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My Early Life



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Written March 2011 by Janet Jones, Edited by Susan Mosey

May 19, 1932 to January 1941: Hordville, Nebraska

I don't remember much about the first four years. I do remember them letting me climb up on the roof of the chicken house when they were re-roofing; that was the summer I was three. I don't remember the year the dirt was scraped down between two hills in the pasture to make a dam, but I do remember watching. It was stocked with fish and also became the winter skating pond for many of our friends. We made bonfires to keep warm. I did sneak up to the school to visit a few times—I walked or rode Polly and I would tie her to a fence. Dad would see me, but never stop me.

I remember taking my brother Bob on Sunday nights into Aurora, where he stayed while going to high school. We would pick him up on Fridays. He was twelve and I was only two when he first started, but I remember a few years later.



Aurora had a movie theater, ice cream store (yum), and grocery store. That is also where our Dr. Don was. He was in business with his dad and brother Ken—Stenberg was their name. Mom worked for them after the bank job in Hordville. Wednesday nights in the summer were free movie night in Chapman, outdoors on benches—that was the town where Dad and the boys got their haircuts. Grand Island was where we would go for clothes and Christmas shopping. Central City is where our dentist was. (Helen is the only one who had braces.)

Summer is when we had cousins visiting—Chuck and Bruce Genoways, the Phelps kids, also Aunt Hil spent a couple of weeks with us one summer (ugh). Carla was just a baby and we had to be far from the house when she was napping, which seemed like it was all the time!



When Dad did custom work in the summer, some of the help would sleep on the porch at night. When Dad went to Iowa in the fall, Mom did the milking, etc., with the help of Dick. That is why he did not go into Aurora for his freshman year of high school the year we moved. So he missed the September through January term in Nebraska, and the January through June term in Illinois.

Life did keep us busy in the summer—swimming in the Platte River. On some summer evenings we would meet with friends down there. It was a sand bed river. It was only a mile from our house. In the summer the sugar beet farmers in western Nebraska

would pump out water for their crops, therefore not much flow in the river, but there were four to five foot pools along the shore, so we had plenty of water to play and swim in. We also would go visit and stay with cousins—the Phelps or Leonard Williams's. We did spend some Thanksgivings and New Years at Aunt Ithel's in Lincoln. That was when Bob was there in college.

My best friend was Beverly Peterson. I spent many nights at their house—they had a bathroom and electricity! Helen was a friend of Marvel Peterson, so she was there sometimes.

January 1941 to March 1942: Bristol Station (Yorkville)

Dad had gone to Illinois early in 1940 to line up a farm. His friend Bob Genoways (Chuck and Bruce's uncle) had lived on a farm next to the Peterson farm in Nebraska. He was in real estate. The farm he lined up for us was a dairy farm. An older couple had lived there. When Dad talked to them they said to "come in January and learn the ropes. There are five bedrooms upstairs you can have." There was a big kitchen for her and Mom. Dad, Mom, Helen, Dick, and I drove the truck with the horse (Buck) and pony (Polly) and some other stuff; the rest went by train. The house had running water but no bathroom. Dad and two cousins knew plumbing and installed a bathroom in one of the upstairs bedrooms, then the cousins went home. I think they were there about two weeks. Farmers always do their moving on March 1st (the previous people had left a little before then).

From January until March of 1941, after we moved to Illinois, I went to grade school in Bristol Station (as it was called then). It was a two story wood building—it is not there anymore. I made a few friends and they would come out by our farm, as the creek ran through the pasture. There was one small water hold, about four feet deep, so we could swim and play games there. Bob Genoways bought a horse for his daughter (Sally) which was kept on our farm. Sally was two years older than me and I would go riding with her, as we had Polly and Buck. (Dad's horse was brought from Nebraska also.) I also spent time in Aurora at their house. She kind of took me under her wing and even let me go with her and her friends to the movies. I had to walk to school. Helen and Dick got a bus ride to Yorkville-Bristol.

There are no farm buildings left there, but some of the farmland and pasture are still as they were... but housing is slowly moving in.

We were out in the yard—Sally, her brother Robert, Helen, Dick, and me—when we were called in and told about the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. I can remember my father talking with friends before this happened—that they knew something was going to happen.

Dad was not really into dairy farming, and told Bob Genoways to find us something else.

March 1942 to March 1943: Warrenville/Batavia

Our next farm was a very big farm by Warrenville—the land is where Fermilab now sits. There were three houses, two for hired men. They were good workers and got free milk and eggs.

I made a couple of good friends from the girls in my class at school—Mary and Geraldine. Somehow Dad and Bob Genoways found a new bike for me; I believe it was in towards Chicago. With the war on, bikes were not being made. I had a mile to travel to school, so the bike came in handy. Our school was a country school, a one story brick. It is still standing, I believe. It is on Butterfield Road and the road that goes to Fermilab. The school had a garage, and there was a church right next door. Helen and Dick had to drive to Batavia to school.

That year several of my folks' friends moved to Illinois, and they would get together for parties and picnics. One of our hired men and his wife had a baby, and I would love to go and play with her—I remember her name was Nancy. In the summer I would ride my bike to either Mary's or Geraldine's houses; they both lived on Butterfield—one east of our road and one west of it.

But the Chicago guy who owned the farm told Dad, "I *expect* you to be at home on weekends when I come out." That did not sit well with Dad and he told Bob to get him another place, which he did.

March 1943 to March 1947: Big Rock

This was a large farm too, but only one extra house for a hired hand. Dick was old enough by then to be of help.

I finally go to a bigger school here—two grades in each room. I made friends easily. I finally did not have to bike or walk to school—they had bus service but for the grade school only, so Dick had to drive. As Helen had only three months until high school graduation, she stayed in Batavia with a friend, but she came home on weekends.

It was so nice to be back to a farm that had a creek running through it; it was just down the hill from the house. There was really no swimming hole to speak of, but lots of fish. When I was between sixth and seventh grades, Dad bought me a horse. (A couple of my friends had horses too.) We bought it on the east side of the river in Oswego. We had no truck to haul him to Big Rock, so I rode him home. I had to hand-walk him across the Oswego bridge and also the railroad tracks down by Montgomery.

We had friends—the Potters—that lived on Jericho Road and Route 47. So I would spend the night there and ride my horse home the next day. He was a big black former army horse. I spent that summer riding with my friends. I would sometimes spend the night at their houses, and they would do the same at mine.





Helen went off to college that fall—Cornell College in Iowa. She went there two years and then came home and went to work for a year before she and Mel got married and moved to Purdue where he was going to school to become an engineer. He treated me like a little sister, and would take me places with them. One night he even took me into Chicago to Soldier Field to see the Roy Rogers show!

We met with the Nebraska friends on the weekends—not as often as when we first moved to Illinois, but at least once a month. As there was gas rationing at the time, we didn't drive if we didn't need to. One summer I needed a lot of dental work, so Mom drive me to Big Rock and I would catch the a.m. train to Aurora, see the dentist, and have lunch at Woolworth's Five and Dime. Then I'd go to a movie and catch the afternoon train home to Big Rock. I bet I did seven or eight trips like that.

The Phelps came to visit a couple of times, and a couple of times I took the overnight train to Omaha to visit. I bet people nowadays would not let their pre-teen take overnight train rides!

This was also the time that our beloved pony, Polly, passed on. She must have been in her mid-thirties. Buck passed on around this time, too.

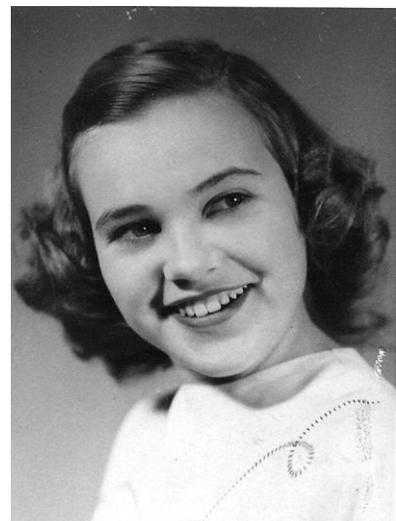
The last year we were there, Bob Genoways asked Dad to farm a small farm over by Kaneville. Well, the landlord did not like this idea, so Dad once again asked Bob for another farm.

March 1947 to March 1951: Aurora

This was the farm where West Aurora Plaza now stands. Our house was just about where the bank building next to the road is (by Constitution Ave.). There was one house at the farm for a hired hand and another one where the owners lived (an older couple)—they were very nice.

There was quite a difference in the size of schools in Aurora compared to Big Rock. But I did make friends fast. I got into going to football and basketball games and to the Tom-a-Hawk after. That was downtown and was for both East and West High students, thus the name (Tomcats and Blackhawks). I still would see some of my Big Rock friends for the first couple of years, but then that kind of dwindled down.

I spent a lot of summer days at the Batavia Quarry, swimming and sunning. I also did some picnicking once in a while. Aunt Emma was still living in Chicago, so I would take the 3rd rail in and go to lunch and to a play or movie at the Chicago Theater. They would have live talent before the movies. I saw Spike Jones, the Lennon Sisters, and a few more I can't remember. I



went back down to Purdue with Mel and Helen when they were home one weekend—he went to summer school there, too. They had an apartment in a big country house. I took a train from there to Chicago and a taxi to the Burlington station and back to Aurora.

In high school I got a part time job at Block and Kuhl. After graduation, I got a job at All-Steel. Dad got me a car so I could drive myself to work. I started out as a mail girl, then did afternoon mailing and filing, then payroll. I had also done work on the farm for Dad, such as mowing, etc. I also mowed the owner's yard. It was big, but I got paid well for doing it! He also gave me a paid-in-full for my colt, Taffy. I didn't really keep up with my friends from school, but I hooked up with a few of the girls from work—one from Plano, one from the east side of Aurora, and one girl that was a year ahead of me in school. At that time you could go to the bars at eighteen, so we would meet up with one of the girl's brothers and his friends. We were all just good friends! This continued after we moved to Oswego.

But the owners' son (a Chicago doctor who was a fool) was always finding fault, and he thought that Dad was swindling his parents! They did not believe their son, but Dad had had enough.

March 1951 to April 1953: Oswego



The folks bought the Oswego house in 1951. The implement dealer on North Broadway in Aurora moved down by the Yorkville “Y” and asked Dad to work for him any hours or days he wanted. Dad enjoyed that, and also the other people who worked there. He even asked Dad to go to Africa, and take Mom and me too. It was to set up and teach the people to use farm machinery. But—Helen and Mary Ann were about to have the first two grandchildren, and that put a stop to that!

The move was a little downhill for me for a while... But I had a place I could leave Taffy in the winter and we had a place for her in the spring, summer, and fall at the house. Mom worked at the little factory in Montgomery and Dad was working in Yorkville. So with the fruit trees and a very big garden, we kept busy. I still did the mowing and helped Mom with her flowers, which she loved. Also at this time Helen and Mel were living in Rockford. After Beth was born I would drive up on Friday night quite often and spend the weekend with them. They also came down to Oswego often.

I thought I needed a change and I had always wanted to be an airline stewardess. I got accepted to the Delta Airlines school in Minneapolis for April 1, 1953... Dad and Mom had made plans to

drive to California in January-February 1953. I had decided that I was going to quit my job at All-Steel in March, so I decided to leave early and go with them. Dad had one brother, Leonard, and two sisters, Aurora and Inez, who all lived very close to each other in California. We stayed at Uncle Leonard and Aunt Helen's house—their daughter Jean lived just a few doors down with her husband Don. I hung out with them a lot. Uncle Ike and his wife came down from Idaho for a time, too. We did Tijuana, Capistrano, Palm Springs, and many other places in the Los Angeles area. In the middle of the visit we drove to Seattle. We made a stop in San Jose to visit an old teacher of Dad's. Also north of San Francisco lived a girl that was a sister of my best horse-riding friend, so we stopped there, too.

Most of the travel was on the Pacific Coast Highway. We stopped and saw the redwoods. I think we stayed a couple of weeks with cousin Bea, her two girls, and her mother, Aunt Signa (Uncle Carl Peterson's widow). Bea's husband was out to sea at that time. Their house was on the highest hill in Seattle and you could see the bay really well. I think it was called St. Anne's Hill. My cousin Louise was going to the university, so I saw her a few times.

Going back to Los Angeles, we did more of the inland road, so the trip was faster. We left Los Angeles and started home in February. On the way home we saw Carlsbad Caverns. (About five years ago Rich and I were out there for his brother's 50th in Roswell. We did the caverns and I really did enjoy it again. The evening flight of the bats was something else! Roswell is an interesting place; I believe the government is hiding something there—I really do believe that.)

April 1953 to May 1954: California

After we got home, three of the girls that were my buddies (two were from All-Steel) decided they would like to move to California. One girl had a sister in the Los Angeles area. It sound so



good that I canceled my enrollment at airline school. So off we went in April! I was the only one with a car, so we shipped by rail all our clothes. We spent one night in a Santa Monica motel and the next day we got an apartment—two bedrooms, bath, living room, dining room, and kitchen. It was over a huge garage in a back yard and was all furnished. We were about ten blocks from the beach. We all got jobs within a week—three at Howard Hughes Aircraft and me at Virtue Brothers, which was a plant that made kitchen sets.

Downstairs was a smaller apartment with three UCLA male students. They were just good friends, though. They took us to football games and frat parties. We did a few weekend trips, but the beach was our favorite. I could go on and on...

I went home for Christmas and saw my little niece Beth and her six-month-old sister Barb. I went back to California after Christmas and stayed until late spring, but then I decided that I needed to go home!

May 1954: Back to Illinois

Back home I got a job right away at Aurora Pump. A girl from Big Rock worked there, too; she had moved into Aurora when she was in late grade school.

She said one day, “Would you like to go with me to a church youth group?” I said, “Sure,” and guess who was there? Rich Jones! End of story!

