

[Bruce Bollerud Collection – Recollections]

I was about 5 or 6 and I walked down to the road to get the mail. I got stung by a bumble bee on my ankle. Ouch! My dad said “Put some mud on it, it will feel better.” I did and it did.

I used to play in the dirt under a big tree in the yard. I made roads and towns, mud pies, and castles & fortresses (ate dirt, 2 yrs old). My mother said I sat in the garden. Austin had been teasing me and I finally had enough. I chased him with a butcher knife. Fortunately for us both, Austin could run faster than me.

Austin stayed with us for periods of time every summer. He also stayed with Irene. He made dad nervous because he would run and holler behind the horses and cows and my Dad was afraid he'd get kicked. Austin was always into something. He would chase the chickens or throw them into the cows' water tank. One time he climbed up on the roof of the chicken house and fell off the roof onto a pile of scrap lumber and stepped on a nail. My dad had to take him to Dr. Marshall for a tetanus shot. One time while my dad was milking, Austin and I were playing outside the barn and Austin teased me. My dad walked by the door and saw a peculiar shadow. He investigated and found me with a big stick waiting to ambush Austin.

I used to sit and play in the dirt in the garden when I was 3 or so. My mother said I used to eat dirt. I suppose I was lacking something.

Hired man Orton Kellesvig used to run a needle and thread through a kernel of corn and toss it front of a chicken. When the chicken swallowed the corn, Orton would jerk on the string and pull the kernel of corn out of the chicken. The chicken looked very surprised.

Orton Kellsvig also dumped some whiskey into the chicken mash. They seemed to like it and they got drunk, staggering, leaning to one side and falling down.

Hired man Leonard Erickson liked to have a drink now and then as did many of our hired men. One day he found a whiskey bottle on top of a beam by the hog slop barrels. He must have thought my dad a stashed a bottle there and he took a big slug- to his sorrow because it was turpentine in the bottle which my dad would use in the hog slop to de-worm the pigs. Leonard

became very sick and rolled on the ground but he wouldn't let my dad take him to the doctor. After a couple days he recovered. Leonard was one of the toughest men I ever knew.

My dad liked Leonard and said he was one of the best hired men in the county. He was really a good cow man. Normally we had two hired men in the winter time to do the hay & silage chores. There were fifty cows to feed and clean up after – two manure spreaders-full every day. Also calves and young stock to take care of. Leonard said “Orville, instead of paying me 2 men’s wages, why don’t you pay me 1 1/2 man’s wages and I’ll do the chores.” And he did.

As I mentioned, Leonard liked a drink although he always stayed sober until the haying was done or the corn was planted and so forth. This time he came out to the farm drunk and he confronted my dad in the barn. Leonard said “Orville, you pushed me around yesterday but today I’m sober so put up your dukes and settle this now.” Leonard put up his dukes, backed up, stepped in the gutter and fell backwards in the gutter which seemed to take all the fight out of him.

Leonard was one of those efficient workers who never seemed to hurry, but he always got more work done than almost anyone else. He never seemed to waste a step or a motion.

Bert Vinje was another hired man on our farm. He came from Norway. He was a character and he had a thick accent. He was telling my dad about his new false teeth. They were standing in barn next to the horse tank (a barrel that the horses drank water from). Bert said his teeth were guaranteed unbreakable. My dad questioned this and Bert took his teeth out of his mouth and threw them on the barn floor. They bounced up in the air unharmed and Bert caught them. He said “I told you they were unbreakable,” and turned around and rinsed them off in the horse tank and put them back in his mouth.

When I was 5 or 6, I was intrigued when our hired man Roy Anderson yodeled. I said “Roy, how can you do that? I want to learn how to yodel.” Roy said “Well if you want to learn how to yodel, you have to eat grass.” That sounded reasonable to me although my mother must have wondered what was going on when she found me pulling and eating grass. Maybe Roy was right though because I did learn to yodel later on.

My dad liked to have a drink. (I personally think that his experiences in World War I caused this) and on one occasion in Blanchardville, the town cop, Clarence Taylor, told him “Orville, you’re my friend and I don’t want to run you in but you’ve had too much to drink and you can’t drive your car.” My dad said “Clarence, when I leave town I’ll be behind the wheel of my car.” Clarence said “Orville, I’m warning you, don’t drive that car.” Clarence left the saloon and my dad called my mother’s cousin Millie (Milford) Venden who had a trucking company. They drove my dad’s car up on the flatbed truck and my dad got in the car. Then they drove down the main street of Blanchardville with my dad behind the wheel as he had said he would be, honking the horn and waving at people as they took the car home. I think even Clarence Taylor had to smile at that one.

If my dad was boisterous and fond of doing outrageous stunts, my mother was quite the opposite. She was quiet, soft spoken, seldom angry, friendly and warm. I don’t recall her raising her voice more than once or twice. Once when as a kid I accidentally kicked over a bucket of wash water she had just drained from the wringer washing machine, and the other time when she had waited in vain for my dad to come home to take her to town. On that occasion she had put a silverware knife in the door frame to lock the door (we didn’t lock our doors, didn’t even have keys for the doors) but my father knocked out a panel in the door with his fist, reached in and took the knife out of the door and walked in. By that time my mother had heard all the commotion and got up. I’m not sure what the verbal exchange was but it must have irritated my mother because she popped my dad a good one on the nose and the blood flew. My dad just stood there for awhile and then he said, “Get me a towel,” and she did and that was that. As I said, my mother was quiet and calm but there was some of that Viking spirit in her if she was provoked.

One of the things I remember about my mom is that she was always there. I’d come home from school and holler, “I’m home,” and she’d say, “Hi,” and fix me a snack, milk and cookies or something like that. She was steady, stable, warm and comforting. She had the patience of a saint. My dad was not always easy to live with. She always kept the house and yard clean and tidy. She was a good cook, fixing the hearty farm fare we liked, meat and potatoes, vegetables from the garden, pies, cakes and cookies. During the Christmas holidays she made *lefse* (sometimes some of sisters would help, with Grandma Vender supervising, they cooked it on the top of the wood stove) *fattigman bakkels*, *krub (klub)* when we butchered, lutefisk, oyster stew, *rulle pulse* [[*rullepølse*]], and on and on. She like to listen to soap operas on the radio, “Portia

faces life,” “Young widow Brown,” “As the world turns,” “Lorenzo Jones and his wife Belle,” etc. Sometimes we would visit Grandma Venden in Hollandale and they would listen to the soaps. Grandma would worry about the heroine who was being mistreated and she would talk to Ma (as I called my mother) in Norwegian and Ma would answer in English most of the time. Grandma and Grampa Venden didn’t have much money but you always felt welcome and comfortable there. Grandma always had coffee and cookies for you.

My mother always had a good time when she and some of her sisters got together. Lu and Olga, Hilda and Laura and my mother would have a couple of drinks at one of the bars in Hollandale and they would talk and laugh and sometimes dance to the juke box. They had fun. The Thonis (mom’s sister Lu) came up from Chicago every summer and they would stay for a month or so I think. They would visit us, grandma, Aunt Laura in Darlington, Aunt Gladys on the farm in Blanchardville and Aunt Olga in rural Mt. Horeb. I had great fun playing with the Thoni cousins, Dick, Pete, Patti. Hilda Lou was a baby then.

Aunt Gladys and Uncle Milt Erickson would come and visit in the evening with some of their kids (they had 12 kids) and Uncle Milt would tell outrageous stories about the goings-on in his youth, boxing and wrestling matches, how strong and tough the men were, bootleg whiskey and home brew beer and how powerful it was and how crazy it would make you act.

Aunt Viola (mom’s youngest sister) and Uncle Gene Phillips and then two sons, Davis and Terry, would come up in the summer from Kansas and stay awhile. Later on they moved up to Wisconsin and lived in a trailer in our front yard.

Uncle Lawrence (mom’s brother) lived with Grandma and Grampa Venden in Hollandale. He was a mechanic at Grant Campbell’s garage and he also drove a school bus for Hollandale schools. Lawrence was blind in one eye and deaf in one ear. When he was a kid he exploded a dynamite cap and lost his hearing in one ear and his sight in one eye. Lawrence loved to joke around and tease the boys about the girls. He would also talk Norwegian to me. Sometimes he would read “Han Ola og Han Per,” Norwegian cartoon in the *Decorah Posten*, a Norwegian language newspaper. He loved animals and played with the cat and dog and talked to them. They seemed to understand him it seemed to me. Lawrence had played the violin and his brother Chris played the banjo. I think they were pretty good. Unfortunately I never heard them play (or don’t remember) because Uncle Chris died in 1940 when I was 5 or 6 years old. (I don’t

know the exact date of his death). They didn't make any recording so their music is lost. Everyone in my mother's family played music, Grampa played the fiddle, and the girls played mandolin, guitar or chorded on the piano. I just recently found out that Aunt Viola played the mandolin. The whole family would gather in the evening and play music. Grandma's brothers (Lindokken) played fiddle too so there was lots of music around. Auntie Vi said during the Christmas holidays all the sisters and their husbands would come home and they would play games, cards, etc. and music, and most of them stayed overnight. It was a small house so the kids slept on the floor. The kids played in and out of doors and it sounds like a grand chaos – lots of fun, noise, running around laughing. After Uncle Chris died, Lawrence put away the fiddle and never really played again except for one time he played for me "Bye bye blackbird," and although he was rusty, you could hear that he had been very good at one time.