



INTRODUCTION

These writings are dedicated to you, my dear children, who have at one time Or another expressed an interest in the "olden days." What makes them old, I believe, is not so much the passage of years as the many changes that have taken place in our society. The shift from country to city, especially during and after World War II, and then the move to suburbia with the baby boom, were major elements in the contrast of our "growing up years." Our moves in the military were a factor I'm sure, but I too moved around (admittedly in a somewhat smaller geographical area) and also attended five different schools before graduating from high school.

This brings an end to my memoirs since the effort to write has become very burdensome. Fortunately, your mother has started to write her life history and this is sure to cover our family life. Those fruitful years will then be given the detailed treatment that they deserve and should delight all of you. -June, 1994

Mancelona

Looking over the front page of the New York Tribune issue of Saturday, March 12, 1921, I found details of a prominent murder trial; threat of a rail strike that concerned our newly elected President Harding; news that the Attorney General of the U.S. would soon make a ruling on the status of using beer and wine for medicinal purposes under the Volstead (Prohibition) Act. Overseas, there was an anti-British riot in Egypt, and Russian rebel refugees were shelling Bolshevik-held Petrograd (changed to Leningrad and now, once more, St. Petersburg).

None of this could have held much interest to William and Martha Schmal. Their third child was being born on that day in Mancelona, Michigan. That was me, baptized a few weeks later as Gordon William Schmal, Gordon being the name of a family friend. I never cared for the name, but it was not much worse than Ralph, their first born, or that of my sister, Wilamine. Ralph was probably named for my Dad's first cousin, but the name Wilamine had an unusual origin. Years later my mother told

me that the name came from "Will, " the name my dad was called, and "mine," because she was Will's and mine. When we were teenagers I started calling her "11Sis", and I believe all her friends called her "Billie", which I am sure she appreciated. The folks did a better job naming their last two children; Francis (Frank) born in 1923, and Richard (Dick) in 1932.

My parents moved to Michigan in the Spring of 1916, following their marriage on Thanksgiving day, 1915. At that time Dad was a machinist and worked in Hammond, Indiana, where they had recently purchased a house. They both enjoyed farm life; having been brought up in the country, they sold their house and bought a 160 acre farm near the city of Mancelona in Northern Michigan. I have no idea what financial arrangements were made, but Dad at 26 years of age must have saved enough to make a substantial down payment on the Hammond house. Dad and his two older brothers, John and George, shared the proceeds from the sale of the family farm after their widowed mother died in 1912.

Dad was a steady worker and had no expensive habits. My mother told me that they had this house remodeled to turn a large pantry off the kitchen into a bathroom. When her parents, John and Susan Stark, came for a visit her father would not use the new bathroom saying that it was "unsanitary." Instead, he made use of the abandoned outhouse. Once I asked my mother which of the many modern inventions auto, television, airplane, etc., was most important to her. She unhesitatingly said it was indoor plumbing. This response makes a lot of sense when one thinks of the need to use an outhouse in the icy cold winters of Northwest Indiana, or perhaps the need to carry water from a well for all the needs of a large house-hold, (she had nine brothers and sisters).

Unfortunately I did not begin these writings earlier when my parents were alive so that we could share their memories of farm life during these formative years. They sold out and moved back to Hammond in 1927, making the recollections of my first six years very sketchy.

The farm was located close to Mancelona within a mile or two. There was a two story house, a barn, and several other buildings. A garage or shed near the house kept the car, a wagon and a sled. With the heavy snows in Northern Michigan, I'm pretty sure the car was not put to much use in the winter months. Other buildings held farm equipment, and there was a chicken coop. Farm animals included cows and two horses, but I do not believe Dad kept pigs. There were fruit trees and a large vegetable garden. I recall helping my mother with the weeding. I feel certain we had indoor plumbing, but no electricity and used kerosene lamps and lanterns instead.

They added to their income by gradually acquiring a small herd of dairy cows. While most of the milk must have been sold to a processor, they also had customers drop by for dairy products and made some deliveries to families in Mancelona. A "milk house" located a short distance from the house, contained water from the well that was used to cool and store the milk. It also held a separator and there may have been a churn for making butter.

My first remembrance was the time I walked behind my dad while he was plowing a field. I must have been three or four at the time. Dad chewed tobacco and had stopped to get a fresh chew from his package of Beechnut. When a few leaves from the package fell to the ground, and after Dad got the horse moving again, I picked up the leaves and ate them seeing that Dad enjoyed this food. Well, was I ever the sick kid after that mess hit my stomach !

Another early recollection was playing a game of "salt and pepper" with Ralph and Wilamine on a log in a nearby wooded area. I do not know how the game was played, but I guess I lost and was pushed backward off the log. I ran back to the house alone in tears.

I was not always the victim of these sibling encounters as I recall picking on my younger brother, Frank. Mother owned a large black bear muff which I would use to scare him. He would try to follow me up- stairs, but I would roll the muff down the stairs and this would insure his screaming and running away .

We had a beautiful Collie, named Teddy, that helped to round-up the dairy herd in the evenings. Teddy could also be harnessed to a sled and would pull us kids around the yard or up and down the road. Eventually Ralph made deliveries of dairy products in Mancelona using the dog and the sled fitted with a box. I recall one time that Ralph was about to get on the sled when Teddy took off leaving him to walk into town. Teddy was a car chaser and was killed chasing a car or truck that passed our house. We mourned the loss of that wonderful dog for a long time.

At five I started first grade in the town's public school. I imagine I was given an early start to make it easier for my mother to accomplish her heavy work- load. While life for farm women had improved over pioneer days, there was still an awesome amount of work needed to fill the days. This must have been especially true for Mother, who had to accomplish many of the farm chores with Dad working full-time in town. I'm sure she had to help with the morning milking and probably took care of most of the dairy activities.

Without electricity there was no washing machine. That weekly chore with a washboard and tubs took most of a day to accomplish. All water had to be heated on the kitchen stove fueled by wood or coal. The same stove was used to heat the irons needed for ironing the next day. There was no refrigerator, microwave, or other conveniences to simplify meal preparation. Bread and rolls were baked several times a week, and canned goods were mostly what you canned from the garden you planted and harvested. It's not surprising, then, that city life looked so attractive to my parents.

Wilamine added these memories of our Michigan days. A Christmas visit for dinner and gifts at friends of our parents, named Dalezel. We rode in the sleigh that had bells that jingled. She also recalled a nearby older neighbor called Grandma Schupple, who had a daughter our parents age by the name of Emily. To quote Wilamine, "My middle name is Emily and its too bad Mom didn't make that my first name."

She also recalls going blackberry picking and how good the cold left-over rolled up pancakes were when Mom filled them with the jam or jelly that she made from the berries.

Wilamine remembered using the out- house in Mancelona and what a happy day it was when Dad finished installing the inside facilities. She also helped make butter with the churn in the kitchen. That reminded me that our Sheriff, named Barney, would come by in his police car and purchase butter and cream. I also remember that when I started school in Hammond I bragged about this and was immediately teased and tagged as "Barney Google with the Googley Googley eyes," a comic strip character.

The heavy snows we experienced one winter, and my sixth birthday, are about the only other memories that I recall of my years in Mancelona. One year snow had piled up against the garage and we were able to take our sleds to the top and slide down into the yard. Then, on my sixth birthday, I received a pair of rubber boots. I was delighted with this gift and immediately tried them out in some

standing water next to the silo. This water covered some unseen ice and I had taken only a couple steps when my feet gave out and I landed with a splash on my backside.

After Dad started working full-time as a machinist at a foundry in Antrim (about a mile from Mancelona), farming became too much work even with the part-time help of a hired hand. The family had increased with four children under ten years of age, so the farm was sold and we moved back to Indiana.

Hammond

We left Mancelona for Hammond afterschool let out in the summer of 1927. The touring sedan we traveled in (a Chevrolet, I believe) had Isin-glass side windows. These were removable panels and they snapped and crackled as we drove along. I shared the back seat with Wilamine and Frank. We had a soft ride since we sat high on the bedding that was brought along. The gravel roads we had to

travel on did not offer a very smooth ride and were very tough on tires, which were primitive compared to today's products that last for 50 - 60,000 miles. Dad stopped often to change a tire or, more likely, repair a tire tube with his kit of patch material.. He then had to pump the tire with a bicycle pump. With no starter, the engine had to be cranked to get it going again.

On our way to Hammond we stopped in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and were able to see the house that the folks had to take in trade in order to sell the farm. It was an all brick house and had polished floors. I was especially impressed by the long stair bannister that was such fun to slide down. While they were initially able to rent this house, I recall them having a lot of trouble collecting the rent. Eventually they lost the house during the Depression because they could not afford to make payments on the mortgage or pay the taxes.

In Hammond we moved into a second floor apartment on the north side of the city. We stayed there only a few months before moving

again. My one memory of this place was the loss I sustained of several baby teeth. This came about when I was being punished and made to come into the house from playing in the yard. I leaned out of the window to watch (and maybe taunt) the kids playing below when one of them shoved a clothes pole at my head. In reaction, I banged my head on the base of the upraised window and two or three teeth were ejected onto the window sill. I do not recall being visited by the Tooth Fairy and was not aware of this custom until my children lost their baby teeth.

We next moved to a rental house at 5524 Claude Avenue. That house number I recently obtained from my fourth grade geography book that has somehow been kept in the family these many years. The one story three-bedroom frame house sat on a very small lot in a working class neighborhood. A front porch extended across the width of the house and the one car garage had its entrance from the alley. An unfinished basement held little more than the furnace and a coal bin.

Dad was employed by American Steel Foundry as a machinist and stayed with that company until his retirement at the age of 65 in 1954. He completed his four year apprenticeship program with the Hoess Brothers Machine Shop in Hammond, and had become a journeyman machinist before he was married.

American Steel was very much a "family" company. Ralph went to work there in 1936 when he was accepted in a Co-op program. This meant that he went to school for six weeks in Chicago at the Armour Institute of Technology (now Illinois Institute of Technology), majoring in Mechanical Engineering, and then worked at the foundry for six weeks. This rotation went on for five years until he graduated in 1941.

A few years ago Ralph told me what he did to qualify for this program. One of the prerequisites for entering the engineering school was a course in mechanical drawing, but the high school that Ralph attended in Dyer, Indiana never offered this course. However, Ralph, or a friend of his, knew the

school secretary and he was given access to his record which he changed to add this course.

Ralph stayed with American Steel in various capacities until his retirement in 1978. I started to work there as an apprentice machinist in September 1939, but quit the company for another job after about eighteen months. Frank also entered their apprentice program after finishing high school in 1941, and except for three years in the Coast Guard during World War II, stayed with them until he took early retirement in the mid 70's when the plant closed their machine shop. Even Wilamine had a brief stint of office work in the company .

Claude street, where we lived for four years, and the immediate neighborhood was the center of my world in those days. Playing was of prime importance at that age. The street was where all activity took place, since yards were all but non-existent; the houses filling almost all of the tiny lots. The street was where foot- ball, baseball, and roller skating games with a stick and tin can took place.

Winter snows brought out our sleds and some of the older boys would try out homemade skis. Young children kept to the sidewalk with their skates as did the girls who used them to push doll buggies, jump rope, and play hopscotch. Older boys and girls might gather around lamp posts in the evening and play tag or some other group game.

Very few cars were seen on the streets and those that did moved slowly and blasted away with their horns to clear the way. Not all of the traffic was auto- motive since horse-drawn vehicles also served the neighborhood. Of these, the ice man was the most frequent and popular in the summer months. When he showed up we would scramble onto his wagon for pieces of ice while he was making deliveries. A placard placed in house windows would tell him that 25, 50, 75, or 100 pound blocks were wanted for iceboxes.

Other horse-drawn conveyances were the produce wagon piled high with fresh fruits and vegetables, and a wagon of bakery goods with its mouth-watering aroma of freshly baked goodies. Vivian Bakery was printed on

the sides of this wagon and one always knew it was coming since a bell would ring repeatedly as it moved through the street. Actually, my mother probably never purchased any bakery products since she was an excellent cook and loved to bake her own bread and rolls, pies, cakes, and sugar cookies~ I recall that sliced bread was new in those days and when you bought it in a grocery store you were charged one cent more for a loaf that was sliced.

An old peddler, on the most rickety wagon, pulled by the oldest sway-backed horse ever, came through the alley buying metal, rags, and paper. He would shout out, "rags, old iron," but with his foreign accent it sounded like "regs alarm," and I could not make any sense out of what he said for the longest time.

Peddlers by the dozen made house-to-house calls selling all sorts of merchandise. Encyclopedias, carpet sweepers, various items of clothing, carpets and rugs, magazines, (kids sold these to), and other household items. Mother was a sucker for these fast talking men and often wound up with a purchase she either did not need, was unsatisfactory, or

could be found for less money in a store. A man pushing a cart with a grind stone would show up periodically and his knife sharpening always drew a crowd of children as he made the sparks fly.

The roller skates we wore were not shoe skates, but clamped instead to your shoes or boots, and were adjustable both to length and width. A skate key was always carried since the skates frequently went flying or simply came loose, and a spill along with skinned knees was not infrequent. Fitting them properly was a big problem since children did not have the strength to draw them up tightly enough to handle the stress of skating. One also spent many hours replacing rollers. The shoes that boys wore were called hi-tops and covered the leg over half way to the knee. One shoe had a small pocket to hold a folding knife. This was some- times used to whittle, but mostly used to play mumblety-peg. This game consisted of flipping a knife into the ground from various positions so that the blade would stick in the ground. The loser had to use his teeth to pull a peg that was driven into the ground.

Ice skates were also clamped to shoes although most older boys had shoe skates. We would ice skate at Harrison Park, the same park we used in the summer for swimming. Harrison was about a half mile from our home and to get there we walked through an empty field (Erie Field), and across railroad tracks. A popular ice skating game was "stink" and the object of this game was to tag opponents who ventured out of their safe territory. This would place them in jail (called a "stink ring"). There was also a method of rescuing jailed members. Five to eight kids usually made up a team and being one of the youngest at eight or nine, I spent most of the game in jail.

Other games included playing marbles and spinning a top. I did okay shooting marbles (sometimes for keeps), when competing with others my age. However, much more time was spent pouring over Ones' collection which was kept in a cloth or leather pouch, or trading them with other kids. Marbles were made of glass or hardened clay. Shooters were agate (called aggies), or steel (called steelies).

Tops were wooden and pear-shaped with a steel tip. You wound a string tightly around the top starting at the tip and this would cause it to spin when tossed onto the floor or sidewalk. With much practice I was able to throw it out and bring it back to spin on the palm of my hand. Very skillful kids could loop the string around the top while it was spinning in their hand, repeat the throw, and keep it spinning through many cycles. These, and I guess all the games we played, were seasonal. Girls, besides playing with dolls, also skated, played jacks, hopscotch, and skipped rope. There were also scooters and wagons for the little ones. Only a few youngsters in our neighborhood had bicycles.

All Saints Grade School was three or four blocks from our house, to get there one had to cross railroad tracks. In Hammond it was nearly impossible to leave the city without having to cross at least one set of tracks - usually two or more. The area along the southern tip of Lake Michigan was one of the largest industrial areas in the world. From South Chicago, Illinois to the Indiana cities of Hammond, Whiting, Indiana Harbor, East

Chicago, and Gary, was a huge complex of industries. Most prominent were oil refineries, factories and mills that produced iron and steel, and the products or plants supporting these industries. Railroads were the primary means of moving industrial products.

At All Saints, I had my first introduction to Sisters, as I started second grade. I found them mostly intolerant of any misconduct. We assembled in church, attended Mass every morning, and afterwards lined up and marched to school. I was an indifferent student, more inclined to day-dreaming and, on occasion, some mischief. This conduct was noted on my report card and sometimes I was punished at school and at home. One Sister, in fifth grade I believe, employed a pool stick to keep order in her class.

I made my First Communion that first year at All Saints, but that important day in my life was marred when I wet my pants some time during the ceremony. The long liturgy and need to assemble early at school and march in procession, proved to be too much for me.

When I started third grade I volunteered to be an Altar Boy. I continued to serve throughout grammar school. New servers were paired with an older boy who taught us the routine and helped us with the Latin we needed for responding at Mass. I can still remember getting up in the dark and walking to church for the 6 a.m. Mass on cold winter mornings. What was real special this first year was the dollar I received for serving at a wedding. That was BIG money for a kid who never had more than pennies given to him for candy. Maybe the groom was paying for his amusement. I recall seeing him silently laughing as I staggered under the load of the heavy missal and its stand when carrying it from the Epistle to the Gospel side of the altar.

Life in our household during these years was very pleasant. My parents were a very caring couple, both in their relationship with each other and to us children. At no time did I ever feel anything but loved, cared for, and treated fairly.

My mothers' brisk, and energetic manner dominated the home since Dad was a very

patient, quiet and deliberate individual. While mother was normally the spokesman I always thought that Dad's judgement, steadiness, and quiet strength were the deciding factor on any major issue. Neither had much schooling. Mother finished elementary school, but Dad left school after completing the sixth grade. His help was needed on the family farm with the death of his father two years earlier. Both Mother and Dad attended the parish school in St. John, Indiana, where classes were taught in both German and English. My folks spoke German at home only when they did not want us to know what they were saying. During World War I there were hard feelings and demonstrations against German Americans and they decided at that time that we would not be taught German at home.

My brother Frank and I mostly played together in the house during these years. I can no longer recall the games we played or the toys we had to amuse ourselves. We had the Victrola that we brought from Mancelona and had acquired a radio (At- water Kent table model) during one of those years. Other than music, and "Jack Armstrong, the All American

Boy," I believe radio did not offer many interesting programs for children until the 1930's.

While Frank and I had neighborhood chums our own age, we were nearly inseparable playmates at home. I recall playing marbles on the living room carpet and with the rubber guns that we made. Rubber guns were made from a piece of lumber and rubber strips cut from the inner tube of an automobile tire. A wooded trigger (half a clothespin would do) would release the rubber band. While not dangerous, they would sting when hit, especially if hit on the face or neck.

Many of our trips away from home were to visit relatives. Dad did not have any close family living near by since both his brothers had moved away. Mother had plenty. Her parents lived in St. John, a town about ten miles south of Hammond, and most of her sisters had settled there or in neighboring towns.

My grandparents celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1931. I recall being in

the procession at Mass along with several other grandsons on this occasion. Grandpa died the following year, but Grandma lived for another 23 years and was 95 years old when she finally passed away.

Grandpa had always been a forbidding person to me and seemed to have scant patience with children. He occupied a rocking chair by the kitchen table, spoke mostly German, and moved around with the help of a cane. I was fascinated watching him eat, seeing the food disappear, and how his white moustache was stained red when he ate beets. He was called Pa by Grandma and all of his children. Grandma was a very energetic woman until old age took over. She was always bustling over the huge black cook stove. You risked a swat if you got in her way. She drank coffee all day long, but the caffeine obviously did not effect her longevity.

I especially enjoyed visiting the farm my Uncle Al and Aunt Rose Miller owned near Crown Point, Indiana. Frank and I would climb all over the barn and hay loft and shell corn with the corn sheller. One year we watched a

cousin participate in a corn shucking contest. We got the use of their BB gun and abused this privilege by shooting chickens and watching them jump and squawk. We also shot the testicles of a large bull they kept corralled near the barn. The bull would shake its head and move away to the other side of the pen.

I remember visiting White City, an amusement park in Chicago. White City was like most of today's amusement parks with roller coasters, a large ferris wheel, and many other shows, rides, and booths. The roller coasters, except for the rails, were mostly of wooden construction. Summertime would bring an occasional trip to the dunes near Michigan City, Indiana. The water in Lake Michigan never seemed to warm up. Dad also took us to watch Chicago Cubs baseball and we all became great fans of that team. I was equally thrilled by the ride on the elevated railroad to Wrigley Field. Dad would drive to and park our car at the 63rd Street Station. We would take the elevated from there.

Dad liked to have a couple of beers after getting off work and before supper. Since

these were the years when Prohibition was the law of the land (18th Amendment to the Constitution), Dad tried his hand at making home brew. I guess he was successful, but on occasion the stopper capping the bottle cap would blow off and we would watch home brew dripping from the kitchen ceiling.

We also went to the movies. In Mancelona I recall seeing a silent flick in a very small theater or hall. In Hammond we had the talkies for a dime and the entertainment could last almost all Saturday afternoon. Most of the time we went to the Orpheum where we could sit in the balcony. The movie menu would include a newsreel, coming attractions, cartoons, a class-B movie that would have a "cliff hanger" ending (to be continued next week), and the feature film (this was normally a cowboy movie). My favorite actor in those days was Hoot Gibson. Sometimes we sat through two showings .

When I was eight or nine, I developed a serious illness that kept me out of school for several months. I believe the doctor thought it could have been tuberculosis since I was kept

isolated in my parents' front bedroom and made to stay in bed. The phlegm from my coughing was taken to a lab for testing, but I do not think I was ever diagnosed as having tuberculosis. While in bed I spent many hours occupied with embroidering various articles - mostly pillow cases. One time several boys from my class came by with a get-well card signed by all the kids. We got to playing some sort of game where we crawled in and out of the bedroom window onto the porch. Mother caught us and I got a good scolding as she sent my classmates on their way.

Since I had missed so much school and was almost a year younger than my class- mates, the Sisters wanted me to repeat the grade. Mother objected so strongly to this that. I was not set back. I'm not certain just why Mother made such a big fuss about this, but I know she was most determined that nothing would impede our educational progress. Ralph was a bright student and was allowed to skip a grade, even though he was only five when he entered first grade. I have to think that her resolve that we all complete high school (college was not then a middle class goal), and

her repeated reminder to us that "we were as good as anyone else," stemmed from her early experience. After her parents sold their farm and moved to St. John, when she was in her teens, she worked several years as a domestic before her marriage. This must have been a traumatic experience and made her determined to see us educated and not vulnerable to a "degrading" occupation.

There was a Holy Roller's church a couple of blocks away where Frank and I would, on occasion, peek in a side window and watch the worshipers in their frenzied mode of worship. One of the parishioners would usually run us off and we would run away laughing .

Religious, ethnic, and racial slurs were common. Catholics were called "catlickers," non-catholics, "publickers." Families in our all white neighborhood were predominately second and third generation Americans from Western Europe. The immigrants from Eastern Europe and Italy were new arrivals and lived mostly in East Hammond. Only a few of the adults could speak English and were often referred to as Hunkies, Polacks, Dagos

and Wops. The Jews were Kikes and the few blacks, Niggers.

Ralph had joined the Boy Scouts and the scouting program was very exciting to me. With other family members I attended all the ceremonies and rallies or contests between the scout troops. Ralph caddied at Woodmar Country Club to earn money for his uniform, summer camp, and other expenses. I was fascinated with all aspects of the boy scouts and could hardly wait to reach my twelfth birthday and become a member. I memorized the scout oath and could complete all the tenderfoot requirements while still only nine or ten years old. Unfortunately we moved to St. John in 1931. There was no scouting program in that small town.

Leona Miller, an older cousin, must have been 19 or 20 years old when she stayed with us. She found a job at the Queen Anne candy factory in Hammond and I'm sure the room and board money helped to make ends meet for my folks. This was the swinging twenties, the flapper era, and Leona was a very pretty and spirited young lady. She always had the

radio or victrola going and practiced the current dance steps - including the Charleston, which we would try to do. She would also sing along with the music and I recall part of one ditty that went, "It ain't no sin to take off your skin and dance around in your bones." She had lots of dates and one of the men who came to call would always bring a quart of ice cream for us. Obviously he was our favorite. I'm not sure how long Leona stayed with us, but when she left, she returned the marbles she had confiscated while helping mother clean house. She also said that she would never eat any Queen Anne candy after seeing how it was made.

The period called the "Great Depression" that followed the stock market crash in October, 1929, had a profound effect on our family as it did with most Americans. As a child, however, I was only partially aware of the impact it had on us since our parents saw to our needs in much the same fashion that they always did. Dad's workweek was gradually cut back, but even in the depth of the Depression (1931-33), he worked one or two days in a pay Period (he

received a paycheck every two weeks) at the plant.

Some Depression scenes were unforgettable. Families gleaning coal along the railroad tracks; men roaming through the alley searching garbage cans for food; Hobos gathered around a fire near the railroad tracks in Erie Field, and others coming to our back door asking to work for something to eat. Mother never turned them away - giving them a drink of milk or coffee and a sandwich to eat on the back stoop. Even the nuns at school must have been hurting. They insisted that we buy their thin tablets of paper for penmanship that they sold for a dime. We could get a whole ream of loose leaf paper for the same amount. I do not believe that Mother won that argument when she protested the issue.

The Depression must have been the cause of our moving down the street to another house on Claude Street. Perhaps the owner wanted to move into our place, or maybe this house at the new location could be rented for less. We only stayed here for a short period (less than six months?), before moving to St. John. The

house was located closer to Erie Field and only a few doors away from one of my classmates, Jim Cook. Jim's parents operated a small grocery at the corner and the family lived in the apartment above the store. Jim was the only classmate that I recall hanging around with during my stay on Claude Street. Other classmates that I remember were Bob Thomson (that's your Uncle Bob), Bill Hill, Francis McGuire (considered a sissy), and Bernadette Doolin. I had a terrific crush on Bernadette. She was a very pretty redhead, took dancing lessons and tap danced at school affairs. I doubt that she was ever aware of me and the nearest I came to talking to her was when I found out where she lived and roller skated past her house hoping to get a glimpse of her.

Jim Cook taught me to smoke. He would take cigarettes from his father's store and we smoked behind trees or bushes in Erie Field. I soon learned to inhale and it took me over forty years to finally quit that harmful habit.

Because of the Depression the Christmas of 1930 was not a very happy one, and I did not

make it any better by grumbling about my gifts or the lack of them. It was a cruel thing to say and to this day I remember the crushed look on my mother's face that followed my remarks. We probably had a string or two of Christmas tree lights and a lot of time would be spent to keep them lit. In those days when one bulb went out the entire string went out. We may have had to test every bulb to find the faulty one. That was still a huge improvement over what we had earlier. In Mancelona, and maybe when we first moved to Hammond, we would clamp small candles in holders to tree branches and light them on Christmas Eve and/or Christmas Day.

I did a couple of foolhardy things that could have resulted in serious injury. A buddy and I would roam around in a condemned theater (named the State Theater), that had been blown up. It was rumored that this theater was built by Chicago gangsters and destroyed by a rival gang of bootleggers (Capone?) . As we became more daring in our exploration, I remember progressing along a ledge some twenty or thirty feet up and nearly losing my footing when part of the ledge gave way. A fall

to the crushed concrete and bricks below could have been very serious.

Another reckless thrill was to hook onto the back of a moving bus and be pulled along on my roller skates. The bus, a Greyhound enroute to the bus station, was routed on the less populated thoroughfare bordering Erie Field and the railroad. I would hook onto the back bumper of the bus with a metal rod as it slowed down to turn. We would then speed along for two or three blocks until I let go when the bus would again slow down to make another turn. I never got hurt but one kid took a bad spill when his skate came loose. The bus driver would sometimes stop the bus and chase us away.

I turned ten in March, 1931, and Ralph took me with him to the golf course that Spring for a caddying job. My first job was for a woman golfer. She was most amused at my size (and comportment, I suppose). However, I received the 60 cents that was then paid to Class C caddies for 18 holes. That to me was BIG money to just carry a golf bag for only four hours in the fresh air and sunshine.

My last account of this period is about the Ringling Brothers Circus that came to town and set up it's tents in Erie Field. I showed up early to get a job carrying pails of water to the elephants with the promise of a free pass to the "Greatest Show on Earth." However, when it came time to give out passes the man in charge gave passes to less than half of those who worked and I was not one of them. I ran home mad, and probably in tears. My dad immediately took me back to see about this injustice, but we could not locate the man in charge. Dad's complaint did find a sympathetic ear from one of the circus employees. He let me in through an unguarded corner of the big tent. I never enjoyed a show more.

Wilamine added several memories; some that I also recall. She thought the ragman yelled "rags, and old lions," and she remembered how badly burned Mom was when the pressure cooker blew it's top. The burns were mostly on her face and so bad that she needed to use a straw to drink.

She also remembered that our Christmas presents on Claude Street were hidden in the top cabinets of a built-in buffet, and that we would climb up there and not be too surprised at Christmas. I can add that Frank and I almost wore out a wind-up tractor with rubber tracks during the days before one Christmas.

After school let out in 1931, the family moved to the Spring Hill Grove in St. John, Indiana.

St. John

This village of about 350 souls was situated astride U.S. Highway 41, a main N-S artery that ran from Lake Superior to Miami, Florida. The towns' most prominent feature was the Catholic Church with its tall steeple, located on a slight rise in the center of town. Spring Hill Grove was less than a mile east of the highway and on the street named Spring Hill. The street was later named SCHMAL, but is now 93rd Avenue. The change to SCHMAL was made in the 1960's, I believe, but not because my Dad ran Spring Hill Grove for six years. It was

named Schmal to honor my Great Great Grandfather Joseph Schmal, one of the town's earliest pioneers. He was 54 years old when he and his wife and six children immigrated to this country from Germany in 1837. They homesteaded land that is now part of the Lake Hills Golf Course, which adjoins Spring Hill Grove.

The Grove was a 26-acre wooded picnic area built years earlier, as there were still several hitching rails on the grounds. The house at the entrance to the Grove, and attached to the tavern, may have been occupied all along, but most of the other facilities in the Grove apparently had not been used for years, due probably to prohibition and the Depression.

The property contained a barn with attached stable and garage, chicken coop, ice house, dance hall, outdoor bar, covered stand (for dispensing soft drinks and food), out-houses, picnic benches, and a small vandalized duckpin bowling alley (eventually torn down and removed). There was also a ball diamond, a miniature golf course, and a pond located in

the back part of the acreage. All of this was leased for \$20.00 a month.

The one-story house contained living room, dining room, sun- room (where Mother kept her plants), kitchen, one bathroom and one bedroom. The children all slept up-stairs in one of the six bedrooms above the tavern. The back part of the tavern contained a storage area, stairs leading to the second floor, and entrances to the house and to the picnic grove. I assume that at one time the tavern offered hotel accommodations. The tavern had a stove, but there was no heat in the upstairs bedrooms. Wintertime would find us all changing to flannel nightgowns downstairs, and making a dash upstairs to our cold beds. Frank and I were fortunate since we shared a bed and could keep each other warm. During the hot summer nights, we would try sleeping on the porch that overhung the tavern entrance, but the mosquitoes would invariably drive us back inside. While the basement was not furnished, there was room for shelving to hold the huge amount of canning that mother put up each year. The basement also led to a dungeon-like area under the tavern where the

beer barrels were stored and tapped for upstairs use.

The front and side yard were wooded while the back yard merged with the vegetable garden. Our house was the last one on our side of the street that then became a country road. Across the street was a farm leased by the Bunkowitz (known as "The Bunkies") family. It was the most decrepid place I had ever seen and the family, the most slovenly. The five or six children (the oldest being 10 or 12) were ragamuffins, and the mother, a heavy-set unkempt person, spent much of her time screaming after the kids. We kept clear of their place and of them, although Mother would go over and help out when new babies were added. Mrs. Bunkie would come into the tavern, on occasion, to buy a couple of candy bars and then wolf them down before going back to her house.

The Schumachers lived next door to us. They were an older couple with a son in his twenties. I mostly remember their white Spitz dog - the meanest watch dog one could imagine. One would not dare enter their

fenced yard unless they had tied up this animal, and even then she snarled, snapped, and jumped trying to get at you. It's entirely possible that we (Frank and I) teased the dog by rattling the fence, etc., since I vaguely recall some scolding for this activity.

The folks bought a cow, chickens, and planted a very large vegetable garden. I suspect that this garden was started even before we moved since a garden was very important to them and they would not have wanted to waste a growing season. We (children) were immersed in this and other husbandry activities whether wanted to or not. There was weeding and hoeing, then the preparation of vegetables for canning that went on most all summer and fall. This was much more tolerated, maybe even enjoyed, compared to the work outdoors. We shelled peas, cut string beans, trimmed pickles, cut sweet corn from the cob, skinned tomatoes, cut up cabbage for sauerkraut, etc.. There was rhubarb to prepare and can and we even ground up horseradish roots that grew along the garden border. If the garden did not provide enough for canning, more was bought at open air markets. This

was especially true of fruits such as peaches, pears, and cherries, although, as I recall, we had a cherry (sour) tree or two, and a crab apple tree. Needless to say, we always ate extremely well.

The cow provided us with milk and cream and Mother made cottage cheese. First she cooked the milk, poured it in a cheese cloth and hung this on the clothes-line outside in the yard. There probably was some other processing, but I can still picture the bag of milk/cheese draining on the line. Maybe we made some butter, but I doubt that sufficient cream could be obtained to make enough butter to satisfy our needs. We must have continued to rely on oleo margarine, an inexpensive substitute for butter during the Depression. Oleo, as it was called, was sold in pound sized bricks and spread like butter, but that is where the comparison ended. A vial of yellow coloring matter went with your purchase of white margarine and it was necessary to thoroughly mix the two to produce an appearance of butter. Once mixed (an arm-wearying task), the stuff neither tasted or smelled anywhere near the "real"

thing. The dairy states were very powerful in those years and dairy products were extolled since the pitfalls of high cholesterol and fatty diets were unknown.

After a couple of years I was put in charge of the cow and kept the job until she was sold or when we moved back to Hammond. What a burden! The cow had to be milked early every morning and then given hay and water, or put out for pasture during the growing season. The stall needed daily cleaning and fresh straw, but the most irksome part was finding the critter in the evening after she was put out for pasture all day. Since the Grove was only partially fenced, the cow needed a restraint when let out of her stall. Tying her to a tree with a chain did not work since the chain would wind around the tree while she grazed. The other solution was to pound a stake in the ground and attach it to the chain. The ball field was normally used for this and worked pretty well as long as there was plenty of grass. Most of the time though, the cow would pull up the stake and drag it and the chain down the road. Sometimes I would spend the best part of an hour looking for her before I could bring her

back to be milked. I don't know if I cussed in those days, but if I did that would be the most cussed-out cow that ever lived. One time I even promised to make a Novena if I could find the cow after a lengthy search. I followed up on that promise, too. Years later when I told Mother about this, she laughed so hard she cried.

To break the monotony of milking, I squirted milk at the head of our cat who always hung around for this "treat." I also remember getting "help" from a cousin, Lamar Cole, Jr., my Aunt Ann's youngest child, who was four or five at the time that they were visiting us from West Memphis, Arkansas. I had him pump the cows tail so that the milk would come out of the teats while I aimed them at the pail. He was a very willing worker and when we finished he rushed back to report all this to his parents.

If the Grove was not rented that first summer, I'm sure it was in 1932, an election year. I recall cars arriving with bumper stickers or signs showing overflowing beer steins with "Vote Democratic" between them.

Sunday was the popular day for picnics, held mostly by small companies, church groups, or reunions. This was not every Sunday, maybe only 10 or 15 days a year. Dad charged 25.00 to rent the Grove and made extra on the sale of candy, soft drinks and hot dogs . Mother handled the concession, perhaps with the help of one of us kids. After 1933, Dad sold draft beer for a dime a glass; other items sold for a nickel. Early on, most of the family may have pitched in to clean up after the picnickers , but that chore eventually fell to Frank and me. I fashioned a stick with a nail to pick up papers, but the remains of watermelons and some other items could not be so easily removed. We soon learned that the public had little regard for our trash barrels.

Dad cut down the dead trees in the Grove for firewood, and shared this task, and the wood, with Mr. Schumacher. We soon had a huge pile of logs for the fireplace, furnace, and stoves in the tavern and dance hall. We also cut blocks of ice from the pond and stored these in the ice house using sawdust as insulation. I do not recall who helped him with this (probably

Ralph) but I remember pulling my sled from pond to icehouse with a block or two of ice. The ice was used to cool bottles of soft drinks, to be put in beer coil boxes, and the icebox, until we eventually got a refrigerator. The pond water was never clean enough for drinks.

Dad started holding dances and eventually they became very popular. He advertised with posters placed in St. John businesses and in surrounding towns. Dances were held on most Saturday nights, but discontinued in summertime. The five-piece band consisted of a piano player, trumpet, base fiddle, sax and drummer. They played the latest tunes plus some oldies such as "The Missouri Waltz " and "Carolina Moon." Their last tune was always "Goodnight Sweetheart." Dad paid them \$35.00, I believe, but sometimes less, depending upon the crowd. Occasionally they had to settle for gas money when bad weather would shut down travel. Very cold weather would also cut into attendance since the single stove could hardly heat more than one corner of the dance hall that must have measured 60 x 80 feet. I recall couples dancing at times

wearing hats and overcoats, and the few people who showed up stood near the stove between numbers. Some singles of both sexes attended, and the hall was also rented by organizations.

Dad stood at the entrance and sold tickets for 35 cents. Later on, instead of a ticket, he would stamp the back of their hand to permit re-entrance. Occasionally there was some fighting that Dad had to break up or move outside. No drinking was allowed although I'm sure many of the trips outside were to visit a bottle. Couples also drifted out, and Mother fussed (to us) about the smooching, etc. that went on in the cars. Dad would not sell beer in the dance hall even when prohibition ended.

Mother ran the food and drink concession and we would help out or hang around. Ralph managed the cloak room where a dime was charged to check a hat or coat. After a few years roller skating was added on Wednesday nights. The skates and music box were furnished by a man who moved his equipment around to other locations during the week. I'm guessing, but I do not think that this went over

very big. The dance floor had to be prepared to eliminate the waxed surface needed for dancing, then re-waxed for Saturday night. Ralph cleaned and decorated the dance hall, prepared the floor, and laid the fire on dance nights. I inherited this work and the check room job when he went off to college early in 1936. I was too young to enjoy dancing but did get around pretty good on skates. Ralph was an excellent dancer and while in college gave lessons at the Trianon Ball-room in Chicago in exchange for free admission.

Ralph and I must have started to caddie at Lake Hills that very first summer. some of the caddies that came from the Hammond area were unemployed men in their twenties and a few were trouble- makers. They would steal our lunch, gamble with dice or cards and cause other disturbances that got them banned. I soon learned always to hang onto the lunch my mother packed for me, and I think that the Pro would let us keep it in the Pro shop to avoid it being snatched. I stayed on as a caddie at this club until it closed in 1933 or '34. Ralph may have had to depart earlier since he organized a caddie strike for higher pay (or

more likely to keep from getting our fees reduced), and was bodily thrown off the course by the Pro. Ralph then caddied at Longwood Country Club, located some five or six miles from home near Dyer, Indiana. Later I followed him there and we were known as "Big Schmal" and "Little Schmal," by the other caddies.

There were other money-making schemes or enterprises that, mostly, did not work. Ralph raised rabbits that he hoped to sell. They reproduced so rapidly that he could hardly keep up with making the pens for them. Sales were very slow or nil and all of us soon tired of eating rabbit. That project never got very far.

The same could be said for my trapping venture. Several of my classmates trapped and sold the skins to a mail order house. These were mostly muskrat, but also an occasional weasel, skunk, or a rare mink. This seemed like a good project to me and I bought about a dozen steel traps with the caddie money I had saved. I set my traps out in a creek that bordered the Grove and golf course and then ran into the lake at the country club. In order

to check and reset my traps, I had to get up at four or five every morning (wintertime only) to make the two or three mile trek. This went on for a season or a season and a half. My total take: maybe two muskrats and a weasel - worth a total of no more than four dollars. The first animal I trapped I was sure was mink, and even took it to school to show it off. I was laughed at for the large field mouse I had caught. This did not help to shake the "city kid" tag I already had.

Trapping was not an easy task. You not only had to get up early, but it was always dark and at times you slogged your way through snowdrifts, or icy swampland. The weather could be bitter cold and it was not unusual to get wet feet or lose a glove or mitten while resetting and relocating the traps. I believe Frank took over from me, but I doubt that he had any better success than I did. I recall that sometimes when a boy caught a skunk he would arrive at school still smelling like the animal. The Sisters would send him home immediately, but the boy would enjoy his brief period in the spotlight.

Getting the miniature golf course in shape to make it playable was one more project. I helped some with this but mostly it was Ralph and our cousin Richard (Max) Gerlach who worked on it. I believe it was opened only for the picnic crowd and few (very few) customers would pay the dime to go around the course. This enterprise lasted one or two summers, at the most.

Max was Ralph's age and one of four children of my Uncle George and Aunt Adeline who lived about a block from us on our street. Their youngest, Blanche, was Wilaminess' age. They were very close friends - a giggling and inseparable pair. Uncle George owned a general merchandise store that had not been modernized and the merchandise, what there was of it, was pre-Depression or earlier. I guess profits from the store must have supported the family, but the Depression and Uncle Georges' drinking problem had to make it a very marginal operation.

Along with Wilamine in the eighth and Frank in the third grade, I started the sixth grade at St. John's that fall. There was a public grade

school in town, but high schoolers were bussed to Dyer. Each classroom had two grades and I was in with the fifth graders. The Sister Superior, Sr. Herman Joseph, taught seventh and eighth grades, and she was hard as nails. I think she needed to be since some of the 14 and 15 year old farm boys were big and mean.

The two-story, red brick school house was the same one our parents had attended. A frame outhouse was out back, and the bell in the school tower was still used to call children to class. Three swings, two teeter totters, and a slide, all with a lot of years on them, made up the play-ground equipment. We played football (not organized) in the yard next to the school, and a baseball diamond was nearby and located adjacent to the parish hall.

We walked to school and even though it was under a mile, the trip could be pretty miserable in bad weather. Once again we assembled in church for Mass before class and the Sisters were posted to spot and correct any misconduct. My interest, grades, and

department in school did not improve with this move.

I recall a big fuss over Wilamine going to Dyer High School after she finished the eighth grade. The Sisters added a ninth and maybe a tenth grade to this school. This was not accredited and the folks were adamant in their refusal to let Wilamine attend.

I do not know the cause of this expansion, but I doubt that it was continued more than a year or two at the most. Mother told me many years later that the Sister Superior took it out on me, but I do not recall being unfairly treated.

The parish hall played an important part in the social life of most members of the congregation. Card parties and dinners were regularly scheduled and the hall was used for school plays and young adult group plays. The hall also accommodated Wedding receptions and family reunions.

These were pre-Vatican II years, when church rules and regulations were very strict. We not

only observed meatless Fridays all year long, but there were Ember days on many Wednesday and Saturdays of Lent when Catholics were obliged to fast (adults) and abstain from meat. We had lots of macaroni and cheese casseroles for supper or else there was a salmon loaf. During Lent we also attended evening services every Wednesday and Friday and there were other scheduled services during the year.

Since our parents were very devout Catholics they saw to it that we attended every service. A stomachache or some other lame excuse did not work. Hymns were familiar then (in contrast with today's fare) and the congregation all joined in. Their voices would especially swell when, on occasion, the hymn "Holy God We Praise Thy Name" was sung in German at the close of a service. The last line "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord" was thundered out, "Heileh, Heileh Heileh, Zu."

Our Pastor, Father Steger, who immigrated from Germany, was a good and conscientious priest of the old school where hell and damnation were often stressed. His sermons,

however, seldom strayed from the need for bigger collections and he could get very worked up on this subject. He taught some of the religious classes at school and on occasion would harass one of the boys with his snuff box. He would inhale snuff through his nostrils and thought it great sport to get boys sneezing by grabbing them and putting snuff up their nose.

Dick was born April 13, 1932, and he rounded out the family. Mother did give birth to a stillborn boy a couple of years later. I well recall how bad I felt seeing this dead child and how Mother wept over this. We chose a name, Peter. He was buried behind the church.

Dick was a precocious child, taking his first steps on New Years Eve, and then being able to hit a golf ball off a tee with a cut down golf club when he was only a year and a half. We would have him perform this for relatives and friends and he never missed. He was also a "pain-in- the-neck" to baby-sit on dance nights when I was called upon for this chore. But the time he drank kerosene was, I am sure, the event we all remembered most. This occurred

on a dance night when Ralph prepared to build a fire in the dance hall stove. On his way he set a soda pop bottle filled with kerosene on the back yard sidewalk and then left to get paper and kindling wood . Dick, who was still a toddler, came out of the house and seeing the 'bottle of pop, " took a drink. Was he ever sick! The doctor from Crown Point, ten miles away, was called, but before he arrived we all wondered if Dick would survive. His woeful moaning and the heaving of his tiny bloated stomach was a sight I'll never forget.

The summer of 1934 found Wilamine, Dick and I going with the folks to Mancelona for a visit. Before we set out, Wilamine accidently slammed the car door on the little finger of my right hand. A broken finger, that is still slightly crooked, was a painful start for this trip. I recall little else about this visit except how small the rooms seemed to be in the farm house where we used to live, and how horrible Dick behaved at Mass the Sunday we were there. My parents also made a trip one year to Foley Alabama where Dad's brother John lived, and to Arkansas to visit Mother's sister Ann and her family. I was left home and stayed

with Grandma Stark who lived on our street about a block from the highway. My Aunt Nora and her retarded son Roman lived with her. I think I got along with Roman (he was four years my junior), but I recall being very homesick. It was a very happy day when my folks came back and brought me home.

The Chicago World Fair was held in 1933 and '34, and we visited it both years. I especially recall 1934, when my Uncle Frank came from Provo, Utah for a visit. He had a new Ford with a rumble seat and my brother Frank and I rode up to the Fair with him and my Uncle Johnnie. They were a fun pair and to toast the end of prohibition, they stood on a Chicago street and drank from a bottle of whiskey that they passed back and forth. Other memories of the Fair: pay toilets; and a driving range where they hit golf balls into Lake Michigan, to be retrieved by a boat since the balls were floaters. Also, a scary trip on the "Sky Ride" in gondolas that were named after Amos and Andy characters. Sally Rand and her Fan Dance was a much publicized show at the Fair, but I was too young to attend this.

Ralph found the Fair an opportunity to make a few bucks. He approached Fair-goers who stopped at the service station in town and offered to guide or drive them the 30 miles to Chicago and the Fair. I believe he mostly depended upon tips for this service and he must have hitched a ride home. He needed a pillow to sit on when he drove since at 16 he was short (maybe 5' 5"), and would not put on another 4" until his late teens.

These years must have been trying at times for Ralph. He had finished high school in 1933, and now was without funds to further his education as he was very anxious to do. Steady work was not to be found, so he mostly helped in the Grove and tavern, caddied, and found an occasional odd job. Being the oldest he was bossy to us younger ones and I know I resented this at the time.

Dorothy Kahle, a cousin of Dad's, stayed with us for awhile. She used the storeroom behind the tavern as her bedroom. I guess she was nearly 30 years old, but I do not know if or when she worked, or why she moved in with us. What I recall most about Dorothy was the

time we ate poisoned mushrooms because she said they were okay. We found a large number of these mushrooms, that were orange in color, and she assured Mother that they were good to eat after being cooked with a dime and not turning the dime (they were made of silver in those days) black. I think most of us ate these except Dorothy, who did not like mushrooms, and were we ever sick! We vomited until we were exhausted.

The tavern was open for beer sales in 1934, but Dad also sold whiskey by the drink, although initially he did not purchase a liquor license. I remember that he hid the whiskey bottle in an opening in the back of the bathroom washbowl stand. I would hear the rattle when Dad hid or retrieved the bottle, but for the longest time I was unable to discover this hiding place.

When work picked up for Dad, and after Ralph left for college, Mother had to tend bar until Dad got home from work around 4 p.m.. There was never much day-time business during weekdays and a bell was installed on the door to alert Mother that a customer had

entered. I would occasionally tend bar the last year or so. Mostly though, I was either in school or caddying during the daytime.

At one time Dad went into partnership with a cousin of his, Louis Becker. This did not last very long - Ralph told me that Louis really cheated Dad. I never liked the man. He had a nice big dog and would beat it unmercifully with a broom stick for no apparent reason.

Most of the customers were men, but at times couples arrived to play cards and drink beer at one of the tables. There was no gambling but Dad kept punch cards behind the bar and a dice box was handy to "horse" for drinks. After a customer had bought two or three drinks, the next one was "on the house." One or two pinball machines were installed. At that time the machines would reward you with nickels when you won. I played, using nickels from the cash register, but I doubt that I put any of my winnings back.

It seemed that there was a never-ending list of chores, with Mother being the supreme task-maker. This burden fell mostly on us boys

since Wilamine told me that she was let alone to do the housework while Mother did what she loved -- cooking and baking. I can easily include her fondness for other food preparation activities such as berry picking, gardening, and the pride she took with jar upon jar of her canning.

There was the lawn and hedges bordering the front walk that needed care. We furnished the power, with mower and clippers, since motorized or electric models were not introduced until the 50's. Once or twice a year all rugs were taken outside to be cleaned. These were hung on a clothesline and whipped with a rug beater (an implement made of wire about the size of a tennis racket.) It did not take long doing this before arms grew tired and one was covered with choking dust and dirt. When we thought we had pounded long enough, Mother was sure to let us know that we had only started.

Eggs were gathered daily (Frank' s Job, I think), but I recall helping clean the chicken coop. At times I selected a rooster or non-laying hen, chopped off it's head and then

plucked it's feathers so it could be roasted for Sunday dinner. There was some house cleaning to do as well. Outside windows were washed, stairs to the basement were scrubbed, the tavern cleaned (including the spittoons), and our room upstairs dusted and cleaned. Logs needed splitting and smaller limbs sawed. All of this was hauled for easy access to furnace, fireplace, and stoves. While the folks enjoyed working in the garden there was always a need for more weeding, hoeing, and picking of vegetables. We took turns setting the table and doing the supper dishes.

To escape from Mother' s chore-making, we would flee to the golf course on the chance of getting a caddying job. Even though we often came home empty handed, we were rarely kept from going. An opportunity to earn money during the Depression must have taken priority.

I imagine we felt overburdened with work after coming from the city where we had it so easy. However, it really was not an "all work, no play" situation. At the golf course, on hot days, we left to go skinny dipping in Bingo

Lake, located about a mile from the course. The caddie yard was used as a putting green with tin cans sunk into the ground. I learned to play poker and shot craps for golf tees, and we played the usual kid games.

There was also plenty of time for play at home. Radio programs were much improved and we caught some in late after- noon for children. These would be 15 minute slots as were most all evening programs for the entire family.

Frank and I were eventually given a used bike to share and we shared a discarded wooden shafted 5 iron. We used this to play a hole that started near the house, ran down the road, then through the woods to the ball diamond. Occasionally we would sneak out on the golf course and play a hole that bordered the Grove. The slingshots we made and used to shoot at birds and squirrels were replaced with a BB gun, but I don't recall hitting these targets with either of those "weapons."

When snow arrived we had our sleds and sometimes joined others to slide down a hill

near the center of town. To ice skate we used the lake at the country club. This ice was often very rough and an area usually needed to be first shoveled and cleared of snow. One time I fell through the ice. It was a very frightening experience. I would try to pull myself out of the hole with my arms, but the ice kept breaking off. Ralph finally rescued me by crawling out and extending a stick for me to grab and then pulled me to safety. I remember feeling warm when I first came out of the cold water. The chill set in while Ralph drove me home and lasted until Mother had had me soaking for a long time in the bathtub.

We played ping pong on a table that was set up in the pavilion previously attached to the bowling alley. In the evening we played cards or read. I read almost every one of the Rover Boys books and later the Zane Grey novels. Since St. John did not have a theater, we were able to see a movie only on the rare occasion when Dad or Ralph drove us to Crown Point or Hammond.

Halloween was celebrated differently at that time. There were no treats, just tricks. I no

longer remember what pranks and mischief we did while in St. John, but I recall the fun we had in Hammond. We wore masks and maybe a costume of sorts and prowled the neighborhood with other kids. We soaped windows on cars and houses, rang door bells, dumped over garbage cans, and shot beans at cars, house windows and each other with bean shooters. This was a metal cylinder slightly larger than a straw. The only treat was what our parents gave us -- maybe milk or tea and cookies. Older boys in St. John would tip over outhouses and I heard of one trick where a wagon was taken apart and reassembled on the roof of a farmers barn.

In 1934, I started high school in Dyer, Indiana. But before I get into this phase I want to cover some of the odds and ends that I have skipped over. Like the complaint, "who forgot to empty the ice pan." This was not a serious flood problem from the melting ice that drained into the pan placed under the icebox, but it was one that did occur frequently. Then there was the breakfast ritual of scraping the burned bread that we attempted to toast. Toasters back then had a central heating

element with panels on each side to hold the bread. One had to constantly monitor the toaster to first get one side toasted and then turn the bread to toast the other side. Any inattention or distraction in this process resulted in a "burnt offering."

During the spring months Frank and I often went fishing at the lake on the golf course. We caught sunfish and occasionally crappie using bamboo poles. To catch bull-heads (catfish) we used a throw line. This was made of heavy twine, about 40 feet in length, with one end tied to a heavy sinker (a large bolt would do). Fishhooks with worms for bait were attached to the line near the sinker. At times the fishing was great and we would bring home a bucket full of catfish. This made a great hit at home especially during Lent.

We also fished when visiting Aunt Minnie and Uncle John Spitz who lived on the outskirts of nearby Griffith. The large ditches on both sides of the road leading into town held some small sunfish. There was not much else to do since neither they or any of the other relatives living in the area had boys our age. Uncle John, who

had a steady job with the railroad, could walk on his hands and would perform this feat with a little urging from us.

When I turned 12 I believe I started to wear long pants instead of knickers. Some of these and many of my clothes must have been hand-me-downs from Ralph. Teens did not have a special style and our ward-robos, for the most part, copied adult wear.

At the age of 13 I was the youngest member of my freshman class of about 25 students at Dyer High School. Being a teenager is a difficult period for most youngsters and I found this transition to adulthood especially trying. I suppose there were a number of reasons for this, but being the youngest, and very young looking and acting for my age, seemed a major factor. Some of my classmates' voices were changing and I noticed that they had body hair when we showered together after gym classes. Neither of these manly displays was my body able to produce for another two years.

This was also my fourth school in eight years and adjusting to new schools may have been unusually difficult for me since I could have been the only "new kid" in class. Ralph also had to cope with these disadvantages but he compensated for them by being an achiever while I went the "cut up" route. However, I am confident that my folks had high expectations for Ralph as the first born, and Ralph strove to live up to them.

Years later, when visiting with Mr. Protsman, our English teacher, he told me how he looked forward to another Schmal as a student after having two outstanding Schmal students in previous classes. He soon found out that he had more of a clown than a student on his hands. However, Mr. Protsman, a small, soft-spoken and very dedicated teacher did not tolerate any misconduct that disturbed his classes. On one occasion he made me sit with a girl to whom I was talking while he lectured. The teasing I had to endure from my classmates following this incident was an effective deterrent.

The opportunity to participate in sports was the best part of high school as far as I was concerned. I was not much of an athlete, but then one did not have to be in a school populated with less than 100 students. We were not large enough to field a football team, but in Indiana, high school basketball was, and still is, the sport that commands the interest of most citizens in every city and hamlet. I played on the "B" team my sophomore year and made the varsity as a junior before we moved back to Hammond in 1937. I also caught on the baseball team, ran the 220 and mile relay in track, and played on the golf team. Only in basketball were we involved in league play which was organized among six or seven other small high school teams in the area.

The golf team went to the State meet in Indianapolis in my junior year, where we played the Speedway course. On this par 71 layout, of 6600 yards, nine of the holes were located inside the perimeter of the two and one-half mile track where the famous Indy 500 is held each year. To reach the infield holes, we would climb a wooden bridge that spanned the track, and since the trial runs

were in progress, had a great view of the racers zooming beneath us on the backstretch.

My most vivid memory of this event was not the raceway, but that of my drive off the first tee. In front of a crowd of competitors, who were on the teeing area awaiting their turn, I topped my drive and the ball traveled barely twenty yards. To say that I was nervous in front of this gathering and embarrassed by my effort, is a vast understatement.

My interest in school work did not improve when I entered high school and I put out only the necessary effort to maintain a 'C' average which allowed me to participate in sports. I did take part in a couple of plays and even tried out for the band (as a drummer) that one of the teachers attempted, but failed to get organized. My only other musical endeavor was the purchase of a steel guitar. The music produced by this instrument was popularized in movies about Hawaii and Bing Crosby's rendition of "Blue Hawaii." I recall that this guitar - which I paid for out of my caddying earnings - was stolen after bringing it to school to show off. This may have been viewed

as beneficial by other family members who had to tolerate my practice sessions.

Sometime in my second year at Dyer I met Nick Rashata, who became a very close buddy of mine. He lived in St. John and I suppose we got acquainted when we rode the school bus to Dyer. Nick was a freshman and a few months younger than me, but a very big boy for his age. Nick's dad owned the other tavern in town which was located across the street from my Uncle George Gerlacks' store.

I believe Nick's parents immigrated from Russia since their English was rudimentary and their ways, at times, foreign to me. On one occasion I stopped by to see Nick at his house when the evening meal was about to start. The male members, Nick and his Dad, ate first while his mother and older sister stood by to serve them. Once Nick's dad had his plate filled, he pushed back his chair, lowered his face to the table and shoveled the food into his mouth without once looking up except to reach for more bread. I had never seen a meal eaten in this manner and could see that this

display was embarrassing to both Nick and his sister.

Nick would come over to our place where we played a lot of ping pong and went skating and sledding together. I introduced him to caddying. We walked or hitchhiked the five or six miles to the Longwood course.

I believe it was near the end of the summer of 1936 that we bought a Model T Ford from a farmer who had more or less junked it. We got it for \$10.00, and drove it away. Needless to say it was in anything but good condition. As I recall, there was no windshield, lights or brakes, except for the emergency brake, but the engine started after much cranking. We must have parked it at Nick's house since I was sure my folks would not allow me to drive this old broken down vehicle.

We had lots of fun driving the car, mostly on the country roads outside of the town. On our last trip we drove the eight to ten miles to the County Fair in Crown Point. On the way home we must have run the car into the ditch alongside the road where it toppled over on

it's side. I'm not sure how all of this happened, but we escaped unharmed, left it, and walked home. It's very possible that we ran out of gas and shoved it into the ditch figuring we got our money's worth during the month or so that we owned the car.

Another friend was "Red" Austin, who moved into the area during my junior year. Red lived with his Mother and step-father on a farm a couple of miles out of town. He was also a junior, but a couple of years older than me and a big hit with the girls.

Red was too busy with farm chores for us to see much of each other except at school. He did come to some of the dances we held, and we went together to the Junior-Senior Prom in his step-father's old sedan. It was an Auburn, I believe, and after running for a half-dozen miles or so, the engine would quit. Red would then get out, lift the hood, and prime the vacuum pump (with gas from a can he carried), to get it started again. We did this at least three and maybe four times on the way to and from the prom, held in the Dyer high school gym. I helped by holding the flashlight.

Red's date lived in St. John, but mine lived on a farm several miles south of Dyer. She was the sister of a classmate and a freshman or possibly an eighth grader. I was too immature for girls my age to be interested in me. I went to school dances, but this was the only date I had in high school. Besides not being very interested, I was very shy when around members of the opposite sex.

Before leaving my St. John years, I should mention a couple of bad incidents that resulted from my cigarette smoking habit. At night before going to bed, I would smoke a cigarette in my room above the tavern and shove the butt through a hole in the screen window. This practice started a fire among some leaves and destroyed the steps and platform leading to the rear of the tavern. Luckily Dad detected the smoke and was able to extinguish the fire before he retired for the night.

On another occasion my carelessness almost destroyed the family car. While driving home from church, I dropped a cigarette on the floor that must have rolled on an oily rag under the

seat. The fire resulting from this action ruined the inside of our 1935 Chevy sedan.

These and other incidents, and especially my misconduct and marginal grades in school, must have given my folks more than a little concern.

Hammond

We moved back to Hammond after school let out in June, 1937. Once again my parents had become overburdened now that Dad was working nearly full time and business, especially the tavern, demanded so much of their time and effort. They found a three-bedroom house at 29 Carroll Street, about a dozen blocks south of downtown Hammond and a half block East of the Illinois State line. American Steel Foundries was now only a two mile trip from home instead of the 10 or 12 mile commute from St. John.

That summer I accepted the job of assistant to John Simpson, the professional at

Longwood Country Club, when his assistant Bill Davis, left to work at the Woodmar Country Club in Hammond. The job required that I arrive early every day, open the Pro shop, then stay until the last player was off the course. During the day I registered members and their guests, sold golf balls and tees, cleaned and polished clubs that members stored in the shop, made minor club repairs, and cleaned up.

For this seven day/week job I was paid thirteen dollars -- not much for an 80 plus hour week, but the work was easy and paid better than the off and on chance of a caddying job. Once school started I only worked weekends.

John, a bachelor, lived in Chicago, but would sometimes spend the night on a cot in the Pro shop. I continued in this job through 1938 and 1939 until I went to work at American Steel Foundries in the fall of that year.

To get to and from the golf course, I usually hitch-hiked, but sometimes caught a ride part of the way home with one of the members -

most of whom lived in South Chicago. On occasion, I would close the shop and caddie for a golfer who came late in the day and after all the caddies had departed. I especially recall one member who lived in Calumet City, Illinois. This city, which adjoins Hammond, was considered the "Sin City" of the Midwest with its gambling and tawdry tavern shows. This member always played alone, tipped very well, and would give me a lift home in his black Packard sedan. He was rumored to be a former member of Capone's Chicago mob, and now controlled the gambling in Calumet City. I know he had a temper -- one that showed itself not only on the golf course. Returning one evening as we approached my street corner in Hammond, he was held-up when a car driven by an elderly person who was slow, or had stalled in his attempt to make a left turn onto a side street. He became very irritated with this delay and finally backed-up a few feet, put the car in gear and rammed into this car. I was stunned, frightened, too, and ever so happy when he, still cursing, dropped me off at the corner of Carroll Street.

For my senior year I enrolled in Hammond Technical high school, for vocational training since I was not interested in college. I took machine shop and blueprint reading, but added some academic subjects when I discovered that I could complete my high school education in one semester. I am not at all sure now how the system worked, but as I recall students were given honor points for obtaining 'A's and 'B's in courses. These were added to points acquired for each course and enabled a student to obtain a diploma in less than the normal four years. This was enough incentive for me to buckle down and study (or at least pay attention) for the first time, and I was out of high school by the end of January, 1938. I did attend graduation exercises and received my diploma later on in June.

Now that I was finished with school, I was able to start my golf course job in April when the Longwood country club season got underway. I stayed on until the course closed that Fall. Since I had no other job lined up (the economy had another setback), John Simpson invited me to accompany him on his trip to California where he wintered each year. He

assured me that I would find plenty of jobs as a caddie at any of the many country clubs in Los Angeles, and that living expenses were very reasonable (room and board for 10 to 12 dollars/week). Well, I was absolutely wild about this offer and prevailed upon my parents to let me go. Then, the evening before we were to depart, when I was packed and the family all gathered, John came by the house, told me and my folks that he could not accept the responsibility to take me with him. Knowing how desperate I was to go, my folks offered to write a letter that would relieve John of any responsibility. They also told him that they would provide bus money for my return home if I were unable to make expenses out there. Despite their efforts and my plea, John Simpson departed without changing his mind. I do not believe anything ever disappointed me more.

That fall I applied for jobs in about every factory in the area and even tried for an office boy job in Chicago. It was all to no avail, so I enrolled in a couple of courses at the Hammond Business College. I soon gave this up, but did latch onto some temporary

employment before the year ended. The Junior Toy Factory gave me about six weeks of work helping to produce their tricycles. For eight hours a day I would put the foot stand on the rear axle. I went through a pair of gloves every night and was paid 40 cents an hour. When this job gave out, I spent a week assembling the same tricycles for the Montgomery Ward outlet, and ended the year selling cartons of cigarettes for a couple of weekends at the Sears store in Gary, Indiana. These jobs and an usher job at the Paramount theatre in Hammond (vaudeville acts were an added feature to the movies) the previous year, was about the extent of my work history prior to full-time employment as an apprentice machinist.

Starting the year of 1939 found me, and all but a few young men in our neighborhood, jobless. I would sleep until noon or so and then hang out with a large group of guys a block away at "Chubby" Olson's gas station, or near by at O'Donalds (OD's), a sweet shop and deli. Some afternoons and evenings we ice skated at Harrison Park which was now only two blocks from home. If weather permitted

we might play basketball in an alley that had a hoop attached to a garage. Some of us also played basket ball two or three evenings a week in an organized league. We got a team together to play in a city-sponsored league and I also played on the CYO team that represented our St. Joseph Parish. Bob Schmal, my second cousin, was our star player and we won the division championship in the city league that winter. The trophy was kept in the window at Chubbies As I recall the CYO had uniform shirts, but when we played in the city league, it was "skins vs shirts" and we wore whatever we wanted for the half that we were the "shirts." Also, we got together for card games in the parish hall and Fr. Pallone, the CYO chaplain, would join us for our penny ante poker games. As far as I know not a single member of Chubby's gang ever got into trouble.

April found me back at my Pro shop job at Longwood, but by mid-summer with the threat of war in Europe heating up, orders for military goods got underway. Then, with Germany invading Poland in September, 1939, the flood of these orders brought the nearly 10

year old Depression in America to an end. Later that month I went to work at American Steel and it wasn't long before all the gang at Chubby's were working full time. Chubby's gas station, however, continued to be the gathering place for us until almost without exception, we entered the service.

One exception was Ralph, whose engineering job at American Steel was rated essential to the war effort.

My apprentice machinist job paid 50 cents an hour and I believe I turned over to Mother, for room and board, \$10.00 every two weeks from my check of nearly \$40.00. Now I had money to go places and do things.

One of the more memorable events was following the Hammond Tech 1940 basketball team's march to the State Championship. The sectional, and I believe the regional tournaments, were played locally, but after winning these, the team travelled to Lafayette, Indiana for the semi-finals. There, Tech emerged the winner and one of four teams to play for the State Championship, to be held at

the Butler Field-house in Indianapolis. I attended every single one of their games and for this tournament we made the trip in Harry Howard's new Pontiac coupe. The others were Bob Thomson and Ken Rundle, plus a quart of Seagrams 5 Crown and coke for a mix .

We celebrated the victory in a hotel (my first) in downtown Indianapolis, and returned in time for the team's tumultuous welcome home. A crowd (estimated by the Hammond Times to number 50,000) were on hand as they arrived and were paraded through the city. Even more important, funds were found to build a new school to replace the dilapidated plant that then housed my old high school.

Early in 1941, after about 18 months into my apprenticeship, I quit and went to work in a defense plant. Dad was upset with me about this move, figuring that I was tossing away a career opportunity. While I probably quit because I could almost double my earnings, I also was not learning much in this program. The foreman (Murdock) started me off on a surface grinding machine and kept me there

for over a year before moving me to the shaper. Neither job required very much skill and here I was already well past a third of my four year apprenticeship.

The defense plant was Pullman Standard, an abandoned railroad sleeping-car factory, located in Hammond, and now converted to the manufacture of tank turrets for the Army. I was employed as a tool grinder. Later that year I quit to take a job in nearby Hegewisch, Illinois, at the Pressed Steel Car Company, (another plant converted to tank production) to do the same kind of work. Why the change? I do not recall unless it offered me work on the swing shift where I could take flying lessons during the week or use the daytime hours for tutoring and study prior to taking my examination for Army Aviation Cadet training. This was my last job before entering the service in March, 1942.

These were fun filled years with hardly a care in the world. I had friends, a steady job, and the use of Dad's car until 1941 when I bought a year-old Plymouth. With Chicago located next door, there was never a loss of places to

go and things to do. Big league sports, and all sorts of entertainment and shows were available in that lively city.

One event I could now afford was the annual All Star football game played in the Chicago Stadium each summer. This game pitted the NFL champs against the College All Stars, and surprisingly, the popular All Stars had their share of wins. I was also able to attend Notre Dame football games since South Bend was an easy two hour drive from home. Mostly I hung out with the guys at Chubbies, and especially with Uncle Bob, his close friend Harry Howard, and Ken Rundle. Warm weather might find us at the Dunes State Park, east of Gary, although Lake Michigan never really warmed up until late August. We also went sailing at Cedar Lake, located fifteen miles south of Hammond, where Ken Rundle had his small boat docked. The swimming and sailing that we did there was always accompanied by a couple of half-gallons of beer and I'm sure everyone nearby must have been thoroughly irritated with all the racket we made. I played an occasional game of golf, usually with Ralph on one of the local public courses. Ralph was an excellent

golfer and captained his college team in his senior year.

Drinking was part of nearly all of our doings. Many evenings would find us in Calumet City at a family tavern owned by the Linkowitzes. Stan (Linky) was our age and the regular bartender. The popular drink then was Calvert (whiskey) and Coke. This cocktail cost 15 cents, and if you ran short of money Linky would run a bar bill for you.

One was always welcome to help themselves to the food on the bar that was prepared by Stan's Mother. Once a week she prepared "galumpkies" (misspelled I'm sure). They were also called "pigs-in-a-blanket." These were a spicy Polish meat mixture wrapped in a cabbage leaf, and were they ever delicious! Later, we made Tropical Inn our hangout where couples also congregated for drinking and dancing to big band music from a music box. I never could hold my liquor and my drunken occurrences were an embarrassment to me and my friends and a disgrace to my parents.

Several years ago Ralph reminded me of the many times that we raced home in our cars after leaving Tropical Inn. It was about a mile drive through Calumet City and Ralph never once won that race. Even when we traded cars - his '41 Chevy vs my '40 Plymouth - he lost. Amazingly I was never ticketed nor in an accident despite driving like crazy after many drinks. My Guardian Angel must have worked overtime looking after me.

I did not date very often and never had a steady girl friend. Most of my dates were to attend dances or parties, or I double-dated to a sporting event or movie. I met your mother for the first time in 1940, when she bought the Gregg shorthand book I had from my business course. My first date with her was to a house party. I had an invitation but no date. Bob suggested I call his sister for the occasion. We had about another half-dozen dates before I entered aviation cadet training. One of these was to the 1940-41 New year' s Eve party that Ralph and I held at our house. We repeated this again the next year, although your mother came with another boy on that occasion.

For these parties Ralph and I would decorate the basement and set up a bar of sorts. We had music from the radio and a record player for dancing. Our basement was not finished, mostly taken up with a hot air furnace. I guess it did not make any difference to the guests as they and others came again the next year. My mother baked a large ham that went over big and there was coffee for those who needed to sober up before departing.

These parties lasted into the wee hours of the morning and several of us would attend 5:30 a.m. Mass (Holy Day of Obligation) before turning in.

This winds up the remembrances that I have of my early years. My emerging interest and activity in flying is covered in my "Wartime Memories."