everything was ok and she had a beautiful live heifer calf! I was somewhat embarrassed but happy for the news and stopped in to see for myself and to thank the farmer for his patience with my novice judgements. He never got a bill.

There were a multitude of experiences in the forty-three years of my veterinary career that followed graduation and I chose to expand on some of those at the end of this autobiography.



## Chapter 8. Family Explosion

During the early month of our courtship and the intimate talks we had before any formal engagements, the subject of family size frequently came up. I was aware of the fertility genes that were abundant in the Jennissen family as one could not ignore that for Margaret to give birth to fourteen healthy children, there had to be some genetic influence. Likewise, some of her siblings were well on the way to duplicate this accomplishment. My family and relatives also were blessed with many children but not quite like the huge number of the Jennissens. With four surviving brothers and a sister, our family wasn't exactly small either. So when the time seemed appropriate, it was amazing that the half dozen number came up for us mutually at the same time. We were fully aware that this was only a desire and much depended on what all transpired after we hitched up but it was a common goal.

The “protection” element was not even discussed in the first years, and sure enough, son Jeffrey was born within eleven months after our wedding and daughter Lisa within twenty-four months. Hopefully we would be able to increase our income a little so as to afford children and become what we hoped would be good parents.

Our situation, with myself having a professional income and with the opportunity to grow a practice and expand that income, plus Aggie's desire to be a stay-at-home mom, bade well for child raising. Trying to duplicate what our parents had accomplished was our goal and for twelve years Aggie was able to be the great mom that I knew she would be.

Like anyone embarking on parenting, we were open to other ideas like those of Dr. Spock's and other child psychologists but our primary method was derived from our parents. Trying to do that in an off-farm situation didn't look like it would work, so the first house we purchased was complimented by some outbuildings and an acre of grassland ... perfect for guess what? Animals!

In our opinion, it was the perfect way for the young'uns to learn responsibility by having animals to love and take care of. So first it was chickens, then sheep and some feeder pigs, and the biggie, a Brown Swiss milk cow. Milking the cow was great because at a very young age, the kids learned not to fear big animals and how to help provide milk, butter and cheese for the family by a once- a-day milking. The procedure we used was, put her to pasture in the morning and keeping her calf in the barn, then two of them would hand-milk (one on each side) in the evening after school. Next the calf got his share of milk from Sandy until the next morning. It was always amazing to see them trudging up from the barn with a gallon of milk in the stainless steel pail which was usually consumed within the next day.

As the family grew with the addition of Lora, Joel, Jason and Jeremy, all within a span of ten years, the need for more space and farm buildings to carry on the mission was paramount.. So the hunt for additional land began early on after Jeremy arrived.

At that time, river bottom land around Winnebago where we lived was called waste land and sold for a fraction of the price for deep rich black crop land. The search was successful and we luckily found forty acres of river land which was traversed by the Blue Earth River and had some high ground to build our dream chalet overlooking the waterway. It had lots of hardwoods including Black Walnut which gave us the chance to harvest some of this beautiful wood.

In time garden spots were tilled, a pet barn and garage was built and a J & L Earth Sheltered Research Barn. This barn became the money maker for the kids as they each owned four sows each and

for their care and labor were rewarded with the profit from selling 40# feeder pigs after paying for the feed. It taught them a little about economics, good times and bad, and that life isn't always fair. Some animals died, some didn't get pregnant and sometimes the prices were terrible but all in all, most of them got at least some income to show for their work.

There were child labor laws already in place but in this family they were ignored. Making it a family affair and fun, allowed the children to learn a lot about life before leaving the nest after high school. We always made sure that the whole family took a lengthy two-week vacation in summer to see the rest of the United States which according to them, was a highlight of their childhood.

The sad thing about child raising is you only get one chance to get it right and we certainly made mistakes but hopefully they were small ones ... but we let the kids speak for themselves on this one.

No matter what they might say, we are so proud of them.

## Chapter 9. In Sickness And In Health

Life was good in Winnebago, with the kids in a reasonably good school, especially the grade school, and vet practice going well after a slow start. I had an excellent partner, John Landman, a good North Dakotan that was great to get along with and always at his best. The practice depended heavily on the farmers maintaining livestock herds which was becoming a concern because of their success in making a living off the fertile land only, rather than adding or keeping their animal herds. But the pet population was like any rural community so that portion of the practice kept growing as people took advantage of technological advancements for the pets they so loved.

Practice never yielded a day that I wasn't excited about going to work and trusting Aggie to provide the basic needs for the kids at home, which made for a good life. Sometimes the long hours and night and weekend calls could test one's endurance and patience but we had the advantage of sharing the after-hours calls with a partner. Plus I loved taking one or more of the young children on farm calls whenever I could so they could get some fun times on farms and lighten the load for Aggie when I was gone. As a result, by the time they were in high school, they had seen almost everything that can happen in a vet's life.

Having a partner also allowed for the two-week summer vacation for the family and a week vacation somewhere warm with some other couples in the winter. Mexico was a big attraction with its many ocean shorelines and economical hotel stays. It was on the one of those trips, that some of us dared each other to do the somewhat dangerous sport

of parasailing at the end of a 300' foot rope being pulled by a somewhat questionable small tow boat. We had heard of vacationers being dropped on to tall hotels or crashing to the ground because of strong wind gusts, but after several margaritas the temptation to be airborne was too great.

It was that experience that triggered the sleeping idea in my head, of taking up flying as a hobby at our local small Blue Earth airport. Laying on my back on the ground as a child, in the summer, taking the mandatory break after noon dinner and watching the commercial DC3 prop planes fly over on their Minneapolis to Fargo route, sprouted a childhood dream to fly. In fact my brothers thought I had gone crazy when I was so sure I could fly by grabbing a bunch of chicken wing feathers and jumping off a full hay rack, only to crash to the ground.

But sailing in the air where there was no other sound but the whooshing of air past your ears and being at the mercy of the wind was just too enticing. So I joined a local flying club that had three small single engine airplanes and started taking flying lessons early in the morning long before any family was awake. I had wonderful instructors, one a spray pilot, and one a fighter jet pilot retired after Vietnam. Both put me through some pretty scary exercises that seasoned me enough to not only enjoy it but to feel confident enough to take my family on cross-country excursions to see our parents and other events.

But a few close calls in marginal weather conditions soon convinced me that in the interest of saving my family and myself from a disaster, it was time to retire the wings after only 110 hours of flying time.

Everything was going well in the family, we were happily married and just having the time of our lives when something changed in a matter of weeks. Aggie started having some double vision and numbness on one side of her face that progressed to the point of giving her difficulty driving. Then it all disappeared only to return in a couple of weeks but accompanied by dizziness, nausea and extreme fatigue.

It was a Sunday night after having friends over for a late dinner that all the symptoms worsened so that when I left for work the next morning, she was having trouble keeping anything down and wouldn't leave the bed. Nervously, I left her with our youngest child Jeremy at home and started my farm calls. Within a few hours, I called her from my radio-telephone but got no answer which prompted me to come back home to check on her.

I found her so dehydrated and delirious that I was afraid she was dying before my very eyes. I carried her to my truck and sped to the Blue Earth Hospital as fast as I could with Jeremy on my lap. The Emergency Doctor, took one look at her and started her on IV's immediately to attempt re-hydration, and then proceeded to evaluate her condition. I was informed it was serious, and could be a brain tumor. They chose to transport her to Mayo in Rochester immediately, Meanwhile, I was trying to find friends to care for the children coming home from school and then I followed the ambulance.

It didn't take long for the Neurology Department in Mayo to come up with the definitive diagnosis of Acute Multiple Sclerosis, or MS, a rapid demyelination of the brain and spinal cord, a dissolving of the insulation surrounding the nerve bundles.

I was informed that MS could not be cured and the only treatment at that time was a cortisone-type treatment to temporarily reverse signs that only lasted about two weeks, or to try to eliminate stress in her remaining life. No prediction was given as to life span or rate of deterioration but we knew enough people that were debilitated from it so the future was scary.

In the days that followed, Aggie started to regain some strength and I spent many hours studying the disease and what we could do to possibly keep our family together. I was informed that in MS cases, 90% of the couples end up in divorce. The explanation was that because of what it does to the nervous system, the stresses of married life are overwhelming to so many.

It was at that time that I vowed nothing was going to separate us, no matter what it took and that we would find a way to get through it with prayer, faith and hard work.

I shall not forget, arriving home without her after a few days, and confronting the many friends who came to our aid caring for the children in our home. I asked if I could take all six for a ride in our station wagon somewhere in the peace and quiet of the country. I said not a word until we stopped in the middle of a sectional road, turned off the car and told them the news about their mother. Needless to say there were many tears and bewilderment but I was so proud of their attitude about our future as a family. We all vowed that Mom was going to be well-cared for in our family and we would do everything we could to make her happy. Life is full of ups and downs, but for young children to accept, understand and adjust so quickly has never ceased to amaze me.

This all took place in May which was a couple of months before our typical summer trip across country. Mom gradually recovered more strength and being brave and a wonderful patient, with our friends help and the family pitching in, we slowly adapted to the new life.

My observations from reading and seeing in others, that MS patients often became difficult to live with for some reason which I didn't understand at the time. MS is a hidden disease in that most people can't see the effects and don't understand the disability that comes with the disease. As maintaining friendships and relationships with "normal" people is usually difficult, patients are most comfortable with other MSers that they can share their feelings with and understand. Hence, many prefer isolation from healthy people which further complicates their situation.

So when the support group and other patients came to visit and share their story, I was detecting that Aggie always seemed depressed when they left. The topics discussed at these gatherings always seemed to come down to who could top the list of who was the worst off.. I wasn't a psychologist but when we addressed her depression, we both

decided that if at all possible, we would try to keep doing what normal healthy people do as often and much as her little endurance would allow.

That decision led to the question as to what we should do about going on another long driving vacation come July. Of course the kids were always so excited to see the world, picnic, swim at hotels and play with new friends they met. So we were successful in convincing Mom that if we could put a mattress in the back of the van, and the kids respected her nap time and were on their best behavior, that we should all go. She reluctantly agreed and off we went to New Mexico, Texas and Louisiana and states between. She came home feeling even a little better than we left!

It was summer now and time for our annual Summer Clinic of Vets and the location this time was Alexandria, my home town and close to Aggie's town of Sauk Centre. On the first evening there was a picnic at the Arrowwood Resort where we met up with some friends standing in line and of course, naturally the conversation settled on Aggie's condition. Standing just ahead of us was a neighboring veterinarian from Sauk Centre who overheard us discussing Multiple Sclerosis. Another huge turning point in our lives was about to occur.

Dr. Brown had a classmate in Bismarck North Dakota that had three friends that were also diagnosed with MS, and supposedly were being cured by some type of treatment involving colostrum milk, the first milk taken after a calf is born. He suggested we give him a call.

We wasted no time and called him that same evening. Dr. Don Hastings related the story of how these close friends were not doing well with their MS. He had been doing research on his own to try to help them as the medical profession had informed them about the lack of available cures just like Mayo had for us. Two of his friends had what he would call a miraculous cure and one did not improve, but this was very exciting news. Dr. Hastings protocol involved immunizing a pregnant cow with several human virus vaccines and then collecting the first two milkings at calving, freezing it and having the patients drink three ounces every day.



Dr. Hasting had learned of some Japanese research that showed MS patients hosting a residual virus from childhood in their cerebrospinal fluid around their brain and spinal cord. Applying his knowledge from veterinary medicine knowing that all mammals provide their young with loads of immune protection in their first milk of colostrum and that these molecules and antibodies are rapidly absorbed by the newborn. Since MS is an auto-immune disease, in that the body's immune system is attacking its own body tissues, he reasoned that maybe the immune modulators and antibodies could help a MS patient.

We got the protocols for the procedures and searched out a dairy cow from one of our farmer clients willing to do the experiment. The milk was collected in time to for Aggie to start consumption on October 1, 1978. At the time she was still weak, had double vision and numbness and difficulty walking especially when she tired.

Almost exactly two weeks later she began to feel stronger, much to our amazement. Being exuberant and wanting to share the good news, we soon organized a Halloween Party at our house for about twenty of our friends. That night, while having a glass of wine, the first since she came down with the illness, nothing short of a miracle occurred. It was midnight and I can still see her sitting at our living room bar and her starting to shout that she could suddenly see perfectly! Everyone was so amazed and gathered all around her to praise God for what was happening for our dear friend.

She rapidly regained her strength after that and all the symptoms gradually left her with only some nerve damage to her brain and spinal cord from the devastating demyelination. Since that time, a company called 4Life, had marketed the colostrum in a purified encapsulated form and has continued to do so for many years now. Both Aggie and I took the colostrum capsules daily for the rest of our lives. Our family was so excited and I couldn't wait to tell other patients of her presumed cure. She went on to lead a pretty normal life until the year 2007 when another challenge came our way.

The medical profession to this day has not done research in this natural approach to MS treatment as far as we know. The sad thing is money rules and no one seems to want to invest in much research for natural remedies, probably because there isn't money to be made on such a readily available and cheap product. My only hope is that new young medical professionals are trained to be open to all types of medical theories and realize that drugs are not always the only answer to illnesses.

## Chapter 10. A Servants Heart

Dealing with the growing family, a busy practice, Aggie's illness and sometimes too many commitments, led to frequent periods feeling like life had become too complicated. Not unusual they say, but somehow the summer vacation and short winter getaway didn't seem to fill the need for rest. It was during this time that the pounds started to add on at the rate of 1-2 pounds per year, and with it, some periods of depression and thoughts of a change of life was happening.

It was four years after Aggie's MS attack and subsequent arrest, when the phone rang one late evening, after spending the weekend camping outdoors on a river bank by St. Peter with friends and their families. I had gone to bed very early after a depressing conversation with the family about individual responsibility of picking up and helping with campsite clean-up. I didn't feel good about being hard on the children and just wanted to go hide.

On the phone was Dr. Gene Karnis, my old veterinary mentor from Alexandria, asking if I knew any experienced veterinarians in Southern Minnesota looking for a change. There were none that I knew off hand but I told him I would ask around to see. His parting words, after a long conversation catching up on news, were "If you would be interested, we would really like that!" My only remark was "We really have deep roots here and liking what we can do here, so I don't think that's a possibility."

Our phone extension line in the bedroom, unbeknownst to me

was being tapped downstairs by Lisa. As soon as I hung up the phone, she came running up the stairs into the bedroom and starting jumping on the bed exclaiming “We’re going to Alexandria!, We’re going to Alexandria!” It was my first tip that maybe, just maybe, we should think about this!

Lisa’s enthusiasm quickly spread to the other children and then even Aggie got excited about the idea, this all in a matter of minutes. Picking up and leaving a practice business, taking kids out of their schools, abandoning friends, leaving partners in the vet practice, and saying goodbye to the entire clan of farmers I had grown to enjoy, was almost too much to comprehend.

The family had always enjoyed our trips to Alexandria to visit both of the Grammas and Grampas, and they all loved the lakes and fishing of the area. I knew the vet practice well and dairy cows, which were my most loved animal, were very plentiful compared to the shrinking population in corn and bean country. Then the big factor of Aggie’s damaged body from the MS with the recommendation from Mayo to eliminate stress for her, was a front-burner issue. She always wanted to be closer to family and being 200 miles from any of her large family was a significant stress.

The decision was a huge turning point in our lives but the positives outweighed the negatives, so the next day I called Dr. Karnis. We wanted to come and look.

In two weeks, our decision was made, and the long process of making the move had begun, starting with putting our property along with all the animals on the market and basically trading it for a house on the lake in Alexandria.

The hardest part was telling friends and partners about our decision as many had difficulty understanding why. Even though the decision was difficult, it was probably the best thing we ever did for raising a family.

Just at the time of our departure in spring of the next year, the housing and farm recession started its downturn. Our financial

planning suffered a severe strain as now we had two mortgages, no practice ownership, and a place in the Winnebago area that no-one wanted. Six years of waiting and hounding from the bank, finally ended up where we sold at one-third of the original asking price, but we could regain our composure and move on. Our marriage and family survived it and in the long run, we all probably benefited from the experience. We all learned to do with a little less and no longer took our financial security for granted.

Aggie outgrew the mom-at-home phase of her life when Jeremy, the youngest entered kindergarten, and she settled into a nice half day job at St Mary's School where the children went. As a teacher's aide she did what she loved but after twelve years she was ready for something new.

We had stayed at some Bed and Breakfasts at a trip to England which planted the seed for both of us to one day take up this profession after the nest emptied. So one day on her trip home from school, she noticed a For Sale sign on the street advertising one of the two B&B's in town. Her curiosity and interest was triggered and she had my full support. Unfortunately we couldn't come to agreement with the owner so that purchase didn't happen.

It didn't take long until we found another Tudor Revival home in the historic district of Alexandria for sale at a good price which we could afford. We launched into the wonderful world of inn keeping, the perfect profession for a couple of mid-fifties to spice up life in those childless remaining years.

Inn keeping allowed Aggie to practice her favorite labors, cooking and decorating the home. After converting the century old house from a one bathroom to a six bathroom inn, which took some real handy work, we took our first guest in 1995.

We found out quickly that there are a lot of stressed people in the world, but fortunately these were people that were doing something about it by getting away and staying in a relaxing atmosphere at least for one weekend. Seeing the worn and haggard look on their faces when

they arrived, and then their smiles and happiness on leaving, was all the fuel one needed to do our job.

From the experience as innkeepers, we also learned that table conversation in most households was an uncommon event, so to eat a nice breakfast, meet some new friends and just talk over extra cups of coffee felt so good that many didn't want to leave.

To open one's home to strangers on a steady basis requires one to truly become a servant. To give up the prime travel time of summer in Minnesota was wearing on us, but the rewards of being a servant far outweighed the negatives. Besides, we could take our vacations in the winter months in warm places like Mexico, Florida, and Arizona. One guest's remark to Aggie on departure said it all: "You have a servant's heart".

If you look at history in foreign countries, especially in the Middle East, you learn that hospitality to strangers traveling is just the way people lived. Unfortunately, often in this country, we are too embarrassed to stay overnight with friends in faraway places, because we think we are intruding. I say if you get the invite, take it, but remember most people start to smell after three days! "There is more joy in giving than receiving" was my mother's favorite line. Only she made it hard for us to give because she would always beat us to the punch!

After seventeen years of inn keeping, and over 10,000 guests, with me at her side as her assistant most of the time, we had to give up inn keeping because another illness came on the scene.

## Chapter 11. Fall Entertainment

Every fall around Labor Day, a small acreage within the city of St. Paul, changes from a population of about fifty people to a sea of humanity that now exceeds two million people in a twelve day period. What makes people from all over the state flock to this location for a so-called day or two of “fun”, is one of the most intriguing questions that few can answer.

What started many years ago as an agricultural show where farmers and farm suppliers could show off their products in a competitive setting slowly became a venue for young 4H'ers to enter their projects of animals, plants, artwork, homemaking, etc., plus vendors to sell everything you can imagine.

So people of every background bring their families and friends to meet for a pandemonium of craziness called the Minnesota State Fair. From every kind of food on a stick, to music of all persuasions, to antics on stage, to showing of all types of animals and birds, to just plain people watching, that's the fair. And entering the scene in the year 2000 was the Miracle of Birth Center, a place to watch livestock give live birth.

Our state veterinary association had long been looking for a way to educate the public on what role veterinarians play in our nation's food supply and to dispel some of the myths the public had about how animals are raised on farms. Our opportunity came when the small FFA Children's Barnyard exhibit needed to be updated.

By assembling hundreds of volunteers from the practitioners in state, veterinary college students, and high school FFA students, the exhibit has been able to attract and educate over a million fair-goers each year. The partnership of the College, The FFA, our veterinary association, and the State Fair management, has been a wonderful experience for all of us involved as we see what can happen when people all work together for the common good. To see little children, old grandparents, and so many adults actually witness the occasion of live birth right in front of them, is so gratifying. It seems to stir the emotions of us humans and awaken the spirit of appreciation for God's Creation and wonderment. It explains why people will sometimes wait for hours to see an impending birth. Simply Amazing. It reflects a basic craving within us to understand life.

At the time of this writing, the center is now in it's 20th year and the crowds still keep coming. It has been a very rewarding experience of life to be a part of this project.



## Chapter 12. Big C Means Change

Life was good. We were enjoying our little mansion inn and all the wonderful guests, veterinary practice was going well and we had just completed a brand new pet hospital, and were blessed with 13 wonderful and healthy grandchildren.

But another event was about to dramatically change our lives. Aggie noticed a lump in her breast that unfortunately turned out to be Stage 3 invasive breast cancer in May of 2006. A tough course of radiation, surgery and chemo successfully treated her cancer but left her body weakened and she could no longer continue the pace we were living. I made the decision to retire from veterinary practice and try to spend some hopefully good years helping her do what she loved.

Unfortunately, cancers returned seven years later in 2013 and this time had spread all over her body including her brain. We were all devastated to think she was going to die at the age of 71. But Aggie maintained her smiling face and great attitude until the very end, setting such a tremendous example for our family and everyone who knew her.

There is only one way to bear this tragedy and that is to be grateful for the wonderful life she was able to live, the family she raised, and the wonderful wife she really was. On her death bed, her biggest concern was what would happen to her husband of 49 years. Years that happened so quickly but years many couples never got.

## Chapter 13. Occupational Hazards

Upon Aggie's passing and the months of grieving, I seriously entertained the thought of going back into veterinary practice. However, the thought of facing the risks of driving 200 miles daily, the risks of getting kicked, bit, or run over by belligerent animals, the need to stay sharp mentally every day and keep up with the profession, seemed to be too great.

Living alone in a huge house that could accommodate many more convinced me that letting go of that property was not only smart but logical.

Letting go is not an easy thing at any age but doing it when you are still able to go has turned out to be a better solution than when you no longer have a choice. I even entertained the idea of entering some type of monastery life, kind of like a religious fraternity. But it seemed that was too drastic of a move considering all the family was begging for time to be spent with them.

So there was only one good option after retiring and veterinary medicine of the practice type was not it. The children, recognizing our love for farming and growing some grapes, convinced me unbeknown to them, to pursue a new profession in the world of wine. It came about by the retirement gift from them, of an intense course in Napa at the Culinary Institute of American called "The Professional World of Wine". I was hooked!

## Chapter 14. The End And The Beginning

The 95 Acre farm of rolling hills, ponds, and woodlands became the new focus of life endeavors. The grapes Aggie and I planted back in 2005-6 were now starting to produce significant yields of grapes that Carlos Creek Winery was happy to purchase for their growing operation.

I found the solace of working the vineyards a wonderful way to live life and appreciate the beauty of nature throughout all of the four seasons. To train, prune and nurture the vine was very fulfilling for the old farm kid that grew up loving animals. The neat part of grapes is they never kicked or bit you. But they present serious challenges with diseases, weather, insects, and management. However those challenges seemed to be relatively painless so now a serious interest in wine-making started to bud in my head.

The grape vine became such an interesting diversion from the life I had become accustomed to, the busyness of raising a family, the challenges of a busy growing veterinary practice, the coming of grandchildren, the demands of real hospitality in inn keeping and now the reality of life of being single again.

By studying viticulture and enology, I began to understand why Jesus, through the Biblical writings, used the grape vine in so many of his stories and parables. And why he chose bread and wine to be the human form of his body and blood in the Last Supper that he wished for us to remember him in celebrating his death and resurrection through the Eucharist.

It seemed easy to see that He being the “vine”, and us being the “branches”, made so much sense in how we need to conduct our lives. We cannot really truly live on this earth without being connected to the God and his wonderful Creation. We discipline the vine by cutting off old and diseased branches so what remains can regrow anew and produce wonderful fruit and we also know you cannot make good wine out of bad fruit. We know the importance of sunlight, rain and warmth, all gifts from God here on earth that nurture the vine and ripen the grapes.

In viticulture we also learn what the enemies of insects, fungus, and predators can do to destroy the crop, so we constantly need to be alert and take measures to protect the vine from harm. And even though the good earth and the air above can sustain a vine for a long time, eventually some fertilizer is needed to replace what we harvested, just like we need food and friends to nurture our own life as long as we are present in the world. And in the end, the vine will die, only to be replaced by another young and energetic plant just like our children will take our place in this world. The body of the old vine will disintegrate into ash as will our body, but the spirits of the grape (wine) which also is a part of God’s Creation will live on as will our spirit except our spirit is eternal. It’s no wonder why I began to love this new hobby and wanted to be immersed in such an interesting occupation to finish out what remaining years I might have on this earth.

Adding to these life changes that now were happening, a new additional chapter of life was about to open ... so subtle and so tranquil that a pinch of the skin was necessary often to awaken the reality.

As the time of Aggie’s departure grew more distant, the grieving that always accompany a loss of this magnitude, was replaced by acceptance, gratitude and willingness to move on with life.

Friends and family who were so much comfort during those times, were now hinting of possible new relationships that they perceived would fill the vacuum of a lost mate. So invites for an expected three-some event would suddenly require four chairs or a four seat vehicle,

sometimes as a complete surprise to me and sometimes creating an awkward situation.

The many hours of solitude had convinced me that I really needed to find companionship and a pet would not fill that need. Even though I loved dogs, cats, and other animals, they did not seem to qualify as human enough in my way of thinking.

So, secretly, I prayed that after two or three years of bachelorhood, someone would come along that would result in a wonderful new relationship that would grow into a new life of happiness and peace for both of us.

I knew Joann for over 50 years, and came to know her and others well in Aggie's family early on. Well enough, so that Aggie wanted her younger sister to be bridesmaid in our wedding, opposite my brother Ben. That friendship grew through the early years to the point that we traveled as couples to the foreign lands of Columbia and England. And there were the wonderful times in visiting, my sister-in-law Sister Anita in Tanzania at her mission where I was the sole male accompanying the three Jennissen sisters.

Aggie and Joann were very close in age and in friendship during their growing years on their farm. So our young children made great playmates during the frequent visits to each other's domain over the years until they too grew up and left home.

During the difficult times of Aggie's cancer and dying, Joann was always there to comfort us and participate in any needs that arose. So for me, I felt a special closeness to Joann and many of the remaining family in-laws.

So as the months passed and the connections with the Jennissen family seemed to become less common, my thoughts of the future really seemed to focus more on growing grapes and letting go of past life endeavors than the hunt for a mate.

But a spark of flame seemed to ignite between us after two years that gradually evolved into a very close relationship over and above that

of brother-in-law or sister-in-law. Before long we both saw it as a love relationship which ended up in our marriage some three years later in the summer of 2018.

Little did I know until our relationship was heating up, that Aggie had confided to her sister on her death bed, that she had a vision from her mom to let me go and to give me to Joann, a decision that was very painful for her but resulted in a very peaceful death a couple days later.

Now I understand, which I didn't then, that at death, we many times find it difficult to let go of a mate but somehow know that we always must die alone and that is what God intended. We come into the world alone, we leave alone, but we cling to our mates, family and friends on the journey. I shall forever be grateful for the life I've had to share with two of the most wonderful sisters one could ever know.

The adjustments the family had to contend with were at times comical. As Joann's son Chad relayed at our wedding, he now had a Fruncle Florian and a Moauntie Joann. And the granddaughter twins exclaimed at the news of our engagement: "Auntie Joann, you're marrying my Grandpa!" Awkward!!!!

Even though it might have seemed awkward to others at times, our relationship continues to grow and Joann's zest for life matches well with my thinking and together we have grown to love and respect each other with a spirit of understanding and acceptance.

## Chapter 15. A Spiritual Awakening

Life filled with getting an education, raising a family and making a living didn't seem to allow much time for deep thinking, meditation, or contemplation. At least I always felt there was more important things to do and accomplish than sitting and doing nothing, which was how it seemed when observing others in this state of mind.

But as life continues to a point where the desire to change the world with our work and our influence seems to be diminishing, I have started to wonder... how do you make a difference when you are on the backside of the survival curve? Do I want to fall into the category of just an old grumpy man that nobody wants around or a grandpa to my children and those around me, that is boring and out of touch with the world? Or is there a way to be happy and fulfilling for those around us and approach our old age with renewed energy to still make a difference?

The annual retreats with the Jesuits at Demontriville in St Paul definitely planted the seed for delving into spiritual matters to a greater degree. So being introduced to the readings and books of Richard Rohr, Ron Rohlhaiser, Don Talfous, Eckhart Tolle, and others, opened up a whole new world that previously I pretty much ignored, but now is so exciting.

Influential in my life a few years ago regarding contemplative prayer, was my sister- in-law Sister Anita, who instigated the program in a mission parish in South Texas. We began to see the value of stillness in a group setting and how the energy would flow between the participants as we attempted to be in the spiritual presence of God.

In recent decades, spiritual leaders have been writing and speaking on how to transcend from an “ego-based” state of conscientiousness to a spiritual enlightenment or awakening. And how that will lead to happiness and fulfillment for anyone, including us elderly who sometimes tend to be bitter, angry and disgusted with the world as our bodies slowly or quickly break down.

Learning to start letting go of our material possessions and maybe face being dependent on others for basic needs, is not easy to accept. But learning to have acceptance, enjoyment and enthusiasm about life every day regardless of age, suffering, or possessions is attractive to me. And maybe, just maybe, we can share some of what we call “wisdom” that we may have accumulated in our lifetime.

Hopefully, if we can be “present” and more “aware”, which is truly the presence of God in our life, we can avoid some of the pitfalls of the “Me” or “Ego Dominated” way of existence.

For Joann and myself, who both grew up in the Catholic faith that stressed that ours was the only true faith and the only way to gain heaven, we are excited about some of the changes that are gaining foothold in Catholicism and Christianity itself.

We have learned, that instead of the church being a system of beliefs and rules, it has to become more of what Jesus taught us, and being a loving and caring church. We need to love our enemies and be respectful of other’s opinions even if we disagree, and abolish contempt which is so common in our lives, our politics and our world today. I believe that our Pope Francis has opened the doors of the church so that it can become more inclusive rather than exclusive. That it needs to practice what Jesus preached about love, that God is in everything and everyone, regardless of race, culture or religion. That means we need to be tolerant and accepting of all faiths and even those who have no faith. By setting an example of being a loving people, we can make this a better world!





Florian at 1 year of age



First grade at Wide View School



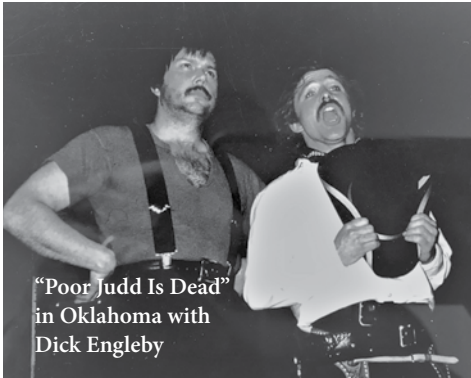
One of my  
favorite animals



Aggie's family. She is the fourth from the right in the second row and Joann is next to her



Aggie at age 60



"Poor Judd Is Dead" in Oklahoma with Dick Engleby



One of many practice vehicles...a fuel efficient VW Diesel Rabbit



Forty years and counting at Glacier Park, Montana. Some of the thirteen not yet born.

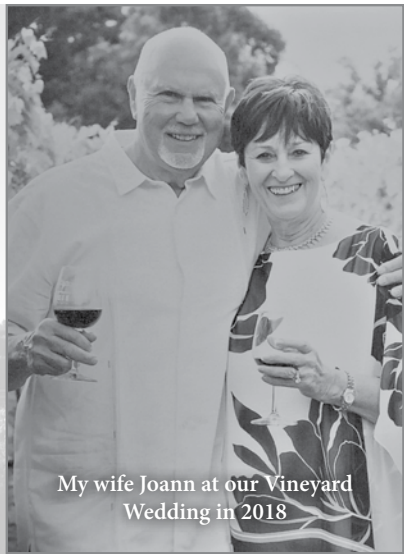
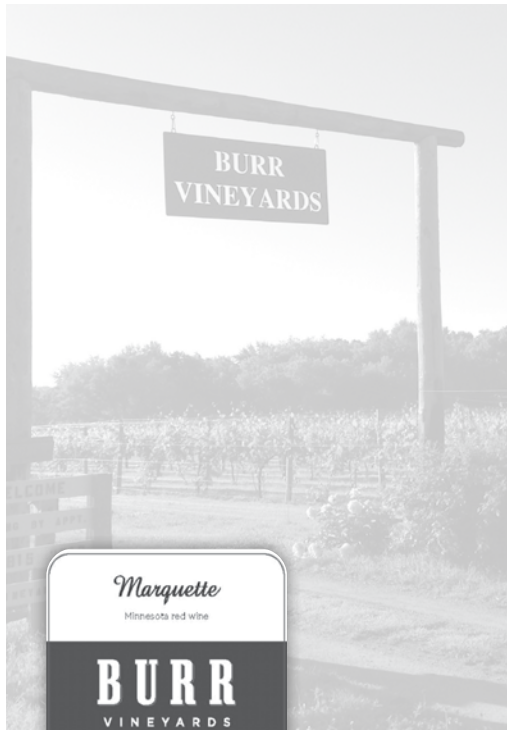




The rest of the clan



Family time  
planting grapes



My wife Joann at our Vineyard Wedding in 2018

*Marquette*  
Minnesota red wine

**BURR**  
VINEYARDS

2012

15.2%alc/vol



Harvest time at Burr Vineyards

# Appendix

*(Some Veterinary Stories)*

## GOING FOR IT WHOLE HOG

It was a normal day of large animal practice...until the afternoon, when a surprise attack made me realize how vulnerable veterinarians and animal owners are in their chosen professions.

Joe needed thirty sows and a boar blood-tested for a Pseudorabies Monitoring Program in our state. Joe's old, 700# Large White boar was tame and gentle by Joe's and my own assessment, so when the animal seemed bothered by our bleeding of sows in the adjacent pen, we decided to catch and bleed him next.

As Joe placed the Iowa Hog Snare over the boar's three-inch, sharp protruding tusks, the animal offered little resistance, and luckily I was able to draw the required blood from the pre-vena cava vein quickly. Then, when I turned away and was climbing over the five-foot fence to rack the blood sample, I witnessed an unbelievable sight out of the corner of my eye. The boar apparently became enraged when the snare temporarily hooked on an upper tusk, and I saw a 240# man being hoisted some eight feet into the air by the boar's sudden charge.

In the next few moments, the flow of adrenaline took over, and somehow I retrieved Joe from the boar, but not until the swine had savagely attacked Joe's chest and abdomen, much like a fighting dog.

The surge of energy allowed me to heave the unconscious farmer over the five foot fence and onto the ground in the adjoining field, with the boar chomping and snorting on my tail. I cleared the fence easily, as I recall, without touching it, even though I had never pole-vaulted before.

As Joe lay gasping for air, I noted two foot-long deep, bloodless gashes through the torn jeans of both his inner thighs from the initial charge. But more importantly, there was a deep penetration wound right through the mediastinum of his chest which showed where the boar had bitten him when he was down.

A tough Norwegian farmer does not go down easily, and as I was quickly assessing the damage, he regained consciousness enough so I could run for his wife, who was working in the barn. As she dashed over to where he lie, Joe managed to yell, "Get my pistol," while we watched the boar thrusting to break the wire fence that separated us.

She brought the large 38 caliber and ordered me to shoot before it burst through the now dismantling fence. With an unsteady hand and a hunting record of little repute, my attempts even to take aim were battling my fear of what would happen if the temporarily barricaded animal was further enraged by a bad shot!

Shortly after we called, the ambulance crew arrived. At first I was at a loss to explain the pistol, the hole in Joe's chest and the anxious farmer's wife, because by that time the boar had left the scene.

Joe made an uneventful recovery, even though the surgeon said another quarter inch right would have penetrated his heart. Needless to say, Joe has not forgotten that day, and I often wonder how we survive these situations in daily routines with large animals.

## HE WILL SLEEP FOREVER

Rueben was a nice old man who grew up in hard times and never really wanted to totally forget the “good old days”. He hand-milked a few cows early in his life, and since he never married and lived alone, he gradually let the old girls get bred to a beef bull so he could have a small beef herd. This, along with his farmland and some old machinery that didn’t cost him much, allowed him to eke out a living. Since he rarely went to town or spent much on himself, it didn’t take a whole lot of income to keep him happy.

Shep was his middle-aged crossbred German Shepherd dog which, through the years had also become a good friend. But his wandering lust for females in the neighborhood caused much concern for Rueben. So after the third time of not coming home and having the neighbors having to deliver him back to his farm Rueben decided that Shep would have to change his ways. Even though he got high marks for being a good watch dog, cattle dog, and friend, his promiscuous sexual encounters were too much to accept.

The call came into our office one morning and our receptionist Sally took the call as usual. It was Rueben who we didn’t hear from much because of his few animals. “I want my dog put to sleep”, came over the phone in a broken voice. Sally noted that we would be out to care of it and if Rueben would just have Shep tied or confined, the job could be easily accomplished. (Many times animals seem to be suspect of the vet driving in the yard so that a once-friendly dog turns into a very suspicious creature that even the owner can’t get close to.)

My partner, Dr. John, knew Rueben well and decided to take the call and do the nasty deed that afternoon. (Euthanasia of a pet is the most undesirable job of a vet). So he made sure he had an ample supply of euthanasia solution along in his truck and headed for the farm.

Rueben already had secured Shep and was holding him gently when Dr. John drove in the yard. After a few greetings and talking about the weather, he filled his syringe with the required amount of

euthanasia solution, walked over to Rueben and his dog and gently eased the injection into Shep's vein. There usually isn't a lot of fancy talk in these situations as it is clearly understood that the job at hand is solemn and must be done.

Shep folded into a peaceful state of anesthesia and then while slowly slipping into the irreversible coma, Rueben asked the question that John will never forget. "So how long will he sleep?" he asked Dr. John.

Somewhat surprised by the question, yet aware that this had been a long-time friend of the old man, he thought it appropriate to simply state the fact. "Rueben, Shep will sleep forever!"

A strange look appeared on Rueben's face as he suddenly realized there had been a communication problem. Because Sally was a woman, and Rueben's rare experience with women, he had chosen the words "put-to-sleep" so as not to mention a "dirty" word like "castration" on the phone!

"But Doc, I wanted him castrated!" Dr. John realized at that moment, that what just happened was a thing of the past and nothing could be done to reverse the situation as Shep slipped into Doggie Heaven.

Communication is always a two-way street. How many times have we felt we weren't understood by others or we weren't sure we understood them? Sometimes those communications using words or phrases that may not be common knowledge can get us in real trouble. In the veterinary world, it is interesting to note while reading old veterinary stock books, to see how many of the taboo subjects were avoided by using word dressing that sounded better. Then along comes the next generation which may not have heard of the cliché and miscommunication results.

In this case, Shep paid a dear price for his neighborhood escapades!



## FROM DREAMS TO REALITY

Yesterday was another very busy day with hordes of urban people are drawn by the craving to see things that we all take for granted on the farm. Yes, it's fair time again and the great Minnesota Get-together unfolds.

Last night at the Miracle of Birth Center started out fairly routine. The FFA young adults quickly cleaned, fed, and bedded the many expectant mothers and made sure all the newborns were going to be comfortable for the night. I volunteered for night floor duty which means at least one of us veterinarians gets to sleep with the animals on the floor so as to "keep watch by night" of any suspect laboring females.

Cow #2424 was due yesterday but didn't deliver. Instead she carried on most of the day entertaining the crowd with her antics. She must have been a show animal because she has those strange actions that makes you think she craves attention. She would walk up to us and then pass by so closely as to roll us along the gates with her big belly. Then turn around and gaze at us for our reaction.

I chose to lie on the air mattress in my sleeping bag very close to her pen (inches) so I could observe her calving progress as we knew she was holding off until the crowd disappeared. All the lights were off except for a few heat lamps in the sow stalls and chick incubators. When the animals settle down in the dark and the noises outside dissipate as midnight approaches and passes, it is almost mystical in the large people-less barn. You hear the normal sounds of heavy breathing and grunts, the occasional bellow or blat, the squealing of nursing piglets, and the restlessness of the laboring sow. It is a unique experience that reminded me of childhood days on the farm during the many hours of barn time, especially in the dark of winter.

After a few nights of the night watch, your mind and senses gets tuned to recognize abnormal sounds....like serious repeated labor grunts. It jars you from your dreams and you bound to your feet in search of possible trouble....just like veterinarians are supposed to do.

I slept soundly the first hour and then somehow awoke to see #2424 just staring at me, a mere foot from me, against the pen gates. She wanted to be close I guess because she could have been anywhere in the huge maternity stall. An hour later I stirred and could see she had repositioned and put her butt near my face and I could smell the distinct aroma of uterine fluids. She was delivering so I watched as she easily popped out a beautiful heifer calf without an audible sound. It was like, see I can do this and I don't need all these people watching except my veterinarian. She jumped up and did the mother thing of licking and bonding. A little later I awoke again and just peeked over the deep straw and mother and baby were both just staring at me just a couple of feet away. I thought to myself, I love cows. And you know, they really do love us humans also. I fell back to sleep with a sense of everything is wonderful about life. This morning after checking out everything with my colleagues, I strolled down to my favorite breakfast cove just outside the dairy barn and sat drinking coffee in the crisp early morning air. The huge draft horses were already out on the street but only a few stray early bird fairgoers were in view. The rhythmic clippety-clop of their heavy steel-shoed hooves on the concrete street was almost musical and magical. Again I thought, does it get any better than this?

But tonight seems different. We had a wonderful day of births and tremendous crowds again. The questions that any first-grade farm kid could answer were in abundance. But then there was the interaction with some curious city slicker that made you feel you were really helping people to understand that milk doesn't really come from the store. It comes from a lot of work and dedication of our dairy farmers together with its joys and disappointments...a reflection of life itself. We are only seeing the miracle of birth here but there is sickness, disease and death also. We need to appreciate agriculture more in this country or we could lose it. I settled into my usual spot after volunteering one last night to take floor duty. I got into my favorite snoring position so that I could wake myself up occasionally to check on the laborers (I didn't trust my senses for some reason tonight). I'm

in a deep rem sleep with wild crazy dreams. I hear the clippety-clop of the horses come and go which fits perfectly in my dream...but there is a strange rhythm now and sometimes it stops and appears close and then far off. "Why is this?" my subconscious mind asks. And then there is a hot moist breath in my ear and I'm tempted to say "But honey, I am so tired...it really has been a long day!" Then I realize that this breath has the force of a hurricane...so much so, that I'm startled from my dream because there is also torrential rain from this storm. But it feels more like saliva running down my cheek!

I open my eyes and there is a dark silhouette in the gigantic shape of a cow's head just inches from me towering over my body. A huge bellow is emitted as this beast quickly realizes I am alive and it scares the heebie-jeebies out of me and her. She races off in a panic. It is #1919 on the loose in the Birthing Center. Some tired staff worker forgot to check her gate latch before bedtime. Yup, that someone was me!

## JUST PRETEND THEY'RE NOT THERE!

One of the major differences between a medical doctor and a dairy veterinarian, is the MDs have their patients come to him or her and generally the exam of the patient is quite uneventful. The veterinarian, on the other hand, not only has to traverse many miles through sometimes treacherous weather just to get to the farm. The patient often is not impressed having a stranger approach her, much less, stick their whole arm up their butt or put their hand down their throat. That's assuming the animal is already restrained when the vet arrives, which often is not the case, which leads to many other interesting differences.

But the biggest obstacle the MD doesn't have to put up with, is the "family" farm dog which can make the novice vet want to turn around and go back to town.

My encounters with farm dogs have been relatively few, mainly because of a wise old veterinarian I knew who once gave me some "usually works" type of advice. His words of wisdom were: "When you drive on a farm and a vicious dog races to greet you as you open the door of your truck, just pretend they're not there and go about your mission. They will make lots of noise and try to scare you off, but when they detect you aren't scared of them, they will back off!"

Well, I heeded that advice and it has worked for me....most of the time. But there have been a few instances when I took the advice too literally.

King was a big German Shepherd that had pearly white teeth that shown brightly when he pulled back his lips during his welcome ceremony to the farm. His master seldom paid any attention to his noisy greeting of strangers as King would bark even at cars going by if they slowed down as they drove by the farm. So when I arrived, I always hoped John was in the barn so I didn't have to go to the house to get him, because that is where King always perched after his initial welcome, right on the front stoop of the farm house/

I approached the house with confidence that my time-tested method of indifference towards King would work as the old vet had promised. As I neared the “Red Zone” which I define as a ten-foot half-circle in front of the door that most salesmen won’t enter, King’s bark was deafening. And as predicted, it turned to a growl as I proceeded to ring the doorbell. The hot moist feel of his breath on my wrist that cold day was too close for comfort but I had to believe it would work. To my amazement, he only laid his canines on my arm without any pressure as if to send a final warning. Unfortunately, I lost my cool just as John turned the latch, and I shouted out “No...King!” That was the fatal mistake as King now completed his objective and disabled my right arm for a few weeks.

The recovery was uneventful and besides I palpate cow’s rear ends with my left arm anyway, so I felt really lucky. If only I had trusted the old vet’s advice to the end, maybe I could have come out better.

But the double-jeopardy encounter with Sneak, the mean Blue Heeler tops them all. Sneak had a habit of circling my tall new Dodge truck the entire time I was on the farm, waiting for an opportunity to sink his choppers into my Achilles’ heel. I kept with my motto of ignoring but always had a peripheral view of this beast as I knew he would look for a window of opportunity.

It happened as I prepared to jump up into the tall Dodge cab and mistakenly left one foot dangling too long. Sneak had snuck under my truck (“easy for a dog to do in a 4x4 Dodge truck) and came in for an attack at just the right moment. The old dog’s teeth weren’t so long and sharp, but the Blue Heeler’s bite is as powerful as they come. The sheer force will puncture a boot, shoe, stocking and human foot with ease.

As I sped down the driveway in pain, Sneak did the double sin of latching onto my half-worn rear tire as I rapidly turned the corner. I do not understand how a dog can sink his teeth into a rotating tire, but he did. I drove for a good mile to make sure I had lost Sneak even though the flopping leaking tire was starting to smoke now!

The tire shop mechanic scolded me for driving so long on the flat tire and totally ruining the tire so he couldn't fix the tooth hole. I smiled and said "Just pretend you didn't see this .....and don't tell my partners!. How much for a new one?"

## KING OF THE HILL

The call was to a client's small dairy farm where we were asked to check out a sick cow in the barn. When I arrived in my small blue VW Diesel Pickup with a fiberglass vet box on the back, no one seemed to be around, not even a dog! We hadn't been to this farm for over a year, so wondered why Hubert's little old Chihuahua wasn't around to greet me.

I found Hubert in the barn, tending to his precious dairy cows. The diagnosis of his cow was simple and routine as I had all the necessary treatments in my Pandora bag to treat the ailing pneumonic animal. It was on the way out of the barn that Hubert and I got the hilarious view. As we approached the barn door, Hubert, with a grin, was asking if I had seen his new dog Bruno, that he purchased a year ago to replace his old Chihuahua.

Well, I got the view as we stepped outside. There perched with two front feet on the cab roof and two rear feet on the rear vet unit, stood a salivating, drooling gigantic St. Bernard! Since my little VW pickup presented no challenge for this long long-legged monster beast to mount, he did so with the look of someone who had just conquered Mt. Everest. We both had our laughs but I wasn't sure I appreciated the aftermath of a slobbered-up windshield, two depressed divots in my roof and muddy tracks all over my shiny fiberglass vet box. But I proceeded without relating my true feelings to the laughing Hubert.

I wrote out the bill on my metal clipboard, gave him a copy, and laid mine on the little passenger seat next to me in the cab. As I started the mighty little diesel engine and started to pull away, Bruno appeared outside my passenger door. With one rear leg cocked in my direction, he unleashed a yellow stream through the open window and all over my copies of bills for the day. Feeling violated, I sped off without saying goodbye as the vision in my rear view mirror revealed a smiling Hubert and grinning Bruno.

I never did explain why all the bills I turned into our office secretary the next day were yellow and crumpled! I just said it was the result of domination and humiliation by one of my patients who thought my little gas-saving diesel pickup was a joke!



## THE COW VS. THE CANARY

Being a veterinarian in the 70's in a rural community almost required one to be a "general" practitioner as there were few veterinarians that could specialize in pet practice and survive because of the low monetary value many clients placed on their companion animals. That meant the vet had to learn much about many species in order to accomplish the results that the clients were looking for.

For me, it made the veterinary profession exciting, challenging, and satisfying. But at times, the challenges were almost overwhelming.

Farmer Bill was a crop farmer with a few pregnant beef cows that were allowed to roam the frozen corn stubble all winter to graze upon the nutritious stalks left over after combine harvest. If he got some of the field plowed creating a rich black seed bed for the spring, so be it, and the cows could also roam these acres.

I got the call one warm spring morning when the early sunshine had already thawed two inches of black dirt creating a quagmire of slippery sticky mud that felt like a load of bricks on your rubber boots. Bill's largest 1800# crossbred cow had decided to give birth in one of the plowed dead furrows (a shallow depression created where the mow-board plow threw dirt in opposite directions at the end of a field strip.

The big animal had delivered a large healthy calf that morning but when Bill spotted it, he also noticed that the cow had continued to keep "pushing" until she had completely everted her womb or uterus. This is a critical condition as shock quickly ensues if the womb isn't quickly replaced inside the cow.

The uterus is as large as the calf and then some, weighing close to 100# and being inside out, exposes the slippery internal surface. The challenge is like stuffing toothpaste back into the tube, only in this case the cow continues to push and strain as you try to work the organ back inside.

As we trudged across the muddy field, I was glad I had a good breakfast as the job ahead looked very physically demanding. The cow,

in addition to continually straining, was laying in the muddy depression with her rear end in the deepest part, creating an uphill disadvantage for the surgeon.

I feverishly pushed and kneaded the organ between her incessant desires to cancel my efforts. In spite of near freezing conditions and laying in the mud with icy ground underneath, my shirtless body was flowing with sweat. At last I declared victory as the organ fell back inside her enormous belly with a whooshing sound. I quickly stitched up the vaginal opening with temporary stitches and as I stood up in the soup hole created by our strenuous activity, I heard a sickening sound of our patient's one last heave. It was over...the surgery was successful but the patient died.

On the way back to town, our office nurse called on the two-way radio and asked if I could come to the clinic immediately as there was another emergency patient. With haste, I sped into town, ditched my blood and mud-soaked clothes at home and quickly dressed for the next case.

To my surprise, the next case presentation was a hysterical woman with her yellow pet canary. Dangling behind the little critter was an everted uterus about the size of an inch long lead pencil. I couldn't believe my eyes! Quickly, with my nurse holding the little bird that had been egg bound earlier in the day, I proceeded to once again reintroduce this creature to one of it's essential organs. This time, the working conditions were great and with a little patience and a lubricated Q-tip, the operation was over within minutes. A tiny needle and thread for a purse string suture around her butt hole, and she was ready to go home. And our happy pet owner reported that her canary was back singing the very next day.

Just an example of what veterinarians mean when they say the profession is interesting and diversified!

## BAD VIBES CAN GET YOU IN TROUBLE

It was a cold January morning when my plan for the day was to get done with farm calls early and head to the Twin Cities with my wife for the annual State Veterinary Convention. I was in solo practice at the time so that to take a few days off for any reason always came at a premium. You had to have a neighboring vet cover emergencies which was always hard because they also wanted to go to the meeting. This meeting was extra special because it was the first convention of my professional career and the subject was Cow Comfort and Cow Behavior....two of my favorites.

The grammas were already at our house to babysit so all that needed to happen was for things to go normal so we could get on the road by noon. Of course, the cows didn't know that so naturally the phone rang off the hook with sick cows that morning. I was already two hours late when I finished the last call and was washing my boots.

Fred was an excellent dairyman and was not unusually demanding but did expect good service and was willing to pay for it. So when he said "While you're here, could you open a teat on my best cow before you leave?" How could I say no? ("While you're here" requests can irritate veterinarians on busy days because it causes you to be late for many other client appointments who also expect good service). So I said "Of course, Fred, where is she?" and strolled into the barn ahead of him to where Whitey stood...the big white cow that always watched me in the barn with ears perked and nervous that I was going to do something to her.

I should have noticed that her ears were erect and her eyes were staring at me, and the tremor in her triceps. But I didn't because my mind was already in St. Paul having a good time with other vet friends and learning great things about cow behavior. Fred cocked the tail, which always provided some anesthesia in cattle because of the pressure it puts on the spinal nerves in the rear end of a cow. I disinfected the teat for the short operation, not aware of the tension in her body as I leaned against her for stability.

Stepped on teats were a fairly common occurrence in dairy barns because of the stall barns in those days that caused some animals to clumsily get up from a laying down position. With their hooves, they would sometimes slam the end of their teat valves causing them to swell and heal shut so little or no milk could be extracted by the milking machine or by hand.

As I passed the sharp teat instrument called a bistory knife through the teat canal, I felt a sharp blow to my shoulder from her rear foot. The next thing I remember was the sight of beating hooves directly above me as the frantic 1,800# beast attempted to stuff my 18” wide body into a 12”-wide gutter as I lie on my back trying to keep my head out of the liquid manure around me. The beating on my belly and chest was almost unbearable but somehow Fred was able to extract me from the depths and safely away before I became permanently marinated in manure.

Any cow person can vouch for how hard it is to scrub the ammoniated smell of liquid manure from your skin. My wife has tried many cleaners on me, but alas, some smells just have to take their sweet time to disappear. So I was careful not to enter the hotel elevator unless we could be alone and my seat in the lecture hall was in the back corner.

There is lots of scientific evidence to show that we give off certain aromatic compounds or pheromones when we become irritated, anxious, fearful or angry. An animal can sense that from many feet away. We also give bad vibes by how we approach animals, by what we say, how we say it, and our body motions. I did all of the above wrong that day and paid the price.

In watching how people handle animals through the years, it has become very evident that those who are patient, kind and quiet around their cows actually do get more milk. Cows don't like surprises any more than we do and will react in much the same way. Is it any wonder?

The moral of the story is whether it is you or any of your employees...try to practice these virtues every day all day. Look for

those traits when you are hiring employees also. People don't change their habits readily just as it is hard to get an old cow to do new things or teach an old dog new tricks.

And I can tell you from personal experience, we will fall off the deep end occasionally because we are human, but we can learn from our mistakes and teach them to others.

## IN PEACE AND SILENCE

New Year's Eve started out like most others except the luck of the draw for being "on call" fell on my shoulders this year. Since we scheduled no routine calls for the day, by mid-afternoon it looked like maybe we could celebrate the year-end with all of the other party-goers. However, things changed when darkness set in and dairy farmers were finishing up chores for the night.

Do bad things come in threes? Or is it good things? Soon after our traditional evening year-end Lasagna, the phone began to ring.

First off, a call about a cow that was in serious labor with no progress for several hours. Her pain and serious contractions were manifested with groans and moans that echoed throughout the barn. It was too enduring for her to stand so I had to begin my exam lying down with her to check what was happening. I found the tell-tale corkscrew in the cervix that indicated the bad news that nothing was going to happen through this half-inch hole. My mind drifted to all the corkscrews that were opening champagne bottles for the celebrations at hand.

Mona had one option to ease her problem. C-section. We delivered a dead calf, but her relief was immediate. Will she be at peace temporarily or permanently? Time will tell but at least she can enter the New Year having finished the delivery.

Back home, and after a shower, came a little time for relaxation before midnight. Not to be.... the phone rings again....a cow in trouble with both rear legs in the gutter and moaning in pain from a bout with milk fever, an acute blood calcium deficiency that will end in death if not treated. Treatment was uneventful but no way could she lift her body out of the gutter with the cramped muscles of her rear limbs. Give her more time? No, we couldn't bear the thought of her suffering her way into the New Year. So out came the cursed hip lifter, a crude clamp that fit over the cows hip bones, for one last time in 2004. To our amazement, she gave it her all and sprang up to new life, turned

and drooled on my arm as if to give me a New Year's kiss under the cob webs. When I refused to cooperate, she dug into the silage that lay before her. My client and I relaxed as we thought about our success as she was the best cow in the barn and it would not be a good way to start the New Year with the loss of her.

I spun my way out of the yard on the glare ice that had formed while I was in the barn, thinking it was time to go home and close out the remainder of the night. The phone was silent. "Wifey" was probably sleeping by now as the waiting is always boring for a spouse of a veterinarian.

My second shower of the night (a necessity in this profession), a little sip of champagne with my wife and the New Year had begun. But not for long as the phone once again shattered our dreams. Wow! It was already 3:45 AM and who checks their cows at this time of the night? It's a good thing they did because this heifer was in extreme colic with a twisted bowel. Not a good feeling and she probably would have rather been dead.

Again, surgery was the only answer. So back to the scrubbing and numbing and sedating. As soon as we got the caecum drained and the torsion corrected, the heifer stood up, stretched and turned to look at me with a droopy eye. I could have sworn she had been drinking. But probably it was an eye of thankfulness.

Getting back in the truck and heading down the road home found me driving only half-speed for some strange reason. Perhaps it was the dimly-lit red eastern sky indicating the sun would rise once again. Perhaps it was the moon shining brightly in southern sky, crescent shaped like a saucer that seemed to contain some translucent treasure in the crisp below-zero early morning air. I stopped at the corner, shut off the engine and rolled down my window. Not a sound could be heard in the whole wide world around me.

A tear came to my eye as I thought about the events of the night. Three cows now at peace, three happy clients that a vet was around on

New Year's Eve and one happy vet that had a better night than anyone could have had at a party. No tsunamis, no hurricanes, no droughts, good prices....yes, it was a very good year! We were mighty lucky and I was once again aware that true happiness and joy in life almost seems to come when we can serve others and make them happy.

Pulling into the garage quietly and sneaking into the house silently, I slowly entered the shower for wash number three, so as to not wake my lovely wife. It didn't work....she greeted me with a loud "Happy New Year, Hon!" And I added "Yes, a great New Year to you and goodbye to a night of peace and silence! What time is breakfast?"



## WE CAN LEARN A LOT FROM A GOOSE

Maybe we humans should pattern our lives more like the animals and birds around us. Here are some things we could learn from a Canadian Goose.

1. Timing...While we are busy worrying about if more snow will come in April, the geese arrive just in time for the new green grass. Do we sometimes fret about the weather instead of getting things ready for spring work so we can take advantage of the warmth when it arrives?
2. Child Raising...Both goose parents raise the goslings. The gander is always there with the mother to teach, guide, and protect the vulnerable baby geese. How many human families are left to raise children with single parents or sometimes no parents?
3. Talk to Each Other...Geese are always communicating with each other as if to carry on conversations. Communication remains a huge human problem.
4. Honk for a Purpose Geese honk to communicate, we honk usually when we want someone to get out of our way, like trying to move the vehicle in front of us off a green light.
5. Dress Appropriately....Geese have by nature, always got the right clothes on--not too cold and not too hot for the occasion. Besides they give us the fabulous goose down for our pillows, vests, jackets and comforters.
6. Eat Right...The goose doesn't abuse it's body with bad nutrition. In the spring, the parents make sure the young growing goslings get lots of new high protein grass. They eat sprouting grains from the fields to balance their diet during the early summer. Then in the fall, they consume lots of corn for their winter fat insulation and their long trip south. We could use lots of help on how to eat right, balance our intake with our need and then live healthier lives.

7. Work Together to Improve Efficiency...Geese fly in V-formations in order to take advantage of the lead goose and succeeding geese breaking the wind. This allows the whole flock to fly more efficiently. If we could always work together, we can usually be more efficient in what we do.
8. Follow the Leader...The lead goose is followed and believed in. The rest of the flock doesn't bash and protest against the leadership. If the lead goose falters, they simply appoint a new one. Wouldn't it be nice if we could always respect our leaders, and replace them whenever necessary by our vote?
9. Respect Each Other's Territory...After some brief territory disputes in the spring and it is settled as to who goes where, it over and never re-disputed. Geese don't continuously envy each other or try to covet their neighbor's land. Do we ever stop wanting more of everything? And how many times do we not get along with our neighbors?
10. Safety Conscious...How many times do you see a dead goose on the road? Seldom. Unless they are town geese that trusted humans too much. How many people are creating hazards for everyone by their driving habits? A goose rarely crosses a road in front of a car without looking both ways first.
11. Sleep at Night...Geese don't lurk about at night and get into trouble. They stay home and go to sleep. How much trouble and accidents could we avoid if everyone came home before dark?
12. Sentinel Duty...Whenever geese are grouped together for whatever reason, one appointed goose always has its head up watching for danger regardless of day or night. Oh, if we could have safer neighborhoods with each one having an alert member of the community serving as a volunteer watchman at all times.
13. Letting Go...Geese know when to let go. When the young goslings have reached maturity, the parents say goodbye and go on with life. How many times do parents have children who "fail to fledge" out on their own when full grown?

14. Don't Ask Directions...When geese migrate the long haul across country in the spring and fall, they seem to always know the way back to their destination. They don't have an electronic navigation system and never ask directions. So are men more like geese than women?
15. Committed for Life...Geese mate once for life and only reunite with another goose upon death. What an example of commitment!
16. Go South for the Winter...Not so dumb. But we do have goose down to keep warm in the northern winters!

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## Conclusion

In writing this autobiography, I found it difficult at times, to tell one's life story without the "It's All About Me" feeling that could surface in some of the tales. But do know that each one of us has a story to tell and do not be afraid to share with others what you have learned in life. Hopefully, by my relaying adverse events in my life, it will help someone to deal with adversity in their life. When I relay joy, may it help someone recognize joy in their life?

*Thank you and enjoy each and every day you have been given!*

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