

ON THE PLAINS

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

OF

EVELYN GILFOY LEWIS



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Dedication

For my grandchildren Kelsey Jean Peterson, Nicholas Lewis Peterson and Maria Daniella Lewis so they have a written history of their grandmother and her life experiences from her early days in North Dakota to her lifetime in Southwestern Minnesota.

Thank You

For editorial and writing assistance I want to express appreciation to my son Jim and his partner Bill.

For information on family history I am indebted to my cousin Tom Gilfoy for his excellent history of my grand parents and to my Lindenfelser relatives for their history of the Lindenfelser family. In both cases I have borrowed their material without acknowledgement or attribution except for this statement.

Preface

The landmass from the Dakotas, including northwestern and southwestern Minnesota, to the Texas Panhandle define an areas of the United States called the Great Plains. It is rural and largely agricultural country. For 70 years the Great Plains has been losing people, a slow demographic collapse. Government subsidization of mega-farms, lack of efforts to keep young people in rural communities, and huge agribusiness operations dotting the countryside have all meant population decline on the Great Plains. Nearly 70 percent of the counties of the plains, have fewer people now than they did in 1950. Population continued to plunge in the 1990's and has fallen even faster since the 2000 census.

For counties close to cities or near Interstate highways, the prospects are better, populations and jobs are generally growing in those counties. That is good news for Rock County with its county seat of Luverne located just off of Interstate 90 and only about 30 miles from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. But most everywhere else – about one-sixth of the landmass of the United States – populations are at all time lows and there is little to stem that tide.

Mom's grandparents, in the last quarter of the 19th Century, were among the first settlers on that part of the Great Plains in southwestern Minnesota. In the early 20th Century her father, uncles and one aunt were homesteaders and speculators in western North Dakota on the northern tier of the Great Plains in the United States. She is a product of the Great Plains born in North Dakota and having lived most of her life in southwestern Minnesota. With the population decline and the rapid disappearance of "family" farms, the way of life she has known is and has changed dramatically and forever. Her autobiography recounts one person's life as a young girl in North Dakota and as a farmer's daughter and farmer's wife in southwestern Minnesota. Her story takes on historical significance recounting a way-of-life that is rapidly disappearing, a way-of-life that was important to a great many people who struggled to make the Great Plains the breadbasket of the nation and the world.

James J. Lewis

**ON THE PLAINS
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Birth in North Dakota

My life began October 5, 1922 at St. Alexius Hospital in Bismarck, North Dakota. I was baptized in St. Alexius chapel ten days later. At the time my parents, James Francis and Magdalena Dorteia (Dora) Lindenfesler Gilfoy, lived in Anamoose, North Dakota. By the 1920's Anamoose had a population 669 and was growing. Anamoose is located an hour from Minot, North Dakota.

My father was working for the North American Creamery Company with headquarters in Painesville, Minnesota. He would travel across North Dakota setting up cream stations. He taught buyers how to test cream as they set up their stations. My mother was a seamstress and did sewing for people in the area.

I have few recollections of the first two or three years of my life. I do remember going to get my picture taken and when I saw the camera I began to cry and scream. I was afraid of that camera! I remember another time being angry with my mother and said I would break the sugar bowl if she didn't let me do what I wanted. She didn't and I took the sugar bowl outside and dropped it on the sidewalk. It is interesting the stories about our youth that we remember.

My family moved to Minot, North Dakota when I was three. Minot, (pronounced MY-NOT) is located on Highway 83, south of the Canadian border. The Souris and Des Lacs rivers and Buffalo Lodge Lake are nearby. Minot was settled in 1885 as the Great Northern Railway advanced across the prairie; it was incorporated in 1887. Minot is located 55 miles from the Canadian border, 150 miles from Montana, 215 miles from Minnesota and 200 miles from South Dakota. Shortly after our move in 1925, my one and only sibling, a sister



Catherine Cecilia was born on May 23. I remember we bought a house at 818 Soo Street. My folks did a lot of work on the house turning it into a nice modern home. We lived on Soo Street until I was nine years old. We had many close neighbors in Minot and I was a friend with all the kids on the block. I started school in Minot at St. Leo's Catholic School in "uptown" Minot. I was a very shy student and missed lots of school my first year because of

all the childhood diseases. I remember that the class was divided into Blue Birds and Robins and I was in the Robin class. I made my First Communion at St. Leo's.

For North Dakota the 1920s and 1930s proved to be watersheds. An economic depression, starting with the 1920 collapse of wartime prices for grain, punctured the economic expansion of previous decades. More North Dakota banks closed in 1921 than in any other year; the resulting contraction of credit caused many farm foreclosures. I remember going to uptown Minot in November 1928, the night of the Presidential Election. There was a large crowd of people in front of the Minot Daily News Building where a radio was broadcasting election returns. Herbert Hoover won the election and the depression continued to get worse. There were long soup lines even in North Dakota. Four years later in 1931 Hoover was badly defeated at the polls. Whether fairly or not, he was blamed for the continuation of the Great Depression.

The Move to Minnesota



By 1931 the United States was in a serious depression and my father, with millions of others nationwide, lost his job. Having no job my father moved his family to Minnesota. I was nine years old when my family moved from Minot to a farm in Rock County, Minnesota. Rock County is located in the southwest corner of Minnesota on

borders of South Dakota and Iowa. The County was established by the Original Act of 1857 and was named because of the immense quantities of rock outcroppings within its borders.

Father had loaned John Bergin (dad's sister Barbara's husband) a sum of money that he was unable to repay, so dad took over the loan on the Bergin farm from The John Hancock Company deciding to take over the loan and continue buying the farm rather than lose the money. So in 1931 we moved from our modern home in Minot, North Dakota to a farm that was anything but modern in Springwater Township, Rock County, Minnesota.

A large van moved our furniture to Lismore, Minnesota where my Aunt Jane lived (another of my father's sisters). We lived in Aunt Jane's house from October 1931 to March 1932. During those few months I went to the parochial school in Lismore and was taught by nuns. I remember that school was hard and the kids were mean and clannish or at least they seemed that way to me, a kid from the big city, now living in Lismore.

In March 1932 we moved to the farm in Rock County. The house we moved into had been a grainary at one time – the floorboards were wide and full of splinters. The house itself was very small. We had a big potbelly heater in the center of the living room that would get red hot as we fed it coal to keep warm on cold days. On cold winter nights it got so cold in the house that water that hauled into the house and kept in a pail in the kitchen for drinking would freeze. There were three small bedrooms upstairs. My mother did lots of painting and cleaning to make the "old grainary" a livable home for us. Decades before Martha Stewart

I remember my mother would cut out leaf patterns from underwear and use them as stencils to dip in paint and decorate the walls. When we moved into the house the living room was painted a “Belgian Blue” and the kitchen an “Irish Green”. We soon fixed that with a more acceptable color scheme.

The tenant who lived on the farm before we moved in was Mel Hoven. Because of the economic conditions brought on with the Depression he was unable to pay the cash rent. My father cut the rent in half and even took sows (mother pigs) in payment for the rent but still the Hoven family couldn’t make payment. Corn was selling for 12 cents per bushel and people burned it for fuel because it was cheaper than buying coal. This was our new home! The roads were all mud in the spring, usually deep with ruts. It was a mess but it was our new home.



We lived one-half mile from the rural school, District 45. When I enrolled in 1933 there was only one other student in my class, that student was Leona Rogers. The teacher’s name was Effie Anderson. Effie still lives in Luverne as I write these remembrances in 2003. I

finished the 8th grade at this country school and in the spring of 1937 we had our 8th grade graduation exercises in Luverne. I was also confirmed that same day at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church in Jasper, Minnesota. Bishop Kelly bestowed the sacrament.

My first year of high school was to be in Lismore where I stayed with my aged grandmother, Catherine Fullam Gilfoy, out on her farm. It was a fascinating year hearing Grandmother's stories of the hardships of her life as an early settler in this part of Minnesota. My Grandmother, with her new husband James Gilfoy migrated from Albany, New York to the prairies of Southwest Minnesota in 1853, five years before Minnesota was a state and the area was still known as Dakota Territory. She told how the grasshoppers came and blackened the sky eating everything in site. She told of twisting hay for fuel to keep warm. In the winters my grandfather would move to northern Minnesota to work in the pine forests so grandmother was left alone with the children on the desolate prairie.

My grandmother gave birth to the first Caucasian child in Leota Township, Nobles County, Minnesota the location of their prairie claim. My cousin, Catherine Gilfoy, a teacher at the Lismore Public School, also stayed with my grandmother during the school term. June 1938 came and I returned home to Springwater Township for the summer. During that summer we built a grainary on the farm, put up hay and cut and shocked small grains to prepare them for threshing. Harvesting the small grain meant a threshing crew on the farm. The crew would start in August and travel from farm to farm harvesting the grain. Threshing time was exciting with new people on the farm, lots of activity, and huge meals. It was the annual signal that fall and winter would soon descend.

1936 was the year of the great snow in Southwest Minnesota. We had snow on the farm as high as the telephone poles. I remember that winter in particular because my cousin, 16-year-old Esther Bergin, died suddenly and

unexpectedly. In order for our family to get to Garreston, South Dakota for the funeral we had to travel the first five miles of the 10-mile trek in a bobsled pulled by horses. Roads were totally snow bound and the snow removal equipment we rely on today was still years in the future. A car picked us up and took us the rest of the way to the funeral. My cousin was buried in Luverne and the only way we could get to the Luverne Cemetery was via Valley Springs, South Dakota. In the winter of 1936 we were snow-bound for six-weeks.

Saturday nights are vivid in my memory. They were the big nights for rural communities. Farmers from near and far would “go to town.” Saturday night meant taking our weekly bath and then off to town. For my family the town was Jasper, located nine miles from the farm. Farmers were selling cream and eggs, farm wives were buying groceries and everyone took visiting seriously, exchanging the local gossip and sharing the news from near and far. Everyone was in town and while the town was small it didn’t seem so small back in the mid 1930’s. There was even a movie theater in town and the young people went to the show every Saturday night and then walked the streets with friends. We always had a treat before loading up the car and heading home. The “Saturday Night in Town” phenomena lasted until the late 1950’s when we all became more mobile and less dependent on our little “home town.”



In 1939 I started my second year of high school in Sherman, South Dakota.

Sherman was located over the state line about six miles from the home farm. I was one of thirteen in my sophomore class. I drove an old Model "A" Ford to school except in the winter. Winter roads were always unpredictable and so a neighbor girl, Mary Sehr, and I stayed in Sherman. Mary and I took in the basketball games at the school. I remember that Garretson was our chief rival. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration put lots of people in Sherman to work during the depression building sidewalks, dams and doing roadwork, probably the last time any major public works were done in Sherman.

Off To College



I graduated from Sherman High in 1941 and like every generation of high school graduates before and after I asked the question, "What am I going to do?" I didn't have any idea what I wanted but because I had an aunt that was a teacher, my dad thought I should go to Eastern State Teachers College in Madison, South Dakota (in 1947 it was renamed General Beadle

and since 1989 has

been named
University). I'll
Sunday that the

Dakota State
always remember the
folks took me to

Madison. It was raining. I got settled in East Hall, the dormitory for women. I was feeling so very lonesome. One of the girls in the dorm asked me if I wanted to walk uptown for supper. I can't help thinking if she hadn't asked me to join her for supper I don't think I would ever have stayed. While going to school in Madison I learned the news that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941 and that the United States was headed to war. The spring of 1942 I had completed one year at Madison and graduated an honor student prepared to teach in rural schools. Madison and Eastern State brings back lots of fond memories. I have printed our school Alma Mater below:

On the eastern plains of South Dakota
Where the sunshine is ever near,
There's a college we are proud to honor
Whose name to us is dear.
Cheer her on to victory, now your voices raise
For her colors, gold and blue,
Sing praise.
South Dakota, GBC, South Dakota, GBC
True and loyal to thy name forever,
Nothing from our hearts thy love can sever,
Hail to thee, our college, may the spirit live,
Our Alma Mater, hail, all hail!

The War changed everything for me and most of my generation. The summer of 1942 after completing college a girl friend and I took jobs in Sioux Falls, South Dakota at Woolworth's Department Store. I was working the lunch counter. Sioux Falls was site of an Army Airbase and that meant lots of soldiers in town. When we got off work we would go home, clean up and head to the Arkota Ballroom and some nights to a nightspot on 9th street called the Dancette.

Teaching School & Summers in the West

The fall of 1942 I taught in a rural school in Minnehaha County near Garretson, South Dakota. I stayed on my folks' farm and drove daily to school. I had nine pupils. I felt totally lost the first month but then I decided I was up to the challenge and things started to fall into place. The next year I moved into Minnesota where I taught for another six years.

When school was out in the summer of 1944 my girlfriend, Dee Simmons and I (Dee was also a teacher in a Minnesota rural school) decided we would spend the summer on the West Coast. We boarded a bus in Sioux Falls and headed West. Whenever we saw an interesting area we would get off the bus, stay overnight and see the sites. Upon arriving on the coast we stopped in Seattle, Washington. We met friends in Bremerton, Washington (outside of Seattle) and they asked if we wanted to work in the Navy Yard. We agreed and knew this would provide another adventure. We started as a part of the clean-up crew, working on large battle ships. We cleaned the USS West Virginia, USS South Dakota and a series of PT Boats. After the workday we would head home and get ready for the nightlife! After six weeks of cleaning and nightlife we proceeded on to California. We stayed in Los Angeles and took in lots of the sites. Then it was time to return home and prepare for the fall term of school. The school year passed quickly. This year I had 10 students representing all 8 grades. I remember that the Christmas Program was always a school year highlight for the students, community and the teacher.

When spring 1945 arrived Dee and I decided to go West again. We joined the work force at the Navy Yard in Bremerton. This time around we were to check inventory coming on-board the ships. We went with truck drivers to unload shipments and ensure that everything was there. We loved the job and decided we would work 4 hours of swing shift as well in the galley better know as “Tomaine Tommy.” We made lunch for the shift workers and then would take in the swing shift dances.

That August the war was over and we were in Seattle when the ticker tape started to pour out of every window in town. People were dancing in the streets. We hurried to catch the ferry to Bremerton feeling it would be safer there. People where marching in the streets and we were there with them celebrating the end of World War II until the wee early hours of the morning. The war was over and so was our stint working in the Nary Yard. It was back to Minnesota and our waiting students.

Courtship and Marriage

As the soldiers returned from the war it was a time of much celebration. Little Hardwick, Minnesota was center of our social activity especially the Gem Hall where we danced. It was an exciting time as we danced many a night away on the shoulder of one of those returning vets.



My folks moved off of the farm and into a home in Lismore in 1946. I found a place to live in Luverne while I was teaching school.

Friday nights the Knights of Columbus in Adrian sponsored dances. While attending one of the dances I met my future husband's brother John (Jack) Lewis. We danced and later he introduced me to his brother Jim and we danced. Jim wanted to know my name and at the time neither I, nor anyone else, was giving a perfect stranger their real name. Jim asked me for a date on Sunday evening. I agreed and so had to tell him my real name. He took me to the Adrian Catholic School where his brother and sister were in a declamation contest (interesting notion of a date). I met his mother and father and we had a nice evening. That was the beginning of our courtship. We would take in the dances in Hardwick, Hatfield and Adrian.



Jim and I dated for nine months. On Valentine's Day 1947 he asked me to go steady. We were falling in love. On the evening of July 17 as we were going to Hardwick for a dance, Jim stopped the car and reached over to the little glove compartment in the car, opened a small ring box and put a ring on my finger and asked me to marry him. I said, "Oh, yes!" Jim wanted to get married on the one-year

anniversary of his discharge from the Marine Corps so on August 19, 1947 we were married at St. Anthony Catholic Church in Lismore. The local newspaper account of the wedding follows:

“The bride’s dress was of white ninon over taffeta, with long sleeves coming to points. French ruffling decorated the neckline and full train. The veil edged in lace was attached to a beaded crown. She carried a bouquet of red roses.

Maid of honor was sister of the bride, was pink

with a fitted lace colonial bouquet

Bridesmaid was Aberdeen, sister was blue

with a fitted satin bustle. She bouquet.

Flower girls were cousins of the organdy dresses flowers.

The groom’s Lewis of Adrain



Mrs. Donald McLean, of Magnolia. Her dress marquisette over taffeta bodice. She carried a of mixed flowers.

Theresa Lewis of of the groom. Her dress marquisette over taffeta, bodice fashioned with a also carried a colonial

Ruth and Rose Lewis, groom. They wore white and carried baskets of

attendants were Ted and Donald McLean of

Magnolia.



The wedding dinner was served at the St. Anthony church parlors where places were laid for sixty guests. A three-tier wedding cake centered the bridal table.

Table waitresses were Marie Gengler, Rita Fath, Isabelle Waller of Lismore and Dorothy Willems of Sherman, S. Dak. All wore pink and white aprons, gifts of the bride.

The newlyweds left on a two weeks wedding trip to the Black Hills and Yellowstone Park and will be at home at Lismore upon their return.”

Life as a Farm Wife

When we returned from the Hills, Jim and I bought a small house and moved it onto Jim’s parents place (farm near Adrian). It was fun buying furniture and dressing the little place up to make it home. In September I began what would be my last year of teaching. Jim farmed with his brothers. It was not going to be the best year for farming. While the crops looked great, a mid-summer hailstorm destroyed most of the crop. That first summer on the farm



also marked the birth of our first child, James John on August 29, 1948 at the Adrian Hospital. Ten days later Jim Jr. was baptized at his dad's home parish, St. Adrian Catholic Church in Adrian. Jim Jr.'s baptismal sponsors were my sister Catherine and her husband Donald McLean. Little Jimmy was our pride and joy.

With Jim recently discharged from

the Marine Corps and little money to his name, a major crop failure in 1948 and a new son joining the family we decided it was time to make a change. In March 1949 we moved to the farm in Springwater Township that I had called home during most of my childhood. We rented the farm from my dad.

Soon after making the move to our farm in Springwater Township in Rock County neighbor Annie Sehr stopped by and said she and her husband Ed were coming over for a visit that evening. I prepared something to serve for lunch but when evening came our neighbors the Burmeisters stopped over and then Floyd and Nina Hawes stopped by. I thought, "How am I going to feed all of these people." Then all of the neighbors arrived and we learned this was our official housewarming and welcome to the neighborhood. It made us feel we really belonged in this new place. We spent the evening playing cards with the 20

neighbors who came to welcome us. Jim said after everyone left he was sorry he didn't meet Floyd Hawes and I had to tell him he spent the evening playing cards at the same table with Floyd. Card playing was a major social event in our lives and it still is in mine. Our neighbors when we moved to the farm in Springwater included Floyd and Nina Hawes, Norman and Della Bakke, Buster and Dorothy Serie, Gert and Gene Hoiland, Elmo and Dorothy Williamson, Ray and Vivian Dorn, Ed and Sofie Willems, Rufus and Verna Mae Garnmeister, Fern and Herman Lackman, Ed and Annie Sehr, Pete and Sandora Burmeister, Alf and Margaret Skorr, Selma and Harvey Hemme. There were others too, but this was the immediate neighborhood in 1949.



The move to Rock County, didn't improve our farming fortunes, as 1949 was a year of drought and most of our crops dried out. Money was a continuing struggle during the early years of our marriage. We were forever grateful for the agricultural education program offered to returning GI's through the GI Bill of Rights passed by the Roosevelt Administration in 1944. Jim enrolled in the program and the \$90 per month stipend saved us many a day when financial resources were scarce. Not only did Jim gain skills for his farming operation, he also gained confidence on his ability to learn and put that learning to work.

One bright sunny day Jim was fixing fence and along came the banker from Beaver Creek where Jim had opened an account. He borrowed some money from the Beaver Creek Bank when we made the move to Springwater. The banker was selling hail insurance and Jim told him he had already taken out hail insurance from someone else. When he learned this, the banker told Jim to pay off the loan immediately. We were desperate; we had nothing to sell and no money. My folks came over the next day and we told them our predicament. My dad gave us the money to pay off the note and suggested we bank at the First National Bank in Luverne. After a few years we were able to pay dad back, we were very grateful for his generosity.

Our car was old, needed repairs and was no longer safe to drive. My dad came to the farm and took Jim with him to Luverne. They came home with a new Chevrolet pickup truck. What a happy sight that was. Again, we paid dad back as we got on our feet on the farm. The times were tough and the incomes

meager. Dad's help came with a bit of advice but it was gratefully received and helped us to survive as we started out.

We participated in a political adventure in 1949. A neighbor, Ralph Arens was head of the local Farmers Union. He came to the farm to collect for the Union. He was encouraging farmers to give a hog to help send a delegation of farmers to Minneapolis to hear President Harry Truman. We were so financially strapped at the time, donating a hog seemed like a major sacrifice. However my dad stopped by the farm the same day and suggested that it might be a good idea to make the contribution. We did and we went to Minneapolis to hear "Give 'em Hell Harry" and he didn't disappoint.

We left for home the next day only to confront a major winter storm. The blowing snow was so bad we could hardly see the road. We got as far as Marshall and started to leave Marshall for home but had to turn back and stay overnight. We called my folks to let them know because they were taking care of Jimmy.

We did lots of cleaning and fixing up on our "new" farm and decided to get into the dairy business. My mother gave us money to go north to visit the Lindenfelders, her brothers, in Wright County and buy dairy calves. They lived in the Albertsville (a short distance west of the Twin Cities) area, the heart of dairying in Minnesota at the time (about 40 miles west of the Twin Cities), in search of Holstein calves to build up a good herd of milking cows. The Lindenfelders were well-established dairy farmers in the area. We were able to buy six calves on the first trip and we returned twice more over the next two

years bringing back calves each time. Jim was telling my uncle how well his cows were producing. Upon hearing the production figures my uncle, not being impressed, told him that with that kind of production he would send the cows to South St. Paul (that meant my Uncle would have sold the cattle for slaughter).

We converted the barn to a dairy operation. We were able to sell Grade A milk (the grade of milk sold depended upon the kind of handling of the product and cleanliness of facilities – Grade A was the top grade and received the highest sale prices). Grade A Dairies meant milk no longer went to market in cream cans, but rather the milk was stored on the farm in a bulk cooler and picked up daily by a tank truck. Dairying was lots of work, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. It meant long hours for everyone. Summers were always busy with haying, fencing, gardening and the general duties essential to running a farm and raising a young family. Jim and neighbor Rufus Garnmeister worked together, helping each other out on our farms. Jim, Rufus and another neighbor Ray Dorn, bought a hay bailer together. Ours was a tight community of neighbors, all of us about the same age and all started farming about the same time.

Keeping up fences on the farm was a constant concern. It seemed like every time Jim ventured off the farm either the cows or the pigs would get out. We had invested a lot in our cows and couldn't afford to have them roaming the countryside or damaging our neighbors crops. I remember one day the cows were out and Jim was gone. I called the school and asked for Jimmy to get home right away to help chase down the cows. It seemed I had just hung up the phone and Jimmy was home. He said everyone in the whole school (all sixteen

students) heard me on the phone because I was talking so loud. He stood at the barnyard gate to keep the cows in as I tried to round up those that had escaped.

In 1952 the family grew as we were blessed with a beautiful baby girl, Connie Jean, born April 28. Thirteen months later the family grew again with the birth of a healthy



baby



boy, Daniel Lee, born June 20, 1953. Three young children represented lots of work and lots of joy.

Son Jim Jr. started school in 1954 at the same school I attended for three years, District 45 a half-mile from the farm. Jim was in a kindergarten program (pretty innovative for a rural school to

have a kindergarten program) for six weeks in spring of 1954 and started first grade in the fall. He spent three years attending District 45. The school in many ways was the center for our community and every year the entire community gathered at the school for an annual Christmas program where all of the students were participants. Jim senior was elected to the Board of District 45 in 1952. This was Jim's first elected office and was to begin a lifetime of public service to his community.

The farming operation expanded with chickens. I raised a flock of 500 pullets each spring raised from chicks. We built a large chicken house in 1952 to



house the laying hens. Every day we gathered eggs, cleaned and packed them for sale. As the children grew they would take on additional responsibilities with the cows and chickens. Jim and I believed that chores were an important part of our children's

lives. While they didn't always agree about their importance, farm chores were a way of life from early on for each of our children.

Jim Goes To Town

In 1953 Jim was elected to the ASC township committee. In this capacity he measured land set aside in government programs. Later he was elected to the County ASCS Board and in 1957 he was selected to serve as the office manager for the Rock County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (the office that managed Federal Farm Programs for Rock County). This opportunity presented itself when positions like that were still political appointments and this was during the Eisenhower Administration when Ezra Taft Benson was Secretary of Agriculture. Jim, a Democrat, had to be approved by the Republicans. Judge Christian was the head of the Republican Party in Rock County and he gave Jim his blessing for the job.

When Jim went to work in Luverne we tried to manage the farming operation and his job in town by employing a hired man. Where Jim found the guys who worked for us I don't even want to imagine. It seemed every time we had a new hired man Jim had a night meeting. One of the guys who worked for us scared me so much I sat with my back to the wall; I wasn't going to let him get behind me. One morning the temperature had dipped to 20 degrees below zero and I noticed that the hired man had let the cows out of the barn and they were headed to the pasture. I told him to get those cows in at once – 20 below was a dangerous temperature for people and for cows.

It never seemed to fail that when Jim would leave for work the hired man would come to the house to announce a cow was off feed or some other problem that needed to be addressed. It was up to me to intervene and determine what had to be done. We had one hired man named Hans. Hans was an interesting character and came with his own home, a coach trailer he parked on the farm. He had his meals with us but then retired to his coach. Hans ate more than any man I ever met and he was the slowest one as well – it took forever for Hans to complete a task.

This new set of responsibilities for Jim meant that our farming days, at least at the scale we were doing them, had to end or I was going to lose my mind. In December of 1957 Jim and I sold our dairy operation in a



liquidation sale. Some people commented that I would miss the cows. I responded, "Not for a second!" We placed a good portion of our land in "soil bank." Soil Bank was a Federal Farm Program that allowed farmers to set aside their land for renewal and conservation purposes. It also took land, at least for a time, out of production as a measure to increase farm prices with less production. The rest of the farmable acreage we rented out.



Nineteen Fifty Seven was an important year in the history of the Lewis family with Jim taking a full-time job in town, selling our dairy operation and most significantly adding to our family with the birth of bouncing baby Patrick Joseph born on October 25 of that year. The family was to grow once again four years later on February 8, 1962 when daughter Rita

Mae was born. Our children were all born in what has been termed the "Baby Boom Generation." James John was born four years after the start of the post World War II baby boom and Rita Mae was born at the tail end of the boom generation in 1962.

Social Life

Shortly after we moved to the farm in Springwater, Mada Reece, a neighbor lady stopped by and asked if I wanted to join a Birthday Club. I said yes and we met every month in the birthday lady's home. It was a wonderful time to visit and have a great lunch. At the time most of the women in the



neighborhood had babies like me. The first meeting I attended I had to stay in the kitchen for most of the gathering because son Jimmy would cry whenever he saw strangers. That situation improved over time. As our family grew there were soon three little ones to take along to Birthday Club. The club would have a picnic for all family members in the summer. It was a club that lasted over 30 years. Some of the members included Nina Hawes, Dorothy Serie and her sister Gert Hoiland and their mother Sofie Willems, Dorothy Williamson and her mother Mada Reese, Vivian Dorn, Verna Mae Garnmeister, Fern Lackman, Dorothy Jaacks, Geraldine Klein, and Lucille Hamann. The membership would change

some over the years as people retired or died or moved and new folks joined the neighborhood.

I was also a member of a neighborhood Extension Club, the Enterprise Club, sponsored through the Rock County Agricultural Extension Service. The purpose of the club was to provide an educational component at monthly meetings as well as time for socializing. Each month one of the members would take a lesson offered by the Extension Office and then share that lesson at the club meeting. There were lessons on all kinds of topics including food preparation, serving and entertaining, crafts and a whole host of other topics. In the summer the club would invite our families for a picnic.

When our families got older and children could be left on their own some of our group would spend Saturday night at the VFW Club in Luverne. We called ourselves the Springwater Bunch. Saturday night at the VFW meant dancing



and Jim loved to dance. He could never get in enough dancing until successive knee surgeries after his retirement made dancing impossible. At its height, the VFW was the site for wedding dances. Some people were surprised

that on any given Saturday night there could be three or four wedding dances going on simultaneously. The VFW in Luverne had the largest dance floor in Southwestern Minnesota. Earl McDowell, long a member of the Township Board in Spingwater Township was quoted as saying, "This group [the Springwater

Bunch] was trying to run the township from the VFW.” I think we did a pretty good job, too!

Across the Road Neighbors

The Homie farm was directly across the road from us. Archie Homie and his divorced sister Irene Schlapskol and Irene’s two children Willis and Marcia lived on the farm. The Homie’s resisted change and walking onto their farm was like a trip to Minnesota’s rural past. They had no running water in the house and depended upon the windmill to provide the farm’s water supply by using wind energy to pump the water (if it wasn’t a windy day water supplies could run short). There was a water pail and dipper in the kitchen for drinking water. No running water, of course, meant no indoor plumbing so the outhouse remained a vital outbuilding on the Homie Farm. Irene used an old style cook stove in her kitchen fueled by wood and coal. There was a reservoir on the stove that kept water hot for washing up and bathing. Irene was an amazing cook and baker. Using that old cook stove she baked all the bread the family used, she made soap for laundering clothes – she seemed like the most resourceful person around. The only exception to the “old ways” was having electricity on the farm. Although older, Willis and Marcia, were play companions for our children and all of my kids fell in love with Irene and her incredible baking. Archie’s farming also reflected the “old way” of doing things. Probably his greatest pride was his garden – it was always bountiful and provided lots for Irene to can and preserve throughout the summer. While we didn’t spend a lot of time with them socially, Irene and Archie were always good and loyal neighbors and I think it was good

for all of us to see a slice of rural life across the road that has all but disappeared from the Minnesota countryside. When Archie died, Irene moved to Jasper and later to a care facility in Luverne and the farm was sold. Today, little remains of the old farmstead. The house and outbuildings are gone and only the memories remain. Irene died in 2003 at age 98.

Television Changed Our Lives

Jim and I got our first black and white television in 1953. The little box (at least little by today's standards) stood in the living room and family life was



forever changed. I believe we were the first in the neighborhood to get a television set, but soon it was the standard in every home. "The Ed Sullivan Show", "Art Linkletter", "The Red Skelton Show", "Ted Mac's Amateur Hour", "Your Hit Parade", "I Love Lucy", "Adventures of Superman", "Lassie" were all part of the 1950's television

programming that began to change our lives. Probably even more important were the events of the world brought to life on the TV every night in the living room. With home entertainment taking a gigantic step forward with television; things like "Saturday Night in Town" became less significant in our lives. Soon the movie theaters in all the small towns around us closed.

The Kids In School and 4-H

As with all families, the children grow up rapidly. In 1958 Jimmy boarded a big yellow school bus for the first time to join with other rural youth as they left their country school behind and joined consolidated schools. District 45 consolidated with the Jasper Public Schools and Jim joined his 4th grade class at a new elementary school on the edge of Jasper. In 1959 he was joined by his sister Connie waiting at the top of the driveway for the school bus and in 1960 Danny joined his brother and sister waiting for the bus to take them to school in Jasper. Four years later Patrick joined that growing pack waiting for the bus and



then four years after that Rita became a bus rider. All of our children completed their elementary and secondary education at the Jasper Public Schools. Those

schools still exist but neither is any longer used for educational purposes. The Jasper Elementary School closed in the 1980's and later reopened as an assisted living center. The Jasper High School closed its doors for the last time in 1993 although it was used for grade school classes until 2001. As I write these reflections in 2003 the school remains vacant. It was a sad day in Jasper when the school closed. For over 100 years, those facilities were used to educate our children (and my sister Catherine went to Jasper High School), and also provide for the social life of the village. The High School complex, built of Jasper quartzite quarried from the Jasper Stone Company, is on the National Historic Register. There are no longer skilled artisans to hand cut and dress out the heavy quartzite building blocks, and there are no stone masons available to erect the beautiful stone buildings that are seen throughout Jasper.

Jim and I spent lots of time in the Jasper schools attending parent-teacher conferences, graduation exercises, homecoming activities, school plays, vocal and band concerts, basketball games, town meetings and other activities. The school is a storehouse of memories for my family and me.

By the time Jim Jr. started 4th grade 4-H entered our lives again. Both Jim and I had been 4-H members in our youth and believed in the program. When neighbor Nina Hawes, the local adult leader of the Springdell 4-H Club asked if Jimmy could join 4-H, a new chapter of family involvement began.

All of my children were active members of the Springdell 4-H Club one of two 4-H clubs along with the Springwater Hustlers in Springwater Township. 4-H opened a new world of learning, experience and leadership for my children and

me. I served as an adult volunteer leader of the Springdell club from 1961 through 1974. For the kids 4-H was a vehicle to “learn by doing.” They gained organizational and public speaking ability by learning how to give 4-H demonstrations. They learned how to lead and work with groups holding offices in their local 4-H Club. They learned valuable lessons about life in 4-H and that not all efforts are rewarded with blue ribbons.

My children had the opportunity to travel and learn about diversity in this world through 4-H. They learned how to present themselves to others with respect and integrity. 4-H also provided the opportunity to me to work with other parents in creating a positive learning experience for neighborhood youth. I learned how to speak in front of groups and I had my first opportunity to visit Washington DC and New York City participating in a National 4-H Leader’s Forum in 1964. I think the kids were as excited as I was going on the trip and they threw a bon voyage party on the eve of my departure.

Jim Jr.’s first livestock project at age 9 was sheep. He had a Southdown lamb named Bingo. We kept the lamb in the house yard and he became another family pet until after the fair when he went to market – a sad day, but a learning day as well. Dairy became a family project – we started with Holsteins and then later became the breeders of purebred Ayrshire cattle. We had a neighbor who



was an Ayrshire breeder and had shown champion Ayrshires at the South Dakota State Fair. He was diagnosed with cancer and was selling his herd. He sold us our

starting Ayrshires. The large red and white cattle were a beautiful sight against the green pasture. Gardening was also a major family project with lots of harvesting before the County Fair to find those three tomatoes or beets or carrots that were just right for the exhibit box.

Connie and Rita learned sewing skills through 4-H and Connie's sewing efforts earned her a place in the county Dress Review Court of Honor more than once. Rita learned the basic skills but she was determined not to be a seamstress!

Demonstrating was a very important part of 4-H work for all members of the family. By learning how to give demonstrations all of the children learned skills of public speaking and organization of materials. All of the Lewis children won trips to the Minnesota State Fair with their 4-H Demonstrations. The topics ranged from livestock conservation to physical fitness and health. I listened to those demonstrations so often during their practice stages that I could recite them along with the kids. Many Minnesota State Fair blue and purple ribbons returned to Rock County with the boxes of demonstration materials the kids took with them.

When Jim Jr. won his first trip to the State fair in 1958 Jim and I decided to drive to St. Paul and see the fair and hear him give his demonstration on "How to Equip a First Aid Kit." The trip took on special significance when Jim and I were enroute to the Fair Grounds from my sister's home in Osseo and ran into a stopped truck with our Chevy BelAir. The car was badly damaged in the front but

fortunately Jim and I weren't. We got to the fair several hours late to pick up a very worried Jim Jr. for the trek home.

Nina Hawes, Norma Cleveringa and Mrs. Merle Thompson were three adult 4-H leaders who served as important role models for my older children and they helped me learn how to be an effective adult volunteer. All of the children attended National 4-H Citizenship Shortcourse in Washington DC at the National 4-H Center. They participated with other young people from around the country in a week of intensive citizenship training including visits to their Congressional delegation at the Capitol. Winning a trip to the National 4-H Congress, which was then held at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago, was icing on the cake for a 4-H member. Jim Jr. won a trip in the Citizenship/Leadership/Achievement category in the fall of 1966 during his first year in College at the University of Minnesota, Morris. Jim also competed nationally at 4-H Congress for a place on the 4-H Report to the Nation Team. He was selected with nine other young people from around the United States to tell the 4-H Story nationally. Connie also made the trip to National 4-H Congress for her many achievements in 4-H. Among the many things Connie did as a 4-H member was helping to start a 4-H Club for Handicap Children.

Son Danny was determined not to follow in his brother and sister's footsteps and resisted being a 4-H demonstrator, but with a little parental persuasion he too learned the fine art of demonstrations. When son Patrick joined the National Farmers Organization and was officed out of their national headquarters in Ames, Iowa he was called on to speak throughout the country

and at National NFO meetings. I know that it was Pat's 4-H demonstration experience that gave him the skills and confidence to be the great spokesperson for the NFO that he was. Rita's natural abilities at public speaking started early, as she began at age 2 imitating her older siblings giving demonstrations.

The Family and Politics



Jim and I often discussed the political issues of the day over the supper table and we encouraged the kids to join in those discussions. Jim Jr. cut his political teeth campaigning for Adlai Stevenson in his second run for the Presidency in

1956. While Adlai didn't carry the nation, he did carry Jim Jr.'s 4th grade class! The kids worked on political campaigns at all levels. They made signs, dropped literature, attended meetings and did all of those things that are a part and parcel of the American political process. My two daughters have made a career based on politics and I can't help but think the roots of those careers go back to their youth in Rock County. When the children all left home I became more actively involved in the Rock County DFL serving as Associate Chair of the party for a number of years.

In 1984 I was elected to serve as Clerk of the Springwater Township Board. This was not a position I sought but when the election returns

were in November 1983 I was elected by write-in as the new Clerk. I served as clerk for twelve years. In addition to my duties as Town Clerk I served on the RSVP regional health board for seven years, Rock County Fair Board, County Park Board and continued my work with 4-H as an adult volunteer until 1979.

The Pickle Patch

In 1965 Lewis family gardening took on a whole new dimension, as we became pickle farmers. The Gedney Pickle Company of Shakopee, Minnesota opened a cucumber pick-up facility in Garretson, South Dakota in 1965. The company provided cucumber seeds to individuals agreeing to raise and sell those cucumbers to Gedney's. Jim prepared a two-acre field for our new crop and the seeds were planted. As the growing season got underway we learned what manual labor was all about. Cucumber vines had to be trained by hand to grow in rows so that there was room for pickers to go through the rows and fill bushel baskets with the produce. Weeding was done by hand and when the cucumber vines started producing the kids and I headed to the patch to pick bushel after bushel of cucumbers. Premium prices were paid for the smallest cucumbers so daily picking was necessitated to bring in the big dollars. It was a summer of backbreaking labor but one that provided enough income for Jim Jr. to pay for his freshman year of college. It was also a summer that we all learned a lot about labor/management relations and how easily those relations were strained in the cucumber field. As one neighbor put it when driving by the farm, "all I could see of the Lewis' were elbows and asses as they worked in the pickle

patch.” Cucumber cultivation was to last for two years on the farm and was later replaced by raising potatoes. They were not quite as labor intensive!

Salesman Visits

A common part of rural life until the mid to late 1960's was a visit from salesmen going farm-to-farm selling their wares. The most common visit was from the Fuller Brushman selling everything from hair brushes to cleaning brushes and a range of other products. The Fuller Brushman also brought free samples of new products or advertising gifts to leave behind. My common response was to ask one of the kids to answer the door and tell the salesman I wasn't home. But there is visit I recall that came one summer day when I was working in the garden. Connie came running out to the garden to tell me to come to the house. I asked her what the problem was and she said a salesman came in the porch to knock on the door and our dog bit him. With thoughts of lawsuits running through my head, I ran to the house and sure enough the dog had bitten him and tore his pants leg. The wound was bleeding, I applied iodine and profusely apologized. He seemed awfully good natured but for two weeks after I watched for the mail each day with dread being sure there would be a letter from an attorney. But no such letter ever arrived and I don't believe that salesman ever visited the farm again.

President Kennedy Assassinated

Like most Americans who were alive then, I remember November 22, 1963, the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. On that day

forty years ago I was watching a soap opera on television that I followed, it was "As the World Turns." Pat was on my lap. The network interrupted the soap and said the President has been shot. I said to myself I'm sure he will be all right, but a few minutes later the news flashed that President Kennedy is dead. We were all so filled with hope and optimism that our new young president could really change the world and suddenly all of those hopes were dashed. School let out early and all the kids got off the school bus with tears in their eyes. Jim closed the office and joined us at home. I remember that evening we went to mass in Jasper to pray for the fallen President and for the country. For the next three days all eyes were glued to the television set with non-stop coverage of the assassination and funeral of JFK. The following Thursday we went to my folks home in Lismore for Thanksgiving dinner. Jim and my dad were watching television and all of a sudden Jim called out, "they shot Oswald." That afternoon we went from my folks to Jim's folks in Adrian and continued to watch the news unfold. Spending time with family that Holiday Season took on special meaning as we mourned the loss of our President. It was a sad time for the entire world and one I will never forget.

Leaving the Nest

In May of 1966 Jim Jr. graduated from High School, our first High School graduation! We had a big open house to celebrate. It was a happy and sad time as I knew that come fall Jim would be leaving home to start his college education. When Jim Jr. left Rita started kindergarten, so for the first time in 12 years I was the only one at home at least for part of the day. We drove Jim Jr. to

the Morris Campus of the University of Minnesota that September. When Jim and I left the campus our hearts were heavy. It was a heart breaker to see my first child leaving home and starting college.



Connie had now started her freshman year of high school and was active in many school activities. She played in the band, participated in declamation and had roles in school plays. When she was a senior, Connie was asked to be part of a community debate on the Viet Nam War. She

was assigned a position of opposing the war. She did a terrific job during the debate, so effective in fact that her high school English teacher accused her of being a Communist! But Connie was anything but a Communist; she was a committed and diligent student who performed well in all tasks she was assigned.

Connie graduated from High School in 1970 and again the farm was the site for a large open house to celebrate her achievement. She was accepted to begin college at the same institution that had been home for her brother for the past four years. Connie graduated in May and Jim received his bachelor's degree in history in June. I remember bringing a cake to Jim's graduation party that was being held at an old home on the edge of Morris where he and three of

his college friend were living. The cake was a hit for the throngs who attended the graduation party (three of his four roommates were graduating) such a hit in fact that I remember one young man who stuck his hand into the cake, taking a piece out before it was even sliced! College during the turbulent late 60's was a continually exciting time and Jim and I were relieved that Jim Jr. was graduating.

Following a summer working in Washington DC with a program for new college graduates at the Pentagon, Jim Jr. landed a job with the Minnesota Extension Service back in Minnesota. He started his career as an Assistant County Extension Agent working with 4-H in Mille Lacs County and later

Washington County. In Extension Office on the staff development work was named the Minnesota 4-H successfully worked to a major donor program 1996 when he left the



1975 he joined the state St. Paul Campus and did for the next nine years. He Executive Director on the Foundation in 1984 and establish the Foundation as for Minnesota 4-H until Extension Service and

joined the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University's Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Policy where he is currently employed. Jim owns a home in St. Paul with his life partner Bill Bloedow.

The summer of 1970 was a time of much excitement with daughter Connie participating in the Princess Kay of the Milky Way Contest. As a dairyperson in her own right Connie and her brother Dan owned a small herd of registered

Ayrshire cattle. Connie was selected princess at the county and regional levels and would complete in the state contest held the evening before the opening of the 1970 Minnesota State Fair. She was named first runner up to Princess Kay of the Milk Way and as a regional winner her head was immortalized in butter at the State Fair. She sat in a refrigerated booth in the Dairy Building for the better part of a day as a sculptor, carved her likeness.

That fall, saying goodbye to Connie when Jim and I dropped her off on the Campus of the University of Minnesota Morris was no easier than it had been four years earlier. It is hard to realize your family is growing up, leaving home and off to start their own lives. Connie excelled at the University and graduated in 1974 like her older brother with a bachelor's degree in history. Connie was the spokesperson for her class at commencement exercises in Morris in June of 1974.

Connie started her professional career working with the 4-H Program and Extension Service. Her initial stint with the Extension Service was in Racine County, Wisconsin where she worked for three years and then returned to Minnesota to work with the Ramsey County Extension Service 4-H Program in 1978. After a short tenure with Ramsey County she entered the world of politics directing the campaign of Gene Wenstrom who in 1979 sought to unseat incumbent Arlan Stangland in Minnesota's 7th Congressional District. Although the election results were close Gene lost the campaign. Connie, however, was bitten by the political bug and has remained in politics ever since. She directed the first unsuccessful bid of Mark Dayton to be a United States Senator in 1981



but then joined Mark as his chief of staff when he was named by Governor Perpich as Commissioner of Energy and Economic Development in 1983. In 1991 she joined the staff of Paul Wellstone and worked in Senator Wellstone's Twin Cities office until his untimely death in 2002. I was so proud of her and I know her father would have been as well the evening of the memorial service for Paul and Sheila Wellstone and the others killed in a plane crash in northern Minnesota only 13 days before he would have been re-elected as Minnesota's



Senior Senator. Connie gave the eulogy for Sheila Wellstone at the memorial.

During the first campaign for Senate by Mark Dayton, the Senator didn't win the election but Connie did win in meeting her future husband

Kenneth Peterson. Connie and Ken were married in 1987 and settled in a home in St. Paul's Irving Park. Connie and Ken blessed us with our first grandchild on May 14, 1989. Kelsey Jean Peterson was born in St. Paul. Jim and I relished in the role of grandparent and we equally pleased when Connie and Ken welcomed their second child and our second grandchild Nicholas Lewis Peterson on May 15, 1991. Today Connie is teaching a course a Minnesota Metropolitan



University and working on the staff of Wellstone Action carrying forth the work of Sheila Wellstone on her campaign to end child abuse and domestic violence.

With Connie in college, her brother Dan was beginning his senior year at Jasper High School. Dan was our non-conformist. He was very bright but didn't want any of his teachers to know it. He was the first child to be actively involved



in high school athletics and played football. When he graduated the following spring we again opened the house for a celebration. Dan decided he wanted to continue his education at Pipestone Area Vocational Technical School. He enrolled in the fall and started a course of training in fashion merchandising. We were

surprised by his choice but he relished in retail work and was a super salesman. It was wonderful having Danny closer to home.

Danny was also the practical joker in the family, a trait his youngest sister Rita has picked up as well. I remember the time Danny called home and said, "Mom, I'm in jail." My heart began racing and I asked him what he did. He said April Fool's. I was so disgusted with him and told him to never ever do that again. But despite my warning he did it again. He called once and disguised his voice. He said, "You cheated on your income tax." I was beside myself trying to think what in the world this was about until I finally recognized that it was Danny on the phone. What added to the upset was this call was coming on a party line (before everyone had private phones, entire neighborhood were connected to what was called a party line where everyone in the neighborhood, if they picked

up the phone when someone else was on the line could hear the entire conversation). This was another Danny April Fool's joke!

The Heartache of Losing a Child

A parent should never have to bury one of their children, but that was the awful experience for Jim and I in 1975. We lost Dan in an automobile accident in the spring of 1975. It was a terrible time having to call the family home (Jim from Stillwater and Connie from Racine, Wisconsin) only having them arrive at the hospital in Sioux Falls shortly before Danny died.



Dan became engaged to Karen Fjellenger the Christmas before. I remember he wrapped her ring in a succession of smaller and smaller boxes and when she finally got to the tiny box in the middle of all the wrapping it was a diamond ring. Dan and Karen were going to be married in 1975 but that was never to happen as Dan life was taken

before the family could experience it's first wedding.

The experience of planning a funeral for one of your children has to be the most devastating thing a parent can confront. Dan's loss has left an unfilled void. The pain has become easier to bare over the years but it never goes away. I was overwhelmed with the outpouring of love and support from family, neighbors and friends.

The Two Younger Kids



Pat, also active throughout high school graduated in 1976. He, like brother Dan, played football in high school. Pat was also active in the Future Farmers of America. As with the other children we celebrated Pat's graduation with a big open house on the farm. Pat enrolled in Austin Vocational Technical School to pursue course work in radio broadcasting. After finishing the course he enrolled in Southwest State University in Marshall and completed an Associates Arts degree in Agriculture. Pat worked for several years with the National Farmers Organization at area offices in Minnesota and Wisconsin and at the National Headquarters in Ames, Iowa. While living in Iowa he met the love of his life Judy Freeman. Pat and Judy currently live in Hector, Minnesota where Pat is the cattle buyer for Minnesota Beef, a meat packing plant in Buffalo Lake, Minnesota. In the summer of 2003 Pat underwent open-heart surgery at Abbot Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis to replace a damaged heart valve. Pat apparently had rheumatic fever as a child which is notorious for causing heart damage. I am so happy to report that the surgery was successful and Pat is back at full function with a fully functioning heart.

When Patrick graduated from high school that left my youngest, Rita remaining at home. Rita was active in high school and 4-H. Rita was also the great entrepreneur of the family. She loved raising and selling potatoes (well maybe it was just the selling she loved) at local farmers markets during the summer and fall. Her sales techniques were always effective! She graduated from high school as an honor student in 1979 and we held the last open-house graduation party for one of our children at the farm that May.



Rita enrolled at Winona State University and began her college years in the fall of 1979. I took Rita to Winona to begin fall classes. When we got to Winona we learned that dormitory rooms were completely filled and that until some other arrangements could be made some of the new freshmen would have to live in the dormitory lounges. This did not make Rita, or me for that matter, happy but I tried to put a positive light on the situation. I was feeling sad to leave my last child on a college campus and I know Rita was feeling homesick. But we persevered and college life at Winona started for Rita.

Rita took mathematics exceptionally well in both. She loved and was elected Vice President of the student body and during her senior year was named by Governor Perpich to serve on the Minnesota State University Board. Her political career had begun in earnest. While at Winona she worked on the campaign



a double major in mathematics and business and did well in both. She loved and was elected Vice President of the student body and during her senior year was named by Governor Perpich to serve on the Minnesota State University Board. Her political career had begun in earnest. While at Winona she worked on the campaign

of a young man named Tim Penny who was to become the first (and at least for now the last) Democrat elected to Congress from Minnesota's First Congressional District in a long, long time. Rita spoke for her class at her college graduation and was invited back the next year to speak to the Winona State

University graduates. I remember Senator Tom Daschel telling Jim and I, “Rita is a bundle of energy with a perpetual smile and a world of ability.”

Following college graduation Rita had a struggle finding that first job. She moved to the Twin Cities. She sold Time Life Books on the phone for a very short stint in 1983. Then she found a position working with an energy program funded by Farmers Union. From that position she agreed to serve as the Mondale/Ferarro Campaign Coordinator for Minnesota. It was a trial by fire as she took on the coordination of a state presidential campaign in Mondale’s home state which was a must win. She survived the campaign; learned lots about politics, and thanks to her efforts, Walter Mondale carried the State of Minnesota, the only state he carried in the 1984 presidential election.

Bitten by the political bug Rita has been involved in politics and political campaigns ever since. She was a part of the team that helped elect Congressman Tom Daschle to his first term as a South Dakota Senator. Rita became known far and wide for her skills and talents in getting out the vote. After Tom’s election she joined his staff in Washington DC and served the Senator’s staff for several years. She joined Secretary of Education Richard Reilly as his chief liaison with Congress at the start of the first Clinton Administration in 1992. Then she was asked by Senate Majority Leader Daschel to join the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee to assist in raising funds for Democratic Senate candidates throughout the country. After serving in that capacity for three years and raising countless millions of dollars she joined the Washington lobbying firm,

The Washington Group in 1996. In 1997 she was named full partner with The Washington Group and works with them at the present time.

Each of our children worked hard and has been successful in their various pursuits. Jim and I are proud of the mark they are leaving on society.

Grandparents Again



In 1999 Rita, living in a home she purchased in Arlington, Virginia decided it was time to share her life with a child so she began an adoption process that was to last about nine months and that would result in a

gorgeous baby girl Maria Daniella joining the family in October 1999. Maria became our third grandchild. Both Jim and I were concerned that Rita was undertaking an enormous responsibility as a single mother but we also knew that if anyone could it, Rita could. Rita and Connie



traveled to Guatemala City, Guatemala in October 1999 and returned to Minnesota (that was Maria's first stop in the USA) with an active, alert, beautiful, dark-haired baby girl. Seeing Rita's beaming face with Maria in her arms convinced Jim and I that this was meant to be.

With all five children on their own I realized that a mother can hold her children in her arms for only a while and then must release them to find their own lives. Jim and I tried our best to release our kids with a set of values and skills to guide them for the rest of their lives. With the kids gone and Jim still at work (since 1977 as the District Director for Southwest Minnesota ASCS), work of maintaining the farm became one of my principle responsibilities.

World Travelers

Let me go back a bit and tell you about a trip Jim and I made in March 1973. It was our first trip to Europe and only trip to Africa. We boarded a Trans International flight from Sioux Falls on our way to spend nine days in southern Spain along the coast of the beautiful blue Mediterranean known as the Costa del Sol (Sunny Coast). The ideal climate attracts tourists from all over the world.

Our first stop in Spain was Malaga. Here we boarded buses for Terremolinos (about 20 kilometers away) where we checked into the Hotel Aloha and lived in luxury for the next nine days. The first evening in Spain we were taken to two clubs. Here we saw the Flamenco dancers perform, a style of dance characterized by stamping and clapping. After the floorshow we all danced into the evening.

The next day was off to Malaga by bus. Here we viewed ancient castles, toured a leather factory, rode in horse drawn buggies and visited a 16th Century cathedral. We visited a wine cellar where grapes are processed into the finest wines in the world. Of course we sampled the fine wines! While in Malaga we also visited a bull-fighting arena. Bull fighting is the national sport of Spain. In

the bull ring the bull comes in mad from hunger and is first confronted by picadors, then by the mounted pikemen and the final stage is the matador killing the bull. About 1300 bulls are killed each year at the Malaga arena. The bloodier the contest, the louder the crowd. Following our visit to the city it was back to the hotel for a Spanish dinner.

We visited Migas, a village in the mountains. All the buildings were white, the streets were very narrow and everything was very clean. From there we went further up the mountains for a barbeque held at a large farm which raised hogs and chickens, the main fare for the barbeque. Following the meal and generous amounts of wine we danced and sang until the busses returned us to our hotel in Terremolinos.

Sunday morning many of us went to the old cathedral in Malaga and heard the giant organ fill the church with music. That afternoon we boarded a bus to a nearby town and helped celebrate a Spanish wedding and did lots of window-shopping.

Next it was off to Granada, a winding trip up the mountains. The roads were narrow and the driving fast. On the way to Granada we saw farms perched on the side of the mountain with small patches terraced for farming. Men, women and children were heading for the fields either walking or on horseback. Fields were being plowed with oxen and occasionally an old tractor. In Granada we visited the Alhambra, a great fortress at the top of the hill overlooking the city. The Moors, who for centuries held southern Spain, built Alhambra. Alhambra means red and the fortress is built of red brick. It covers 35 acres. The

Alhambra was started in 1248 and construction work continued for 110 years. The buildings have beautiful halls, courtyards and fountains. The walls are decorated with delicate carvings with inlays of silver and mother of pearl. Alhambra is the finest example of Moorish culture in Europe. Washington Irving brought popular attention to the Alhambra in his book "The Tales of the Alhambra." We saw caves that served as home to Gypsies, a lace factory where women were making lace by hand and the Royal Chapel where we saw the tomb of Queen Isabella – the same Isabella who helped to fund Christopher Columbus' trip to the "New World."

One of the highlights of our trip was a visit to Tangiers on the African continent. A two-hour bus ride to the ferry gave us another opportunity to view the countryside. At the ferry dock our passport was checked and we boarded the ferry and were off to Tangiers. We saw the Rock of Gibraltar on our journey. The Rock is actually an island with a population of 75,000 and the British govern it. Upon arrival in Tangiers our passports were checked again and again and again and then taken to rechecking before we were finally given the all clear to board the busses. We toured the city by bus. It is a city of many hills and narrow streets. The homes are white and look very clean. Flowers were blooming everywhere. We saw women at the creeks washing their clothes. The natives wore long robes and small pillbox hats. The women had their faces covered in the Moslem tradition. We went to the heart of Tangiers where 70,000 people are crowded together living in solid blocks of homes, shops, good stores and craft houses. The entire area had a disagreeable odor and lots of men and children

were out selling their wares or begging. At the top of the Cosabar is the king's palace with all of its splendor. The contrast of the very rich and the very poor was apparent. Tangiers opened our eyes to a new and colorful world. The day in Africa was over too soon and we were once again on our way back to Terremolinos.

Our last day in Spain was devoted to a tour of the countryside. The farms are very small and terraced, most on mountainsides. Small white stone homes dot the countryside. Crops included olives, oranges, lemons, figs, almonds and tobacco. The land is mostly cultivated with horses and oxen. Goats are herded on the mountainside and used for milk. Most of the work on the farms is done by hand.

On our last night on the Costa del Sol we enjoyed Spanish nightlife and wonderful food. The nine days ended far too soon and then it was back home for Jim and I. My sister Catherine and her husband, Bob Willems, joined us on the trip.

Visit to the Old Sod



In 1978 Jim and I made another European trip, this time with son Jim and daughter Rita. We were visiting our roots in Ireland and seeing relatives Ray Fullam and his wife Helen Byrne Fullam. Ray was a direct descendant of my grandmother Catherine Fullam Gilfoy

(my dad said Ray was his third cousin). We flew into Shannon Airport on a charter flight from the Twin Cities and were met by our Irish relatives. Ray before his retirement was an engineer for Aer Lingus, the Irish Airlines. Both he and wife Helen had visited the United States many times as Helen had relatives living in Canada and Ray frequently was taking training at airplane manufacturers in the United States.

Ray and Helen opened their home for us during our first week in Ireland and guided us on many tours of the surrounding area including trips to Dublin and to the ancestral home of the Fullams in Tuppertown, not far from Skerries where Ray and Helen live. At the time four of Ray's uncles and aunts were living in the small shanty in Tuppertown (Pat, Bea, Mary and Tom). They were all elderly in 1978 and have all since died. None of them had ever married. Pat was the traveling Fullam having spent a part of his life in Australia. Bea ruled the Tuppertown home and was outspoken on the evils of "modern technology." Mary was quiet and shy and did all that Bea assigned her. Tom came as close to looking like an Irish leprechaun as anyone I have ever met. It was an amazing experience to meet these elderly individuals knowing we were somehow related that they represented a dieing generation of the Irish still clinging to the "old ways." Ray and Helen built a modern kitchen addition on the Tuppertown home, but Bea used the refrigerator for storing canned goods – milk and meat belonged on the porch! Bea did not welcome technological innovations! The Tuppertown elders were wonderful people and they welcomed us into their home and treated us like the long lost American relatives we were.

After a week with Ray and Helen we devoted the next week to traveling the countryside and staying in local bed and breakfast establishments. It was a countryside dotted with castles, narrow roads and wonderful people. Our Ireland experience is a treasured memory and one that helped us build strong bonds of friendship with Ray and Helen who have visited us many times since.

My grandmother maintained contact with her Fullam relatives in Ireland during her life and my father took on that responsibility when she died. We were pleased to be continuing that tradition and were humbled to be able to visit the land where both Jim and I have ancestral roots.

Goat Races in Jasper



For a few years in the 1980's Jasper made news hosting Goat Races on Main Street. The Races were the invention of then mayor of Jasper and provided an excuse for a community celebration. Flat beds were placed end to end for

a city block and the goats used that as their running track. Lots of beer sold on the sidelines helped to add to the merriment of the event. The Jasper Goat Races even made headlines in the Sioux Falls Argus Leader. Like most families we enjoyed the community celebration and the Goat Races provided an excuse for family gatherings to enjoy the spectacle. The races went on for a few years

and then the novelty wore off. I understand that steps are underway to revive the event. Events of this sort brought lots of people back to Jasper and spawned a Jasper Community museum and the preservation of historic homes in Jasper.

A New Home on the Farm and Retirement



In 1982 we decided it was time for the old farm home and all of its additions over the years to come down and we built our retirement home on

the farm we loved. Our new home was large but so much more efficient and easier for us to care for. It was a home that suited us well until my departure from the farm in August 2002.

Jim retired from ASCS work in 1987. He and I maintained a large flower

and vegetable garden on the farm. We took the opportunity to travel and beginning in 1990 we spent part of our winter with our wonderful friends Gay and Jean Hiebert at their winter home on Marathon Key in the Florida Keys.



During our stays Jim and Gay would spend

hours and hours fishing. Each evening they would tell us about the big fish they caught and the struggle they had getting them on the boat. Jean said, "Jim, you caught them so you clean 'em and fry 'em." Jim enjoyed bringing pictures back home of the big fish he caught and showing them off to his coffee buddies in Luverne and Hardwick.

In 1989 Jim made a run for County Commissioner in Rock County. He was elected to a four-year term that fall. I worked with and supported Jim in his work on the County Board.

Friendships

At the urging of Evelyn Feit we started a "Springwater Get-Together" about ten years ago. Evelyn and her sister Barbara Marie Nelson were childhood friends and neighbors of mine. Her parents Barbara and John Bergin (Barbara was my father's youngest sister) lived on a farm not far from ours in Springwater Township. Evelyn persuaded Jim to serve as emcee for the event. The gatherings brought together lots of "old timers" who lived or had lived in the Springwater and Sherman areas. We'd have a good meal, tell a few jokes and visit. When Jim died so too did the Springwater Get-Together.

Jim and I were blessed with many close and dear friends throughout our lives. One friend, Dorothy (Dort) Willems Serie lived directly across the section from our farm. I knew Dorothy growing up because her father and mother, Ed and Sofie Willems, farmed the same land across the section when my folks moved to the farm in Springwater. We have known each other for over 60 years. She served as a table waitress at my wedding. In 1987 we took a trip together to

Washington DC at the invitation of daughter Rita. It was a wonderful trip and Rita had carefully planned a full itinerary including a deluxe tour of the U. S. Capitol by a staff person in Senator Daschel's Office, Arlington Cemetery and all the monuments. We especially enjoyed a tour of the FBI Building. At the time Rita was living only a few blocks from the Capitol so we "lived" in the heart of Washington, DC for a few days. Rita capped off our trip by taking us to the Kennedy Center for the Arts where we saw, "Murder in Office." It was a wonderful trip and great spending it with my friend Dorothy.

50 Years of Marriage

In 1997 Jim and I celebrated 50 years of marriage with a gala celebration hosted by our children and grand children. We were overwhelmed when 450 people from the community joined us at the Blue Mound Inn in Luverne to help us celebrate our 50 years together. We were especially proud that our grandchildren Nick and Kelsey participated in the program honoring their grandparents. We know we have been richly blessed with relatives, friends,

neighbors and a wonderful community to call home.



St. Joseph's Parish

Except for the year we spent to Adrian Jim and I were members of the St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Jasper throughout our married life. I worked many a

church bazaar
serving up an
feast for the
worked as a
church circle
church on a
serving meals



over the years
annual chicken
community,
member of a
cleaning the
regular basis and
for funerals. The

Church played and still plays a central part in my life. My husband of 54 years and my son Dan are buried in the St. Joseph's Cemetery in rural Jasper.

Losing Jim



I suppose one of the inevitable chapters in the autobiography of any married person is the experience of losing a spouse. For me the reality came crashing down on March 8, 2002 when I awoke to find Jim had died in his sleep. While his death was totally unexpected and left us all unprepared I am grateful he was able to go peacefully and with dignity to his heavenly reward. After 54 years of being together it is an amazing and difficult

transition to face life and living without my partner. But with the help and outpouring of love from so many I find new strength and purpose.

2002 was the kind of year I hope never to experience again. Beginning with Jim's sudden death in March through my stint in the hospital in September, the year was a whirlwind of activity. After the last thank you note was signed and in the mail the kids and I began to think about my future. I was not excited about living alone on the farm. Jim and I had long talked about making the move to Luverne but decided as long as our health was good we would stay on the farm. But now with Jim gone and with the help of my children I started looking for a

suitable home in town and I started to contemplate sorting out and getting rid of a 54-year accumulation.

I was fortunate to find a home and would be ready to move into Luverne in August. I decided that the most efficient way to reduce the amount of stuff in the buildings on the farm was to start sorting and preparing for an auction sale to be held in July. After weeks of work and lots of effort on many people's part not the least of which was all the help from the children, July 20 arrived and much of what was on the farm went on the auction block. Little did we know when planning for the sale that July 20, 2002 would be the hottest day of the summer with afternoon temperatures soaring into three digits, but by 3:00 PM the auction gavel fell for the last time.

A New Home in Luverne

In August we loaded up what was labeled for my new home and on August 10 I moved into 204 Cashin Avenue in Luverne. Then, in early September, I fell ill with some kind of infection that doctors had a hard time bringing under control. I spent 10 days in the hospital and many weeks at home in recovery. Fortunately I recovered in time to enjoy Thanksgiving with Rita and Maria in Washington (Jim and Bill joined us as well) and to spend the Christmas Holiday with family in St. Paul. Needless to say I was pleased to bid farewell to 2002. Rita and Maria invited me to spend January and February 2003 with them in Arlington and during that stay I made a one-week trip to see my friends the Hieberts in Florida.

One of the wonderful advantages of living in Luverne is living close to Evelyn Feit and her sister Barbara Marie Nelson (my cousins) who both have

homes in Luverne. We played together on the farm as children and now have the opportunity to spend lots of time together in Luverne, at least during part of the year. Both Evelyn and Barbara winter in Arizona.

Thursday Nights at the Pizza Ranch

Over the years Marvin and Sharon Hawes became dear friends. I think it started when Marvin (who farmed near Hardwick) made regular visits to his parent's farm (Floyd and Nina Hawes just down the road from our farm) while they wintered in Texas. Marvin would stop by after checking their farm and we'd end up getting into a good game of Pinochle (the card game of choice in southwestern Minnesota). I'd tell him to bring Sharon by and he did. That started a tradition of card playing with the Hawes every Friday night (we traded off -- our place and theirs). We would enjoy a couple of drinks and get serious about our card playing, men versus the ladies. Marvin always chided Jim who prided himself on being the best pinochle player west of the Mississippi to "get the trump out." Marvin and Sharon moved to Luverne as part of the semi-retirement but the Friday night card games continued. When Jim died Marvin and Sharon were there to lend their help in so many ways. I am proud to call them my very best friends and so pleased that I now live only a few blocks from them in Luverne. Whether helping me with things around the house, driving to Sioux Falls for a visit to the doctor or shuttling me to the airport, Marvin and Sharon are always there to help me out. Since my move to Luverne we have shifted our card playing from Friday night to Thursday nights. Every Thursday

night we play three-handed pinochle after supper at the Pizza Ranch. I consider myself richly blessed knowing Marvin and Sharon.

Highlights of 2003

I have now lived in Luverne in my townhouse at 204 Cashin Avenue a little over a year. Adjusting to a new home and new neighborhood was a challenge, but I am so fortunate to have friendly, generous neighbors. It feels good to live in a nice and safe neighborhood surrounded by people I enjoy.

My 81st birthday in October took on special meaning this year because my kids helped it become a month long celebration. Jim called a couple of weeks before my birthday and said he and Bill were coming to Luverne the weekend of my birthday to help me celebrate. They told me to invite people over for a party. That sounded good to me so I extended invitations to 26 of my lady friends in Luverne. Jim and Bill decorated the house for the occasion and prepared a wonderful lunch and served as greeters and hosts for my guests. The afternoon was spent visiting, laughing and having lots of fun. It was a great gathering including many of my new neighbors and many of my neighbors from Springwater now living in Luverne.

Rita and Maria called in late September and asked me if I would like to celebrate my birthday with them in mid-October in Las Vegas. Rita had a meeting to attend in Las Vegas for Nevada's Senator Reed. I said I would love to join them. I arrived on a Friday afternoon in Las Vegas and Rita and Maria met me at the airport and then we were whisked off to the Mandalay Hotel. That evening we had dinner at Charlie Palmer's Steak House, where Rita introduced me to lots of people. The next afternoon we went on a tour of the Venician Hotel and of course took a trip down the canal. I did a little gambling and was pretty lucky! Saturday evening we had a tour of Mandalay Bay and Travel Plaza and then off to cocktails and dinner at the Wynn Gallery. Sunday brunch was a special treat hosted by Wayne and Kathleen Newton at their home in Las Vegas. That evening Maria, Rita and I were wowed by the play, "Mama Mia." Then on Monday I was back to Luverne with memories and a few more coins thanks to my luck with the one-armed bandits.

The birthday celebrating just kept coming with a visit from Connie, Ken, Kelsey and Nick the following weekend. They helped me do some work around the house and we celebrated at the Country Side Inn in Adrian. It was a warm weekend and we had a wonderful time together.

Then the next weekend Pat and Judy visited to round out my month of celebration. Pat was looking so good and feeling well after his summer heart-valve surgery. They were here over October 25 so we celebrated Pat's birthday as well. It was a nice visit and the perfect ending to a great month.

Of course, I couldn't talk about 2003 without mentioning card playing. I play lots of cards; pinochle's the game of choice. I play with groups in Luverne, and Jasper and once in a while in Harwick. I have super partners wherever I play.

My Roots

My story begins long before my birth, at least 100 years before my birth. To understand my life and upbringing it may be useful to know something about my ancestors. I am German and Irish in equal proportions. My mother's family came from Germany and my father's from Ireland both in the 19th Century. Thanks in large part to the work of other relatives I have some information about my ancestry. I begin my autobiography with some background about my family tree.

German Roots My maternal ancestors were Germans and were part of the emigration of German people to the United States in the mid 19th Century. Beginning in 1846, mass German emigration to the United States was underway. By 1854 the year my great grandfather left Baden, Germany for the United States, almost 900,000 Germans had arrived in America, and this figure outdistanced all other immigrant groups. The potato famines that struck Ireland

also had their impact on Germany, that and other economic hardships encouraged the large emigration. My great grandfather John Lindenfelser and his brother Alexander emigrated together and settled in Wright County, Minnesota.

John, born April 11, 1831 was described as being 5'5 1/2" tall, with dark hair, hazel eyes and a dark complexion. He married Magdalina Halter on August 29, 1859. Magdalina was born in Alsace-Lorraine, Germany in 1836. John and Magdalina had two sons, Frank and Augustine John (called John). Frank was born August 3, 1860 in Frankfort Township, Wright County (just west of Minneapolis). He and his brother John Jr. helped their father on the farm. In 1884 Frank became a constable of Frankfort Township. He was also one of the incorporators of the Sunflower Co-operative Creamery Association that had its headquarters in St. Michael and was organized in June of 1904.

On July 11, 1888 my grandfather Frank married Dorothea Goeb. Dorothea was born in Alderdorf, Frankfurt in Bavaria on July 28, 1866. They had one daughter Magdalena Dorothea, my mother, who was born Christmas Eve 1889. There was joy at the birth of their daughter but this was followed by great sadness when Dorothea died January 1, 1890 from complications with the birth of her daughter.

Frank was not to be a widower for long. The priest at St. Michael, Minnesota, Father Diesterman was a good friend of Frank's. The priest introduced him to Mathilda Donnay who was a friend of Father Diesterman's cook.



Frank and Mathilda were married on April 28, 1891 a little over a year after the death of his first wife Dorothea. Mathilda was Dutch, both of her parents (Heinrich Donnay and Cecilia Kolan) were born in Holland. Frank and Mathilda had nine children, step brothers and sisters to my mother.

My mother, Magdalena Dorthea (called Dora),

was born December 24, 1889 in Wright County.

She married my father James Francis Gilfoy on

June 15, 1921 at Van Hook, North Dakota. My

mother died in Garretson, South Dakota on

December 10, 1982. Her husband preceded her in

death by 10 years. He died February 29, 1972 in

Jasper, Minnesota. Mother's nine step brothers

and sisters were Henry, born April 12, 1882; Matt

born September 18, 1893; John Joseph born February 25, 1894 and died a year

later; Peter Joseph born November 4, 1895; Maria Celia born February 14, 1897;

William born July 8, 1899; Rudolph born January 31, 1901; and Agnes born June

7, 1906.

The Lindenfelser's were and are farmers. There are still Lindenfelser family members involved in agriculture in Wright County. My mother was born and reared in a family where English was a second language as German was still spoken by her family and many of the German families around her. Pictures

taken of my grandmother and her family would indicate the family was prosperous in their farming operation. My mother early developed skills as a seamstress and left the family home in Wright County to market her skills as a seamstress in North Dakota. It was in North Dakota at age 31 she met my father and they married in Van Hook, North Dakota [Van Hook, like it's sister town Sanish, no longer exists, it was engulfed by the Garrison Diversion Project and the resulting Lake Sakakawea, a project authorized by Congress in 1944] on June 15, 1921. With that marriage there was a blending of a German emigrant family with an Irish emigrant family.

Irish Roots As German as my mother ancestry was, my father was Irish. His father and namesake, James Gilfoy emigrated from Ireland in 1865. James, the youngest of four children was born at Ballinard, County Tipperary, Ireland in 1847. His siblings were Maria (born June 4, 1842), Richard (born in 1844 or 45) and Katie (date of birth unknown). As family legend has it, Katie was very young when she fell in love with a good-looking man from a nearby city. She became pregnant by him but he refused to marry her. To have a baby outside of marriage would have been an unforgivable social disgrace in mid-19th Century Ireland. The baby died at birth and Katie, broken hearted, died shortly after. The story has it that the family was deeply shocked and Katie's brother Richard, in an attempt to avenge the wrong to his younger sister, waylaid the young man in a park and beat him up unmercifully.

James was the third member of the family to leave Ireland for the United States. Previously his brother Richard and sister Maria emigrated in 1860.

When James was preparing to leave his father, Michael decided to join him for the trek to America. He was a widower and all of his living children would be in the United States when James departed. They traveled to Cashel on their way to Cork to book passage on a ship that would take them overseas. Tragedy struck them in Cashel. Michael took suddenly sick and died on April 23, 1865 at the age of 55. His wife Barbara Flanagan had previously died in 1848 probably from the result of the famine. My Aunt Barbara tells the story that Barbara Flanagan, her grandmother and namesake was the daughter of wealthy parents who opposed her marriage to Michael Guilfoyle (probably the original spelling of the name) so strongly that it was necessary for the two young people to run away to be married.

The variations in the name Gilfoy are interesting and also the stuff of family legend. Both Michael Guilfoyle (born in 1810 as shown on his death certificate) and Barbara Flanagan, possibly born about the same time or shortly thereafter, undoubtedly could not read or write, nor, likewise, could the relatives who raised the Guilfoyle children after Barbara died. The spelling of the surname, Guilfoyle, at James' baptism was most likely that of the parish priest who performed the ceremony and who spelled it, as he believed it should be spelled. Likewise the spelling of the surname, Kilfoile, by the relatives who raised Michael's children was possibly not of their doing but that of either the local parish priest of that area or the teacher who first taught the relatives children or the Guilfoyle children in school. The Irish lived under repressive Penal Laws that England had forced on them several centuries earlier. Among

these laws was one that forbade Irish Catholics to send their children to school. To enforce this edict the English Parliament decreed death by hanging for any teacher caught in violation. As a result there were succeeding generations of Irish who were completely illiterate. It was not until 1829 that the so-called religious and educational freedom act for Ireland was passed by the English Parliament.

James apparently was raised under the name Kilfoile and he used that name until he came west to Minnesota in 1876. In fact his name and the names of his first two children, Jane and Michael, are entered in the family bible as Kilfoile. Another story is told that James' brother Richard owned a tavern in Albany, New York. When his brother first saw Richard's place of business he noticed a big sign on the front of the building that read "Gilfoy's Tavern." Richard's explanation was that the brewery where he bought his beer had furnished the sign that they had put it up before he noticed the mistake in the spelling of his name. Since the sign had cost him nothing, and a new one would have been expensive, he left it as it was. Richard's customers knew him, because of the sign, as Dick Gilfoy, and he soon adopted the name. This was a story furnished by my father and I don't know how authentic it is. My father always used to say, "If you're going to tell a story, make it worth listening to."

Upon emigrating to the United States James joined his older brother Richard in Albany. His sister Maria married another Irish immigrant and had migrated to Albert Lea, Minnesota by the time James arrived in this country. On September 26, 1866, Richard Kilfoile married Annie Reddy of Albany. At the

wedding or before James no doubt met 13 year old Catherine Fullam, Annie's cousin, an orphan, who had been raised by Annie's mother, Mary Clark Reddy. Five years later James would marry Catherine Fullam.

James met another Irish immigrant in Albany, Pat Kelly. Late in October 1866 the two young men went to Troy, New York where they enlisted in the United States Army. On his enlistment papers James gave his date of birth as October 18, 1848, his age as 18 and his birthplace as Thayer, Ireland. The records show that he was 5'8" tall. Thus James began a three-year enlistment in the Army of his new country. Apparently James and Pat Kelly asked to be assigned together as the two remained in the same regiment during their entire enlistment.

James and Pat were sent west (via a 2000 mile journey by ship to Aspinwall, Columbia (this is almost a half century before the construction of the Panama Canal) and there by rail to Panama City. At Panama City James boarded another ship for a 4000-mile journey to San Francisco and Fort Scott. By enlisting in the Army James became a United States Citizen. Soon after arriving in this country he was afforded an amazing adventure traveling 6000 miles on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and the Caribbean Sea, he visited fabled Panama City, and viewed the stormy, turbulent Golden Gate. James was assigned to fight Indian tribes under General Crook in Oregon and Washington. James and Pat Kelly, according to Army archival records, "proceeded in pursuit of hostile Indians to Dunder and Blitzen Creek where they fought a battle with the Indians, killing and capturing 14." James was 20 years old at the time of this

battle. Forty-eight years later, in 1916, he became eligible to receive a pension as a veteran of the Indian Wars because of his involvement in this battle.

INDIAN WARS. Act of March 4, 1917.

8653

Original



BUREAU OF PENSIONS

It is hereby certified That, in conformity with the laws of
the United States, James Kilfoyle
who was a Private, Co. 1, 23rd Regiment United States
Infantry,
is entitled to a pension
at the rate of Twenty dollars per month,
to commence March 4, 1917.

Given at the Department of the Interior this
seventeenth day of August
one thousand nine hundred and eighteen
and of the Independence of the United States
of America, the one hundred and forty-third

E. C. Sieman
Commissioner of Pensions

Martin H. Spera
Director of the Interior

765

On October 26, 1869 James and Pat Kelly received their discharge from the army at Camp Warner, Oregon. They then set out for California in search of gold. The two apparently didn't find any because in 1870 they returned to Albany by way of the new transcontinental railroad which had only been completed May 10, 1869. Upon return James found employment in the Albany iron foundry (pay was one dollar a day). The work was heavy, heat terrific and the hours unbelievable by today's standards. James worked 84 hours a week, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Shortly after returning to Albany James began dating Catherine Fullam, the cousin of his sister-in-law. On April 30, 1871 they were married. Catherine was born on June 5, 1853 in Albany. She was the first child of young Irish emigrants Thomas Fullam and his wife Jane Reddy. They had come to the United States the year before from Dublin. A second child, William was born in 1855 but he died eight months later. In 1857 a second daughter was born but died during birth. On August 27, 1857 Catherine's mother Jane Reddy died of complications of childbirth.

After the death of his wife Thomas moved with 4-year old Catherine to St. Louis, Missouri. A wagon maker by trade, he opened his own shop and found business thriving in St. Louis. But in 1859 Thomas' health failed so he returned with Catherine to Albany where he died the same year. He returned to his wife's brother's (John Reddy) home. John was married to Mary Clark and Mary nursed Thomas until his death.

Catherine, now orphaned at age 6 remained with the Reddy's. She was called Katie by the Reddy's and they raised her like their own daughter. Catherine remembered the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln in 1865. She recalls that coming home from school that afternoon she noticed black and white handkerchiefs draped together in mourning for Lincoln in many of the homes she passed. As soon as she reached home she located a piece of black velvet and a white handkerchief and similarly draped them in a front window. She said that he, Uncle John, apparently an ardent Democrat, came home a little later and demanded to know who was responsible for the black and white material draped in the window. When she told him she had put it there, and why, he said, "Not in my house you don't! Take it down!"

When she married James she was not quite 18 and he was 24. They lived in a 3rd floor flat near the foundry where James worked in Albany. On March 4, 1872 their first child William was born but he lived only a few hours. On October 18, 1873 a daughter, Jane Dolores was born. A little less than two years later a second child, Michael Harry, was born July 8, 1875. Frequent lay-offs at the foundry led James and Catherine to make the momentous decision to leave Albany and take up a homestead in the west. James' sister Maria and her husband Richard Donovan were already homesteading in south central Minnesota near the Iowa border. Since James was an army veteran he was entitled to special rights in acquiring a homestead.

They left Albany with their belongings and two little children in 1876 traveling first by train through New York State, then by steamer to Milwaukee,

and finally by oxen and covered wagon to the home of his sister near the little town of Heartland, Minnesota. For the next year and one-half they lived with the Donovan's helping them with the farm work. They learned first hand the requirements of farming a prairie homestead. When they learned of James' army experiences, a group of Albert Lea businessmen and homesteaders planning a buffalo hunt engaged him as a guide. He served as a guide on several more expeditions into what was then known as Dakota Territory.

In 1877 James secured a land claim in Nobles County and what would later be known as Leota Township. The trip to the new homestead was delayed in the spring on 1878 due to the arrival of James and Catherine's fourth child (3rd living) Thomas Edward. Thomas was the first of the family to have his name recorded as Gilfoy. Apparently James decided on the trip West to use the shorter name, Gilfoy that his brother Richard had previously adopted. Two weeks after Thomas' birth the family was off by covered wagon and oxen for their new homestead 150 miles to the west. Six days later the young couple was in Worthington, Minnesota. They drove out the "old diagonal trail" toward the homestead. Catherine would get her first view of the new land she would call home for the rest of her life.

I think it is important to try to help you visualize what it was like for a young woman, in her twenties, born and raised in a large city now being transported to a desolate prairie absent of all human landmarks. During the first years on their own homestead in Nobles County Catherine and three young children lived in a one-room sod shanty dug into the ground. There were no windows and little

light. Outside there was only a vast countryside of prairie extending into the hazy mist of the horizon. Not only could you see only prairie sod, the home you lived in was built of the same material. The loneliness must have been crushing. Imagine living in a one-room dugout with a dirt floor, little furniture, no music or pictures and only the bare necessities of life. No trees or shrubbery (they hadn't been planted yet) only incessant wind, dust and in the winter blown snow. The ever-blowing winds of southwest Minnesota drove some of the early settlers to the verge of insanity and caused others to abandon the homestead. The wind, the dust, the drought, the unmitigated sun and the boundless expanse of horizon must have been powerful allies of feelings of desolation, insecurity and futility.

Adding to those feelings of desolation and isolation James left the homestead the first three winters to work in a logging camp northwest of Stillwater, Minnesota. He served as a cook for Dennis Boyle who farmed near Adrian and also operated a logging camp in the winter. Most of the lumberjacks were big, strapping Irishmen so James probably felt right at home, but this left Catherine alone on the just broken prairies of southwestern Minnesota.

When blizzards hit in the winters the roads that existed (they were barely tracks) were obliterated and families were completely isolated from all other human contact. The snow would find its way through every crack and crevice. Barns, haystacks and sod houses were literally covered by drifting snow. Everything was white. Catherine recalled that many a winter night the wind blew so hard and the cold was so bitter that she had to stay up all night twisting hay and straw to feed the fire to keep herself and the youngsters from freezing. She

reported in an interview with the Rock County Star, Luverne, Minnesota, dated June 11, 1942:

“Our first years on the prairies, like the ones experienced by the rest of the early settlers, were trying ones. He harvested our first crop with a ‘cradle’ and bound the grain by hand. Wood was scarce and we twisted hay for fuel. Food was often very scarce, but in season wild fowl, fish, wild strawberries and ground cherries were plentiful. Sometimes we had ‘stone’ soup as the main course of our meal. It was made by boiling a certain kind of stone, noted for its mineral qualities, in water, together with nutritious herbs and roots. We used roasted barley to make coffee and often used dried rose bush leaves as tea.”

July 23, 1897 the third son, John was born. He was the first Caucasian child born in what is now Leota Township.

About half the early settlers in the area were Catholics, mostly Irish and some Germans, who had come as members of Bishop Ireland’s Catholic Colony (Ireland was a Bishop in the Twin Cities and concerned that Catholic settlers be encouraged throughout the State of Minnesota). These settlers started arriving in Nobles County late in 1879. Pat Kelly, James’ army buddy arrived about this time bringing with him his parents and his sister. Because many of these new settlers were Irish and Catholic, James and Catherine welcomed and identified with them. The Gilfoy’s helped to organize a Catholic parish and building in 1880 with families named King, Sweeney, Gray, Brown, Magee, Kelley, Noonan and

Finnegan among many others. There was also a school organized and located only a mile west of the Gilfoy Homestead.

Catherine recalled one of the most sensational things she saw in the dearly years on the homestead was the day thousands of snakes crossed the farm migrating toward the west. The whole family watched them, on and off, for hours. She said there were different species of snakes but that the various species did not intermingle. Each traveled only in groups of its own kind but the succession of groups formed an almost endless column. She didn't know where the snakes came from nor did she know for sure what caused the mass migration but believed that all the sod the homesteaders were breaking up may have destroyed their natural habitats and caused them to leave the area.

On September 9, 1884, a fourth son, James Francis, my father was born. On August 3, 1888, Barbara Agatha was born. She was named Barbara after James' mother. Jane, the eldest was 15 years old the year Barbara was born.



In 1895 tragedy struck James and Catherine when 16-year-old John died suddenly of double pneumonia. He and Thomas had been at a barn dance the evening before enjoying themselves and dancing every number. It was warm in the barn and perhaps John cooled off too quickly when he stepped outside after the dance. The next day, November 7, 1895, he died. James built a stout, water tight coffin of two-inch pine planks and John was buried in the cemetery that lay alongside St. Mary's mission church (later

□

Catherine had his body exhumed and moved to the Catholic Cemetery in Lismore).

As the frontier aspects of the homesteads passed, the crops the homesteaders planted changed. In the early years wheat was the principal crop raised in southwestern Minnesota with some acreage sown to flax. Experience soon showed that while flax did well on newly broken sod, it depleted the soil too quickly to be planted more often than the first few years. Oats, which was a



necessary feed grain for the horses and other animals, soon displaced wheat.

When it was realized that corn also grew well in the area, it became of equal importance to oats. Catherine remembered in an interview that while hardships were many, “crops were good from the start.”

Catherine also noted that the Irish, for the most part, were not good farmers. She said many had been raised in large cities and even while homesteading did not have their heart in farm work. She said that when the great influx of German farmers came to this country beginning in the late 19th Century, the Irish readily sold out to them. By the second decade of the 20th Century rural areas of Nobles County were almost solidly German and only a sprinkling of Irish remained.

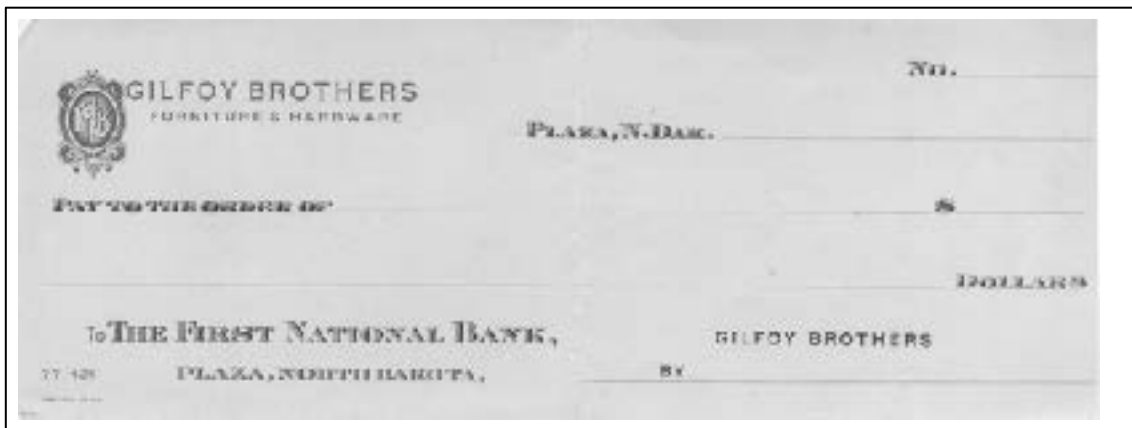
In 1899 the Burlington Railroad built a spur line from Worthington to Hardwick. New towns were established along the track. One of those towns, named Lismore, was laid out at the rail site two miles due south of the Gilfoy homestead. Catherine recalled that her son Thomas at age 22 heard the whistle of the first train approaching and he leaped on his horse and raced the two miles to join a crowd of whooping riders who escorted the slow moving train into town. The train reached Lismore for the first time on June 9, 1900.

As the children grew older they all left the homestead. All had inherited the pioneer spirit of their parents and with the exception of Barbara, all moved on to the new frontiers of the country. Barbara studied teaching at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and at Normal School in Austin, Minnesota. Jane homesteaded near Van Hook, North Dakota in the valley of the Missouri River in western North Dakota. Her claim now lies underwater beneath the Garrison Dam. Mike and my father, James,



took up claims near Mohall, North Dakota about thirty miles from the Canadian boarder in northwestern North Dakota. Thomas homesteaded near Germantown, Minnesota in the Red River Valley in northwestern Minnesota. All three sons at one time or another operated businesses in newly founded villages in the western Dakotas. In fact, Mike, usually in partnership with my father made a living for a period of years starting businesses in one newly developing village after another, then selling and moving on.

My father, James, after proving up on his homestead claim (residence for



5 years and improving the land) and several years of operating small businesses



in partnership with Mike in the western Dakotas, eventually became a field representative for the North American Creamery Company. His headquarters were at Minot, North Dakota. He married Dora Lindenfeltser, of German descent, in Van Hook, North Dakota on June 9, 1920. In 1930 he acquired a quarter section of land

from John and Barbara Bergin near Sherman, South Dakota, and farmed it for many years.

With all of their children gone, Catherine and James continued living on the homestead. In 1907, however, they decided to retire and they rented the farm and moved to Luverne. After two years of retirement, they realized their hearts were still on the land and they returned to the homestead. Between 1906 and 1925 James and Catherine were blessed with 14 grandchildren, me among them!



In 1915 James and Catherine bought an eight-room house in Lisemore with three and one half acres of land, and for the second time moved to town for retirement. They settled down to small scale farming on the three acres, and with both of them enjoying good health, the prospect of many pleasant years of retirement appeared to lie before them. At this time Catherine was 62 and James 68.

On April 30, 1921 James and Catherine celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. They had a large party at home attended by many of their old friends and neighbors. Mike, Thomas and my father came from North Dakota for the event. Barbara joined them from Sherman and Jane at this time was living in Lismore, so the Gilfoy's had their family together again for their anniversary. My grandfather, father an aunt were all poets. I have printed below a poem written by my grandfather when he first left his homestead:

LEAVING THE FARM BEHIND

Well, wife, I find I'm growing old
My hair and beard are gray.
The farm is rented – the stock sold,
And we must move away.

The boys have grown to manhood
And left us all alone
The place is now neglected,
So we had better leave the farm.

Well, wife, we should not hate to go,
For our life on earth is short,
And when the neighbors talk of work –
We know we've done our part.

So come dear, lean upon my arm,
For we must go today –
And as we leave the dear old farm,
We'll wipe the tears away.

But when we get on yonder hill,
We'll both look around and see –
Where we have left our youth behind,
At Lismore on the prairie.

In the spring of 1925 James' health began to fail. He died later that year on December 10 at the age of 78. His obituary stated, "The deceased was born in Tipperary County, Ireland, in 1851 coming to this country as a mere boy. He was a soldier under General Crook during the Indian uprising in the Western states. In September 1876, he came to Minnesota and located at Albert Lea, Minnesota. Two years later he moved to Nobles County and took up a homestead, which farm he still owns, it being located two miles north of Lisemore. Like many of the other early settlers he experienced many hardships

in the early days, but he was a man who was hard to discourage. He was a member of the local M.W.A. Camp (Modern Woodmen of America).

“On the 30th of April, 1871, at Albany, New York, he was united in marriage to Miss Catherine Fullam. This union was blessed with seven children, five of whom are living, two having preceded him in death. He leaves to mourn his departure a loving wife and five children, namely, Mrs. John Toomey of Lismore (Jane); Mrs. John Bergin of Garretson, South Dakota (Barbara); M.H. Gilfoy of Garrison, North Dakota; T.E. Gilfoy of Minot, North Dakota; and J.F. Gilfoy of Anamoose, North Dakota. He also leaves one sister, Mrs. Maria Donovan of Albert Lea, Minnesota.

“Funeral services were held at St. Anthony’s church Saturday morning at 9:00 O’clock. A solemn requiem mass was celebrated. Rev. Fr. Kramer and Rev. Fr. Jennings of Lismore, and Rev. Fr. Krebsbach of Adrian, Minnesota officiating. Internment was made in the Lismore Cemetery. The pallbearers were: M.M. McCann, T.P. Noonan, Eugene Metz, Geo. Asquith, Ferd. Lenz and Henry Peterbush.

On June 5th, 1943 Catherine celebrated her 90th birthday and on September 18 of the same year she died. This indomitable pioneer died peacefully in her sleep of old age.

