

Geraldine Gordon Morris:

My Memories



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BABIES

I was born the 28th of May, 1926—it was a Friday—in Arthur Township, Clare County, Michigan. I was the seventh born of fifteen children. (The fifteenth one, William, had a bad heart and lived only a few days.) I was born at home, as we all were. When a new baby was about to be born, we would go outside to play, if we could, in the old corn crib if it was empty. When Rex was born, I remember that the rest of us were asleep in the same room! Mom had one baby mid-bread-making—Fern stepped in and finished the bread. There was no telephone, so Dad would go and bring the midwife. For the last two or three, our neighbor was a nurse/midwife, so that made it easier.

Walter was the next born after me, in 1928. Mother didn't have enough milk for him, so he cried all the time. Forest, who was eight, became the babysitter for Walter and was very good at it. After that, Mother wasn't able to nurse her babies—they had cow's milk. Marlyn, the youngest, was allergic to cow's milk, so she had a hard time.

William, the last one, weighed 13 pounds when he was born (in 1939). He died at five days old—congenital heart disease, the death certificate said. There was just too much baby for the heart. He died at home with the midwife. I remember the midwife holding him and rubbing his legs and arms, I suppose to help his circulation... The morning he died we were all sent to school. I remember going in the cloak room and bawling my eyes out. Aunt Alta had lost her first baby and it was buried in the family plot. There was room for two small coffins in the plot, so William was buried there too. The stone came later—my brother Forest organized that.

I remember once telling my teacher that when I grew up I wanted to have lots of children, like my mother did.

FARMS

The houses we lived in along the way—the first one was at what we called “The Grove.” I think there were nine of us at the time. My dad was a “dirt poor farmer.” Our neighbor, Mr. Robinette, was a real help to our family. He helped on “threshing day”—not a combine like people had later. One year a spark from the threshing machine caused a fire on the barn with the crop, so there was no way to make the farm payment to the bank. So we had to move. We moved into my great aunt's house [Ellen Heilman Gordon]. We were the last family to live there. Not a great house, but by sleeping three to four in a bed we kept warm.

After Grandpa Charles Gordon died, Grandma Emma Gordon had a farm sale and we moved into the family home down the road, on Adams Road in Clare, Michigan. The main floor of the house had a living room with a kerosene space heater, and a sofa, and always some rocking chairs. The first floor also had the girls' bedroom and my parents' room. In the lean-to part of the house it had a pantry and laundry room and a kitchen/eating area, with a dining table to seat twelve and a wood stove for cooking. The second floor had only the chimney for heat, and that

was the boys' bedroom. Later on it was where visiting grandkids would stay—mostly the Morris kids, since my siblings mostly lived nearby or stayed with other relatives when they visited.

That house on Adams Road didn't have electricity until the 1940s, and there was no indoor bathroom until 1946, about the time I got married, when the former girls' bedroom was turned into a bathroom with a clothes wardrobe in it. (The house had no closets.)

Besides the house there was a barn, a granary, and a corn crib where we had a playhouse when it wasn't being used. Now all that's left is an enlarged barn.



Eventually my brother Rex took over the farm and built another farmhouse—a modular he moved in on 20 acres further down Adams Road on the corner of Rogers Avenue. Rex's house is just a short distance from the old farmhouse where he was born, and near where he was killed in a horrific accident, doing what he always wanted to do—be a farmer.

But my parents still lived in that old farmhouse all their lives. Years later, after my parents were gone, my brother Charles wanted the main part of that old house for a hunting shack, and it was taken apart piece by piece and reassembled at a road called Eighth Line, by a creek. It was used by three generations of Gordons who were, and are hunters—no ladies welcome! The last I heard, it was still there.

Besides farming 40 acres of land, Dad worked for the WPA in the 1930s, helping to build Route M61. They built it by hand, with shovels. He boarded out during the week and came home on weekends. The workers who had horses got more money than those who had only shovels and manpower, so since every nickel counted, Dad was hired with a team of horses. I remember he would tell us how much burned bread he had at the home where he stayed while he worked on the road!

SCHOOL

I started at a country school. It was 2¼ miles there, so some days, my brother Lester pulled me to school on a sled. Other days, the milkman saw us Gordon kids and picked us up and gave us a ride... The 18-or 19-year-old teacher delighted in making me cry. I hated school for the first four years when he was my teacher there. After that we changed schools, to the Browns Corners one room school, half a mile closer to home. (That first school, Brand School, closed after we left, since there weren't enough students.)

I remember a funny thing that happened... Before you started first grade, if you had a sibling at the school, you could visit the school for one day. Fern was there, so I went for a visit. At one

point I left Fern's desk to go look at the books in the library cabinet, and I let out a fart, and everyone giggled. I still remember how embarrassed I was.

I had a lady teacher at Browns Corners School (fifth through eighth grades) who had never been married. She was a real teacher!—and I loved her. I got the chance later in life to tell her how I enjoyed the four years with her as teacher. That teacher was the one who put my name in as the one and only student from our school who was allowed to go on a trip the Upper Peninsula by school bus. We saw Tahquamenon Falls, Castle Rock at St. Ignace, and rode the Mackinac ferry (there was no bridge then). We also saw Spikehorn Meyers and his bears—he was an old, scruffy man near Harrison, Michigan who had bears on his farm.



At school we had a recess at 10:30 and 2:30, and a one-hour lunch break at noon. Reading was my favorite subject. I remember what an awful time I had with long division, though! I could do short division, but not long... We played anti-over, where we threw a ball over the school house, and “ducky on the rock.” The only fly in the ointment was the preacher’s son. We were both in the same grade, and he would scoot up right next to me on the recitation bench in the front of the schoolroom, and I did not like that. I think he had designs on me, but no way was I interested in him or anyone else at that time!

I loved to read; I devoured any books that came into the house—books, magazines, my sister Doris’ True Stories and Modern Romance, Reader’s Digest if I could get them, the newspaper if the store man saved it for us, anything I could get my hands on...

There wasn’t any library that I remember. Dad was on the school board with Uncle Forest and another neighbor in the 1930s or 40s.

I was terrified of speaking in front of people. Every time I did, I ended up bawling. Old Mr. Robinette, even though he burned down the barn at The Grove, was still our friend—he was a shirt-tail relative on my mother’s side. He was instrumental in the spiritual life of my parents. One time they were at our place, and I had a Christmas program coming up, and I had a part, and I was afraid. He said, “If you get up there and *only look at me*, you won’t cry. And if you say your part, and you don’t cry, I will give you a dime.” And I did it! I’ll always remember that Christmas program and I only was able to teach Sunday school by being on the kids level. First second grade, then in the beginner’s department—four years to first grade.

LIFE ON THE FARM

We bought flour in 25-pound bags, or took our own wheat to the mill to be ground. Mom would make 10 or 12 loaves of bread at a time, in round pans—she could only fit four at a time in the oven. The recipe was simple: yeast, water, sugar, flour. Our stove was wood-burning cook stove with a wood box nearby. Mom was a good cook and a good baker. She would make pies on Sunday while we were at Sunday School. We had a few chickens, and she would make egg

noodles. When we had noodles, they were homemade with about a dozen whole eggs and flour and salt. None of us could roll them out as thin as Mom did! She dried them on the table (the one that seated twelve) for the rest of the day. They were really a treat with chicken and broth!

After school we would help in the kitchen. We would usually burn the potatoes if Ma was out to the barn—we burned a lot of potatoes.

We didn't get too many invitations to eat at other people's houses—there were too many of us to feed! But my childhood was a happy time, as I recall it. We didn't know how others lived, and it didn't matter. I think that probably was good—that we were either naïve or dumb—I choose to think that what we didn't know, couldn't hurt us.

I remember laundry days. Mom had a washboard, two tubs, and a boiler for whites—no washer or dryer. She had to pump the water (kitchen pump), haul it to the stove, heat the water, fill the tubs, and scrub the clothes by hand. She would start the laundry on Monday morning and not finish until Wednesday morning. I remember her hands were raw and her fingers were bloody by the time it was finished. I don't know why, but we used to beg her to let us help her scrub the socks!... We would hang clothes outdoors to dry (even in winter)—they were freeze dried, but they smelled heavenly. Ironing was a family thing. The experienced ironers would do shirts and dresses, and the beginners would do hankies and pillowcases. (Sheets weren't ironed.)

Mom wasn't a great housekeeper, and we all had to help. Saturday was cleaning day (for the girls). We would scrub the kitchen and wash the white cupboard doors. We would also help with the garden; Mom would say, "One of you girls, go to the garden with me"—that would mean Fern, Virginia, or me. We would weed the carrots, etc... Our entertainment after working in the garden or picking berries was a free movie show on a store building, or maybe even at a drive-in theater. Life was good!

All the older folks remember white margarine that we colored yellow. Our imagination said it was better if it looked *yellow*, like butter. Later, when I had kids of my own, I mixed butter with margarine to make the butter stretch farther.

Mom did the milking, since Dad didn't like working with the cows. There were about twelve of them. Fern would do the cooking while Mom was out milking the cows. We sold the cream but not milk—we didn't have the cooling required for milk. The man picked up the cream once a week. We had *real* butter at home, and *real* homemade bread in our school lunches—which we took with us to school every day if we wanted to eat—no cafeteria in one room schools! I could spell good in those days—not so good now—because we had "spell-downs" on Fridays third quarter after recess, quite often.

At Christmastime, we would cut our own Christmas tree from the woods. Mom made sea foam candy, fudge, peanut candy, and other treats. I remember that in later years, she made popcorn balls and stored them in the wringer washer. (I think all our kids remember this!) Gifts were practical—clothes for school, mostly. We would also get those old pinball kind of games that you would play on the floor—not one apiece, but one to share for all... In winter there was "fox and geese" and sliding downhill, building snowmen, and snowball fights.

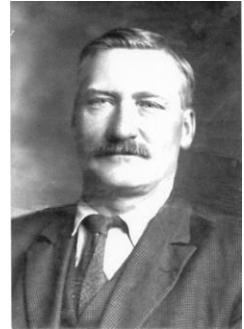
When I was little our family had gone to church, but we quit going when there were too many kids to clothe and transport. We went until there were five kids (counting brothers and sisters), but then it got too hard to get everyone dressed up enough. But after that, we kids were still allowed to go—my dad would even drive us there—and my sisters and I went—Fern and Virginia and I, and Betty when she was old enough. Mom was the alarm clock. I never could figure out how she could wake us up without an alarm clock—I wonder if she was awake a lot... One year I won a Bible for a whole year without missing. I really loved the Easter sunrise service.

We girls didn't have bikes, but the boys did. We didn't do any horseback riding—we only had work horses. Summer vacations, we worked in the garden and helped with the canning—I liked peeling peaches and tomatoes because you could boil them and the skins would drop right off!... We always had enough to eat—but it was a lot of beans and potatoes. I still like beans of all kinds—now it's a healthy thing to eat. I'm a "vegaholic" and I like fruit of all kinds. Of course I like meat, too. Butchering days were interesting on the farm!

My mother always made a good Sunday dinner with all the trimmings—meat, potatoes and gravy, salad, coleslaw, pie... We girls once said to her, "You always cook what Dad likes." She said, "I had Dad before I had all of you, and I'll hopefully have Dad after you're gone—so yes, I cook what he likes." I got the same story from our Fabulous Five with what I cooked for Norm while they were growing up.

MY GRANDPARENTS

I never knew my Grandma Addie Alwood (she died in 1912). Grandpa Warren Alwood would come out to visit us. He lived on a farm nearby, and in those days he was a widower and quite diabetic. He had a car called a Whippet. One day he drove the car out and couldn't get it to start. He threw the keys to my dad and said, "Take it, you can have it." Until then my father's trips to town were made with a workhorse and an old farm wagon, so this was an improvement. Grandpa Alwood died in 1935. I remember him well.



My Grandma Emma Gordon was not a nice person! We always felt like she didn't like us, and we had almost no contact with her. She must not have approved of my mother's marriage...



Dad went to barn dances in the early days of their marriage—without Mom, while she stayed home with the babies.

I remember once we were playing outside with a sort of fodder cutter, cutting up weeds. Walter was the power—turning the wheel—while I was feeding the thing, and I fed my forefinger in—ouch! Mom sent Virginia ¼ mile down the road to Grandma Gordon's to get bandages to fix me

up. And Grandma Gordon was unhappy because Virginia was out on the road with a dirty face! I still have a funny nail on that finger.

I didn't have very much contact with my Grandpa Charles Gordon, but I remember that Grandpa Gordon had a big mustache. He was a farmer and seemed to be well liked. He must have been a saintly man to put up with Grandma! I remember when he died, in 1931, my father picking me up to look at him in his casket, laid out in the bedroom of their home. Grandma Gordon died in 1943, and we got her radio after she died. I remember "...the Shadow knows..."

My closest aunts and uncles were Aunt Florence and Uncle Art Gordon, who lived across the field. They had three girls. We would go over there on Sundays and play ball. Uncle Art had a sister who was a 'kisser' so I avoided her at all costs! (Later I came to like that "kissy" stuff.)

Another favorite was Uncle Forest Gordon. He was on the Browns Corners school board, as I remember. He went to church at the church I went to—United Brethren. I've kept in contact with his daughter Laurene through the Browns Corners school reunions.

MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS GROW UP

I remember the day Doris (the oldest) left home. It was the first time I ever saw my mother cry. She left to be a housekeeper for somebody; then she met Lawrence and got married. Lawrence didn't treat her very well—he was mean when he was drinking. He was not a Christian, but Doris accepted the Lord later in life—as did Charles and Ellen; Wayne and Elva; Forest; Fern and Floyd; Norm and I; Walter; Virginia and Clyde; Rex and Carrie; Betty and Nial; and Marlyn and Dave. As for Robert, Lester, and Max, I'll leave that in the Lord's hands. I do know they were witnessed to.



Charles left next. He worked for a farmer nearby, the next farm over from his future wife Ellen. He hung around with her brother.

I remember when Forest left home. A farmer came to the house, wanting to hire a farmhand for milking, etc. Mom and Dad said, "Forest can go." He later felt that meant that they didn't like him

as well as their other kids—but probably he was just the right age to leave home... None of the boys ever had trouble finding work; all the Gordons had a *good* work ethic.

WORLD WAR TWO

Wayne was the first to go in, and he saw the most action, in the Pacific. Naturally, that was a sad day for us. Ma went to the mailbox every day, hoping for news. I remember seeing her cry sometimes. Then Forest was called (also to the Pacific), and then Lester, who was wounded. Later, during the Korean War years, Max and Robert served in the military too. The mail was very important to us in those days.

During the war, you could go to the movies for free if you could show that you'd bought a U.S. Savings Bond, and I had one. I borrowed the money from Mom to buy it, but I paid her back... The first movie I ever went to was in the mid-1930s; my sister Doris and her husband Lawrence took us to a western. I don't know what the movie was, but I remember not being able to follow the plot very well! I still like a good movie.

LEAVING HOME

When I left home, I first worked at a dairy and rented a room in Clare. I was close enough to walk to work there. I could eat all the ice cream I wanted—I loved orange pineapple. One of the other girls there was my cousin Laurene... I didn't leave home as soon as I could have—I waited a while because I hoped to be allowed to go to high school... I wanted to be a teacher, like the teacher I had from fifth through eighth grade.

At that time, Fern was living in Ypsilanti with our brother Charles and his wife Ellen. Fern worked in the cafeteria of the bomber plant where Charles worked. I moved there, and Fern and I got a room together—several in fact, as time went on. One job I had was working at Packer's Grocery Store. I took the bus about five miles, and if I missed the bus, I would hitch-hike. But that didn't happen very often because I knew just when to get there, just in time. That's where I learned to like all veggies—in the produce department of that grocery store.



By now, Fern was in beauty school and divorced and expecting a baby. She and her boyfriend Jess had run off to Oklahoma and gotten married, against our warnings, but the marriage didn't last. So she went home to our parents' farm in Clare to have her baby, and started her own beauty shop in Clare. So I got my own room—a nice one with a kitchen. Fern later met Floyd Squires in Clare; he worked at the Sunoco station there. He was a lot older than her, but he wore her down and they got married. She was stepmother to Floyd's three kids—he had been widowed—and together they had a blended family—his, hers, and theirs.

NORM

It was a happy day when I met Norm, and we had 63 good years together. He was a good provider and we had (and I have still) the Fabulous Five with their mates, plus eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren (as of September 2011).

There was a magazine called “Michigan Farmer.” When Norm was drafted, after basic training, he talked to one of their journalists, and he said that “people should write to their servicemen.” The reporter made it sound more like “people should write to this lonesome sailor,” and Norm got a lot of letters. Virginia and I both decided to write to him. Virginia was in Clare, and I was in Ypsilanti, but I went home on the train often to visit. Our theory was, “Let’s both write to this guy and see if he tells us both the same story.” We wrote until he got out, especially me... He wrote back to me almost every day. I hated to write letters even then, so I didn’t write back that often.

When his father died [in December 1945], Norm was given a leave from the navy. He went home to Bad Axe, borrowed a car from his brother, and drove to Ypsi to see me. He was home from January 21 to February 21, and when he left I bawled all day. He had talked about our getting married [when he got home in a few months], but I thought it was too soon. I thought the next January would be better—to wait a year. So Norm came home, and he got a job where I worked, making car parts. He came up home for the 4th of July and met my family. I told him, “Whatever you do, don’t disagree with my dad!” But they got along great. My older brothers were hunters, and Norm and Dad enjoyed fishing together.



By that fall, January seemed a long way away. Norm had a room but no kitchen, and so he ate at restaurants a lot, and he spent a lot of time at my place so I could make him something to eat. So we moved the date back from January 1947 to November 1946—everyone would be home at Clare for Thanksgiving then. We got married at my family’s home there. I wore a straight dress in aqua. Virginia stood up with us, and Mike Quinn, Norman’s friend—Norm had to drive to Bad Axe to pick him up since he didn’t have a car. We had to take Mike back to Bad Axe afterwards... it was snowy and blustery, so we stayed in Bad Axe at a hotel the first night, and then on to Flint for a night, and then back to my (our) apartment.

MARRIED LIFE

After I married Norm in 1946, we lived in my room-with-kitchen apartment in Ypsilanti. When we were expecting our first baby in 1948, I asked for a bigger room. But they landlady said we needed to move out, so we moved to Willow Run, some old army housing in Ypsilanti. We set up housekeeping with \$25 of purchases from an auction house—a bed, davenport, and little gray table. My sister Virginia, who took my old room, would take the bus from her place to Willow Run to see us. She met Clyde Haft at that house where she rented my room after I left—he was the landlady’s brother—and she later married him.

I continued to work at Ennens through having Marsha and beyond—I had a good babysitter. Norm worked there, too. But when I was expecting Gary, I quit. (Actually, I got a leave of absence and then didn’t come back.)

We were still at Willow Run then, but we moved out when I was expecting Gary. We bought a little house on Campbell Avenue in Ypsilanti and moved there in late 1951. It had one bedroom, and Marsha and Gary slept in bunk beds in the utility room. We had an 8-party telephone line at that house, because phones were scarce... We had one disappointment there as we were moving in. Norm had an old pistol which he brought over to the new house early in the move. But when he took another load over later, he noticed it had been stolen. We reported it to the police, but the gun was never found.



We started at a church our neighbors recommended—Willow Run Baptist... After Norm and I got married, we were ‘the prodigal couple,’ but eventually, in the later 1940s, we got back to God and we were baptized at a church in the area—ours was a mission church. After that we were back to church every Sunday—but not to potlucks—Norm didn’t like to eat in church.

We were at Campbell Avenue from December 1951 until January 1956, when our family had grown larger. Deb was born in December 1955, while we were still at Campbell Avenue... She was born two months late (due in late July, born early October) and weighted almost 11 pounds! Right about that time, my sister Virginia and Clyde Haft got married at our house.

GARDENING

Norm always liked to garden, starting when we lived on Campbell Avenue. He would go to a place a mile up the road where he was allowed to have a garden; he grew sweet corn and sold it. He liked raising potatoes there, too, and beets, string beans, tomatoes... He gardened at Ecorse Road in Belleville also, behind the house—we had half an acre. He grew the same kind of stuff there also. We canned all the surplus.

BELLEVILLE

Our friends Odie and Marie Samples saw the house on Ecorse Road in Belleville one day when they were out in a pouring rain, and they told us about it. The price was right, so we sold the Campbell Road house and bought that one. Norm still worked at Ennens then, but someone there put a foot in the door at Willow Run Airport for him (with American Airlines). He got hired as a baggage handler, but later worked up to maintenance.



Bill and Susan were born while we were at Ecorse Road. When Susan was born, I got a blood clot, and I was told I couldn't go home unless I had help. An old witch of a nurse came, who made the kids stay outside all day. I called my parents to come down and help—it was the only time I ever asked them for help. They came for a week or two, and helped me out. Susan was a good baby, and my mother took care of her, so I could give some attention to Bill, who was only 18 months old.

Marsha's name—Norm and I agreed on it, but not on the spelling; Norm wanted "Marcia." Gary Norman we agreed on right away; the first son should have Norman's name. The name "Deb" was a natural—almost every girl was called that in those days! Bill was named after my baby brother who died. Norm wanted him to be "Mark," and when the preacher came to see me in the hospital, he asked what the baby was named, and we gave two different answers! But the hospital asked me first, so he ended up being "Bill." Susan got the middle name "Marie" after my friend Marie Samples.



So, I had five children by the time I was 31... The hardest thing was washing diapers and drying them outdoors. When Norm and I were first married we had a wringer washer and I used water heated on the stove, and rinse water was cold, in a separate tub. Ironing was another big job... I remember getting up at 4 a.m. to iron. Sometimes it went in the freezer so I could do it later. I never had clothes mildew! I sure appreciated the TV on ironing day.

I had always wanted to go to the circus, and I got the chance in Belleville. A circus came to the Belleville Fairgrounds. We sat on bales of hay. But the animals were stinky, and I didn't like it, and I never wanted to go back!

Christmases, we went to Clare—everyone came with their kids. So, we waited for our own family Christmas until after the 25th—we had two Christmases. One year, I think it was the year we got the kids the bikes, we had to wait until after the flood went down in the utility room—there was twelve inches of water down there. (It was at a lower level.) I always tried to keep the spending equal for each child, and the number of gifts equal. Usually they got clothes, and toys—Gary and Bill got metal trucks and cars. Before Christmas, each child got one dollar to spend on gifts at the Ben Franklin dime store; they spent ten cents on each of their brothers and sisters and got them little gifts. (That would be more like a dollar today.)

We got our first TV around 1953, just in time to watch the Rose Bowl parade. I liked to watch *Bonanza*, *Gunsmoke*, and later on, *Magnum P.I.* Norm and I did watch one soap—*The Young and the Restless*, at lunchtime. I never got hooked on *Dallas*—too many characters.

I learned to drive on a stick shift, not because I wanted to, but Norm worked two jobs and someone had to take the kids to the doctor, dentist, barber shop, and the like. Norm planned to teach me, on a 1950 Dodge with a stick shift (but you could bypass the clutch). But when we were out driving, I did a right turn and was headed for a ditch, so then Norm said he wanted someone else to teach me! Donna Smith, a friend, taught me, and I passed on the first try.

Norm worked afternoons, so mealtimes were messed up—our big meal was at 2:15 because he had to be at work at 3:00 (but he went early to socialize). He had gotten his job with American Airlines when they flew out of Willow Run Airport. When they moved to Detroit Metro Airport, it was 10 miles away (from our house on Campbell Road)—but after we moved (to Ecorse), Detroit Metro was only a few miles from our new house. He also worked at a lumberyard.

Looking back, life was easier on Ecorse Road than on Campbell Avenue, even with more kids. We had space; we were spread out; the kids could play outside more freely; work days got easier.

What's not to like about our house on Ecorse Road? I felt a lot worse about losing that place even than Norm did... After we moved out, we didn't realize that the couple and the new mortgage company wasn't living up to their end of the bargain. We didn't know that the taxes weren't being paid. They made all kinds of excuses to us later. The one who bought the house for the cost of the taxes lied—she said she tried to find us first. But the next day after she signed the papers—someone knocked on our door and notified us that it had been sold—so they did know how to find us!

CAMPING AND FISHING

We made summer trips to The Thumb [of Michigan] when the kids were little. In March 1947, a few months after Norm's father's death, the lawyer got the four sons together to decide what to do with the family farm—80 acres + 40 more down the road which weren't tillable. They all met in Bad Axe, in a blizzard. Lewis wasn't interested in buying it, although he did want to live there. Gordon had a place of his own. Perry didn't have a pot to pee in, so he couldn't buy it! But Norm was interested in buying out the other three—and that's how we got the farm.

Norm sold the 40 acres down the road later on, but kept the original 80. He had a sharecropper farming it. We started going over there to work on the house (or hire work done on it). Norman had thoughts of moving the family to that farm, or retiring there... Perry and Lewis were both living there when their father died, and afterwards for a while—but at some point something happened, I'm not sure what, that caused Norm to ask them to move out. Perry moved to Detroit, and Lewis to Romulus or Ypsilanti.

Some time in the early 1950s we started going up there with the kids on weekends in the summer, maybe once a month, to camp in



the old farmhouse. That went on for some years, until we sold the farm in the 1960s. Right after that we used some of the money to buy a pickup cap and a trailer and went camping all over with the Samples. (The kids all got new bikes that Christmas.) Norm didn't like that trailer, though, because he couldn't tow the boat, so then we got a fold-down. Later on we bought an old school bus and made it into a camper; the Abbots did the same thing! We often camped in Brighton. Later on we had another pickup camper.

Norm always liked to fish. Before Harrison, we'd visit Clare and stay at my parents' home, and Norm and my father would go fishing. Even in Belleville, Norm had a boat and a motor—one time, the motor was stolen in Belleville. Later, in Harrison, Norm probably fished about twice a month, normally with Nial Abbot but sometimes with Dennis Spickenagel, or the pastor, or whoever wanted to go. I insisted that he not go out alone in the boat... He had fished in Belleville, too, but not as much, as he had to go to Smith Like on the other side of Ann Arbor.

MOM AND DAD

Mom died in 1968. She was a diabetic, like her father. She did her own shots; she didn't see a doctor very often. She ended up in a hospital in Ann Arbor at one point because of her diabetes. She had a stroke one time while picking apples, and it affected her one arm after that. Eight years later, she had another one that took her life. Mom and Dad were married over fifty years, and I think they got along alright. He was kind of hotheaded and stubborn, but if she felt strongly enough about something, he'd come around. I remember one year she bought our school supplies out of a catalog [without asking him] and he was against it; he paid for them, though.



I remember, Lelia [Guilds] came to the hospital one time while Dad was there visiting Mom, and he walked her out to the parking lot, and she was all over him!... They got married after Mom died. Lelia and Dad both kept their own houses, though, and sometimes they lived together and sometimes they lived apart. After Mom died, Dad started growing African violets; he loved that... Dad died of heart problems in 1971. He was in and out of the hospital three or four times, and he died there.

RETIREMENT

In 1983, when Norm was 58, he was told by American Airlines that he had to move to Texas or retire. He had always wanted to retire young, so he did the math and figured out he'd make more this way—by retiring—than by moving, even though the airline would have moved us. But, he thought that was a good time to retire.

We looked for some land near my sisters and brothers—Fern was in Clare, Forest was near Clare, Betty was in Harrison... We had looked at land at Lake George, but I wanted to be closer to town. We bought some land near Harrison. The first thing we did after we bought it was drill a well. Then we went to Bay City to look at the modular homes; my brother Forest had bought a modular home like that, and he liked it. We picked out one with a layout we liked. The house was “cash on the line” and we didn’t have it all—but good old Marie Samples loaned us the last \$10,000 that we needed.



The house came from Bay City in two sections. Russ Alwood, a shirt-tail relative, was the contractor to do the ground work and put in the basement. While the foundation was being put in (out of cinderblocks), the land was so sandy that one side caved in! So they shored it up with an extra wall sticking out into the middle of the basement. We got to pick out the wallpaper, carpet, etc. The first night we were up there after we started building the house, we took our camper, which we kept at Nial and Betty’s, and parked it on our property, and I was in the camper alone while Norm went fishing with Nial. I was out there in the woods with the animals, and it wasn’t fun!

While our house was being built, Norm would load the truck each fishing trip and bring it to Harrison, and he kept tabs on the new house that way. I don’t remember where we stored our stuff! We moved into the house in July 1984—the year is written in the cement on the porch, to remember when we moved there. There was one house to the east of us, and the next one was about a mile away. Some time later, maybe 2 or 3 years, Norm built the barn; Nial and Tim Abbot roofed it. Norm had a garden there, too—he had to purchase loads of manure to improve the sandy soil.



We started going to church at Nial and Betty’s church in Harrison, First Baptist. Bobby Stewart was the pastor; he had been there forever—he practically died in the pulpit!

We met other people in Harrison. We all walked for exercise at Hayes Township Hall and we got to know each other. Six of us—Dave and Ann Soderbloom, Wally and Maxine Crawford, and us—were known as the Six Pack. We would walk in the mornings—eighteen laps equaled one mile. After walking we went to a tiny restaurant for breakfast, coffee, and more talking, and we'd decide whether to go to the senior center to eat later. On Bingo Day, we all played bingo.

Shortly after we moved to Harrison, we started having monthly birthday luncheons with my brothers and sisters. The first time we did it, we went to Houghton Lake for Norm's birthday. After that, once a month we'd all meet. All were welcome. Doris never came, or Charles, and Fern seldom did due to work. Walter came when he could. Some of the next generation would



come sometimes, too. Whoever had a birthday picked a restaurant and we'd all meet there, and it was Dutch treat—everybody paid for their own. It was a good way to bridge the gap between holidays, and have more social interaction. We still have

continued doing that, but Bill needs to get me there now. Marlyn comes now with Virginia—Virginia didn't come until after Clyde died. We also met once a year, on Labor Day weekend, for a Gordon family reunion, as we still do. (This photo was taken at the 1982 reunion.)

In 1996 Norm and I had our 50th anniversary, and we had a party at the Harrison house. The Harrison years were good years—nothing spectacular happened, but good years. We lived there until Norm's death in 2008, and then I moved to Bill's. The house sold about a year later, to a family named Trevino.

LEAVING HARRISON

When I left Harrison after Norm's death and funeral, I didn't realize that day that I wouldn't be coming back... but when we got to Middleville, my bed and dresser were there, and I had my own bathroom. Then I found out that the siblings had taken care of where I'd live if the need

came about. The kids pitched in to help Bill and Lori during the move and in getting the house ready to sell—Deb and Bob especially were a big help.

MY LIFE NOW

I live with Bill and Lori now. I still like to read, just like when I was young. I like Debbie Macomber, Janette Oakes—women authors. I also like magazines. I like mysteries, too—I used to read a lot by James Grisham.

As far as the end of my story—who knows? My hope is to go without suffering in my sleep. I'm a chicken about being sick—or even worse, having no mind and being a burden to the kids, especially Bill and Lori or the others of the Fab Five. The Lord knows my wishes, and I have had a blessed life. I always felt I was the fortunate one—being the seventh born, I lived with both ends of my family... and I was especially blessed with having a husband who loved me, and I him.



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