



Abandoned corncrib and shrub located in a field of beans on the left and of corn on the right. The property belongs to the Kathy and Gary Dahl family and is on the south side of Section 7, Garfield Township, 2001.

From the yet to be published book *The Road I Grew Up On: Requiem for a Vanishing Era*
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THE FIRST FARM ALONG THE ROAD



The Lyman and Arlene George family who rented the farm on the south side of Section 7, Garfield Township in the 1940s. Back left to right: Norma Jean, Willard, Lorene, and Bertha Ellen. Front left to right: Ada Marie, Arlene, Lyman, and Marjorie. Photo circa 1948. The Marcia Smith collection.

My earliest memories of life along the road are ones of Mother and Dad stopping at Lyman and Arlene George's place on the way home from town. I had thought my parents were picking up some staple such as baby formula, but when I asked my parents what they remembered, they were surprised I could recall something from so long ago. They could not remember stopping at the George farm. They said, "Perhaps we may have bought milk, eggs, or cream from Mrs. George." Although I cannot prove the events happened, I have this image of being a toddler, riding in the back seat of the car as my folks drove up the long lane to the George house hidden in a huge grove of trees. The George family lived there from 1941 to around 1958.

Lyman and Arlene died several years ago; however, I located two of their granddaughters in Minnesota who loaned me the originals of some of their family photographs to copy. Their mother, Ada Marie Colee, who had collected the shoe box of photographs, died the year before. The granddaughters also gave me phone numbers and addresses for their aunts. When I called one of them, Marjorie Simonson of Des Moines, who is Lyman and Arlene's youngest daughter, I did not know quite what to say but told her my name and asked if she knew who I was. She said, "Oh yes, I used to babysit you when you were an infant." Perhaps that is why my parents stopped at the George's — to pick up the babysitter.

Roger DeWolf and his sisters, Beverly Wiegert and Phyllis Thompson, also grew up on the farm. Their parents, Jim and Carrie, moved to the place as newlyweds in 1920. Roger was born in 1922, stayed home to farm for two years after graduating from high school, then went to Iowa State in 1941. It was the same year his folks moved away from my road after buying a

farm a few miles farther south that Lyman and Arlene George were renting. The result was that the DeWolf and George families swapped places.

After college and serving in the Marine Corps, Roger returned to the Rolfe area and farmed with his dad for 11 years, but he felt more like a hired hand than an equal of his father. I asked Roger about the phenomenon of farm boys becoming hired hands for their fathers, while their fathers governed the farm and accepted little input even after their sons had become grown men. As an example, I explained to Roger that when I was a child, I thought Dad was in charge of what was done on our farm such as the decision to build a new barn and corncrib. In later years, I learned the place belonged to my grandfather, and Grandpa was the one calling the shots. Roger sighed in recognition of what I was driving at and said the matter was prevalent but not something many people were willing to discuss. He believed that the problem stemmed from being in a rural culture where many of the men had not been brought up with good communication skills. He also said that fathers and sons did not know how to reconcile their differing perspectives. Roger and I agreed an entire sociological study could be conducted regarding this pattern. The only choice some sons had in a situation with a strong-willed father was to wait until the father died in order to be involved in the farm decision-making or to move.



Roger DeWolf, 1939 and circa 1995. From the DeWolf family collection.

Roger eventually moved from Rolfe to Eagle Grove where he owned a small but successful company that manufactured ventilation and other accessories for livestock facilities. He was on the school board when I taught physical education there beginning in January 1974. It was one of the most difficult times of my life.

I had graduated from Iowa State University in 1967 with a degree in physical education for women. After that, I taught successfully for four years at a junior high in Duluth. Next I went

to graduate school in instructional media technology at the University of Wisconsin-Stout and then did some traveling before taking the Eagle Grove teaching position in January of 1974.

I was torn between staying in physical education and getting a job in instructional media. During the early part of the 1970s, there were times when I stayed with my parents. Dad had a bit of farm work for me, such as driving a tractor and pulling a wagon to haul grain at harvest time; but he and his hired hand, Johnny Zeman, managed well without me. Besides, Dad was starting to hire Joe Reigelsberger, who lived a quarter of a mile away, to plant some of his crop. Dad was turning 55 and moving toward full retirement from active farming, which he completed in 1976. During that era, my heart ached and I was deeply depressed, perhaps because there was no real role for me on the farm, perhaps because I was single and lonely and felt like a misfit who couldn't propel herself into life, perhaps because I really didn't want to work in a public school again, or perhaps because I wanted to be a photographer but had not yet developed the artist's inner eye.

In December of 1973, I heard that a physical education job would become available that January in Eagle Grove. The town was about 40 miles southeast of Rolfe, and I had interviewed there when I was a college senior. Even though the school had an extremely well-developed physical education program at that time, I balked at staying in my home state. I was torn between my affinity for its rural landscape and a desire to escape its flat cornfields. I took the job rather than drift with more graduate school, travel, or time on my parents' farm.

It was difficult to begin a midyear teaching assignment. I often felt like I was stepping on invisible land mines. Much of the problem was related to the sudden December departure of the former physical education teacher, Mrs. Abrahamson. There was a huge contrast between us. She was petite and blonde, wore a pony tail, and was a buddy of many students. I was taller, was heavier set, had short brown hair, and was unknown at the school. On the first day of the semester, when I walked through the long hallway toward the steps that led to the girls' locker room, several boys skulked by their lockers and grunted, "Huh, huh, huh. There goes the woman shot-putter." Neither ignoring nor confronting them helped.

I had been warned that Eagle Grove, a trucking and wrestling town, was a tough place to teach. Many fathers were on the road and not home to consistently discipline their children. Wrestling was the dominating sport, one that warped people's priorities. I was often frustrated and angry with the preferential treatment given to it and the boys' physical education program. In addition, I had to advise the high school cheer squad, even though I have always had a disdain for cheerleading. There were other problems. The sophomores who entered high school during my second year had held a middle school reputation of being extremely difficult. With the unruly sophomores and insufficient disciplinary support from the administration, things went from bad to worse. Also, many of my bright curricular ideas and innovations that were readily accepted in Duluth met resistance.

At the end of my first year, the administration announced the school would have a girls' basketball team the next year. Mr. Baretich, the principal, asked me to coach the program, something I was only partially qualified to do. I did not anticipate that the girls and their parents would have such high expectations for their first year of basketball; but they did, and when those expectations were not met, I became a scapegoat.

If I had not been so depressed or ambivalent about my career, I probably would not have taken the job in Eagle Grove. On the other hand, if I had possessed more confidence, perhaps I would have been successful there. In the spring of my second year, I was offered another

contract. I promptly signed and returned it. I should have realized things would not improve for me in that teaching situation. It was only a few weeks later when Mr. Baretich called me to his office. He explained that in light of new state laws regarding teacher tenure, the administration was going to cancel my recently signed contract. Instead of fighting the decision, I decided to walk away at the end of the school year. The Eagle Grove experience convinced me that I never wanted another teaching job. A door had closed, but others would eventually open.

Not long after resigning, I got a call from Roger saying that as a board member, he was not supposed to be calling me, but that he felt a personal obligation, as an old family friend, to do so. He said he felt sorry for the way I had been treated and that he cared about my well-being. A call such as his is better late than never, and his quiet, albeit after-the-fact, support helped me heal from the hurt of that year and a half I taught in Eagle Grove.

I reconnected with Roger in the early 1990s and did a preliminary interview with him but without a tape recorder. I wish I had recorded him, but my normal style is to schedule a preliminary meeting to get to know persons connected with the road, find out what they remember and how well they are able to articulate their experience, explain my project, and hope to make them comfortable with it. Roger told some great stories that day, but I have only scribbled notes from the conversation. By the time we arranged another meeting in 2000, Roger had Parkinson's disease and had moved to the Green Hills Retirement Community in Ames. With his diminished health, Roger's thought process had slowed, and he spoke softly and haltingly. However, there was a hint of humor and mischievousness, not only in the twinkle of his eyes, but in a few deadpanned puns and some irreverent remarks about big-time agriculture and university officials. We talked some about the years that I taught in Eagle Grove. I could tell he was still troubled by how unfairly I had been treated and perhaps felt guilty that he had been ineffective in altering the situation. The good news, in looking back, is that my experience in Eagle Grove convinced me I did not want to work in public school education again. It also helped me gain a better grasp of the adage that says, "When one door closes, another opens."

Because of Roger's limited conversational ability, our time was more focused on being together than my collecting lots of information and stories. What I remember most is exchanging soft and kind remarks and ending with a hug. He was now the frail one, and I the strong one who wanted to convey my concern about his well-being.

Roger died on November 15, 2003. His wife, Helen, resides at an assisted living facility in Des Moines, the city where their daughter Ann lives. Beverly lives on a farm near Rolfe, and Phyllis lives on a farm near Hayfield, Minnesota.

I promise not to give a detailed history of the ownership of each farm along the road, partially because I'm not an expert when it comes to understanding land abstracts and partially because much of the information is tedious. There are a few instances where the land has gone through only two or three transactions from the federal government's control in the mid-1800s until now; however, understanding the abstracts for other parcels of land is like trying to find one's way into and out of a maze. The history of ownership for this first farm is particularly interesting, or should I say confusing. It begins with three lineages or, perhaps more legally speaking, three claims to the land. To complicate matters even more, not only for this farm but many others in the area, there was a lineage of ownership for the land that led to extensive litigation.

In 1850, through a swampland act, the federal government gave Iowa title to all swamp-

land in the state. Subsequently, in 1853, Iowa turned around and transferred the swamp-land in Pocahontas County to local control. The county, until it was later tilled and drained to become tillable land, consisted of many marshes and other wetlands. In fact, there were “old-timers” who claimed that in the springtime, they could row a boat from Rolfe to Fonda some 20 miles away. One would have to have a wild imagination to envision such a boat ride today. In 1859, the county contracted to give all of its swamp and overflowed lands to William E. Clark in return for constructing a bridge over the Des Moines River and a new courthouse for the county. In those days, the county seat was on a high spot at what is now called Old Rolfe and not at its current site in Pocahontas. In 1860, Clark assigned his contract to John M. Stockdale, and a deed from the county authorized the “conveyance of 76,250 acres of swampland” to Stockdale. Legend has it that the county never meant for Stockdale to be given so much land but that he went out in the spring time — the wettest season of the year — to determine what lands should be his even though some of the property had already been claimed by other people. A Pocahontas attorney, Don Beneke, who is a student of the history of the county, pointed out that the 76,250 acres is only some 20 percent of the total 368,000 acres in the county, probably a plausible amount of land. However, he also said that a lot of fraudulent behavior was involved and that for a number of years, Stockdale was selling deeds to land he did not actually own. Stockdale’s behavior caused a great deal of difficulty and resulted in considerable confusion regarding the rightful ownership of many farms in the area. The controversy seems to have been resolved on May 3, 1872, when the Iowa General Assembly approved an act that legalized and confirmed “the sale and conveyance of swamp lands of the county which are not patented to the county.” That act also said the sale could not affect lands “claimed by any pre-emptor homestead settler or anyone claiming a grant from the railroad when same may conflict with the current grant.”

A second lineage of ownership began on October 13, 1865, when the federal government gave a portion of the land to Harmon Sealy. Perhaps he was a Civil War veteran. The records show that he got an official patent for 80 acres of the farm from the State of Iowa in 1881 and another 80 acres in 1885. However, the transactions acknowledge that the same lands had already been granted to the railroads through an act of the 17th General Assembly of Iowa.

The railroad lineage began in 1867, when the federal government gave land to the state, which in turn gave it to railroads. The rail companies then sold the land to raise money to build rail lines. This may appear to have been an unfair support of the railroad corporations, but the arrangement also benefitted the government by making it possible for the nation to tap into the rich agricultural resources of the Midwest. It was through this kind of scenario that the state deeded this parcel of land to the McGregor and Missouri Railroad in 1871. Then that rail company sold the property in 1880 to the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad for one dollar. CMSRR sold all but a 100-foot-wide strip for a railroad right-of-way to a person named L.C. Coffin in 1889.

The documentation recorded in the land abstract is peculiar. It suggests that Robert Hunter purchased the farm twice. In 1896, he bought 160 acres (nearly all the farm) from Harmon Sealy, who had been granted the property after the Civil War. And in 1901, Hunter bought the same 160 acres plus another 40 acres from L.C. Coffin, the man who had purchased the land from the railroad. By then there was no more record of the lineage of ownership that had gone through Mr. Stockdale, who sold his portion of the land in 1862.

Robert and Mary Hunter made their home on the farm and had six children. She died in

about 1908 when their youngest child Bobby was nearly 11 years old. Robert's second wife, Rose, did not want to live on the farm that had become known as the Hunter homeplace, so Robert sold it in 1910 to H.L. and Viola E. Everson, and the Hunter family moved north of Rolfe to a farm near West Bend.

Bobby Hunter was a prominent businessman in Rolfe when I was growing up. He had initially studied dentistry in Chicago but came back to Rolfe and started a creamery business. He then had the Maytag store, which he expanded to sales of other appliances. A 1941 newspaper clipping reports that the Maytag district manager had written a column for the Maytag Company's magazine commending Bobby on his 17 years of "Maytagging," and claiming Bobby was still going strong and that "during the summer, golf and fishing are his hobbies and he is adept at both. Seldom does he require more than par on the local golf course, but in fishing some of the big ones always get away." The manager also said Bobby had built up a good trade because of the fine service rendered to customers and that Bobby occasionally received letters asking him to bring out a new Maytag to a person whose parents bought a machine from him 12 or 15 years before. "One of Bob's favorite bets," the manager wrote is that, "He will give you \$5 for every person entering his store who does not have a Maytag if you will pay him \$1.00 for every Maytag owner who steps in during the day."

I remember Bobby as a jovial man. In about 1961, Dad came home in a green 1951 Chevrolet he had bought from Bobby for us siblings to drive to school. Dad and Bobbie had seen each other on Main Street earlier that day, and Bobbie asked Dad to make an offer on the car. Dad said he would give \$50, and the transaction was completed with a handshake.

Bobby's daughter, Mary Jane Hunter Dow, lives in Utah. She also remembers her dad as having a good sense of humor and said that in 1973, just as his funeral service was ending at the cemetery, a cow ambled over to the area and mooed. She figures her dad would have



Bobby Hunter at his creamery station in Rolfe, circa 1921. The Mary Jane Hunter Dow collection.

laughed. Mary Jane also said Bobby had unpleasant memories of the Hunter homeplace and only drove her by the farm once. Mary Jane said that life on that farm was extremely difficult. She also speculated that perhaps Bobby's mother died due to exhaustion from childbearing and hard work as a farm homemaker.

In 1920 when the Jim and Carrie DeWolf moved to the farm, they rented from the Eversons who had bought the farm from Bobby's dad, but the Eversons had large mortgages both with the New York Life Insurance Company and the State Savings Bank of Rolfe. By 1925, the Eversons had conveyed all their land and mortgages to the State Savings Bank and management of the farm was assigned to James Bruce, one of the bank's directors. On June 9, 1932, the superintendent of banking for the State of Iowa went to court and claimed the State Savings Bank to be "insolvent and unsafe" and that "the interest of the creditors demands its closing" and that the said bank was "voluntarily closed by its creditors." By Christmastime of 1932, with a deed for one dollar, the land was given to Mr. Bruce. He continued to rent the farm to the DeWolf family but moved to Des Moines where he died in 1947. His will stipulated that all his property would go to his wife, Ruth Bruce. She remarried and became Ruth Killingsworth. In 1955, she sold the farm to my grandfather, John Gunderson, who continued to lease the farm to the George family, who had moved there in 1941 when they swapped farms with the DeWolf family. My grandfather died in 1956 and ownership of the farm eventually ended up in the hands of my mother, who bought it from my father, who had inherited it from my grandfather's estate.

Following Grandpa's death, our family had to pay \$16,631 to the State of Iowa and \$73,020 to the Internal Revenue Service in inheritance and estate taxes. Because of the huge sum of taxes, an amount that perhaps would have been less had Grandpa done better estate planning, my father and mother became well versed and active in estate planning. They developed trusts, one for each of us siblings, and arranged for my grandmother, DeElda, to put land in the trusts. During the next two decades, the trusts (under my father's management) purchased more land, and my parents gave land to other trusts for us siblings to lessen their holdings and the eventual inheritance taxes on their estates. When my youngest sister, Louise, turned 21, the trusts were divided equally with each of the six of us being given land in our own names. The trusts were dissolved.

In an unfortunate turn of events in the farm crisis of the early 1980s, Louise and her husband Bill, who farmed in the Rolfe area, ran into financial difficulties. Dad sought out area farmers to buy some of Louise and Bill's property in order to liquidate their assets, pay off creditors, and avert bankruptcy, but his efforts produced too little revenue too late. They ended up using Chapter 11 of the federal bankruptcy code to reorganize their finances but lost all the land she had inherited. However, they did sell (in an indirect manner that involved land trades and the exchange of money) part of the farm that my grandfather had purchased from Ruth Bruce to Blanche and Wesley DeWolf, who was a nephew of Jim DeWolf, and another part of that farm to Gary and Kathy Dahl, her siblings, and her father, Norton Ives.

I was not living in the Rolfe area at the time. I was enrolled in seminary and only distantly aware of the day-to-day, nitty-gritty activity and turmoil that was going on for those in my family, who were either in or close to the Chapter 11 process.

Anyone who has read Jane Smiley's best-selling 1991 novel about a farm dynasty in north central Iowa, *A Thousand Acres*, or who is otherwise familiar with the social mores of farming communities, knows that land can be an extremely important part not only of a farm family's financial prosperity but of its identity. I was raised with full knowledge that the Gundersons

had large land holdings — as much as 3,000 acres at one time under my father's management. Land was part of the core identity of who we were and are. I assume I am not the only one who has felt an admonition not to sell or lose inherited land. Such values might not be central to every farm family, but they were impregnated in our family psyche. Knowing our inherited mind-set, I can only imagine how difficult it was for Louise and Bill and other family members involved in the bankruptcy to endure and survive the process.

It is interesting to trace the price paid per acre of land in the early days of white settlement of the 1800s to now. However, the task does take an extreme amount of attention to detail to tell exactly what particle of land was being sold. The property descriptions are part of a daunting shorthand language (SW1/4 and SW1/4 of SE1/4 of Sec. 7 translates as the southwest quarter of Section 7 and the southwest quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 7, with a section being one square mile).

In the scribbled notes I made in 1989, when Norton Ives let me look at the abstract for this first farm along the road, I wrote as thoroughly as possible and drew a little square for each transaction to show the entire section of land and shaded in the described parcel. But to decipher those notes and drawings sufficiently to determine the price per acre for every purchase is beyond the scope of my skills and this book. However, in general, from my calculations, I'll take a stab at portraying the evolution of prices paid for the farm.

It appears that the 1889 transaction from the railroad to the first investor, L.C. Coffin, was for little more than a dollar per acre. By the time he sold it to Robert Hunter in 1901, the price had risen to \$10 per acre. When Robert sold it to Henry Everson in 1910, the price was \$87.50 per acre. Then after a long and complex period of ownership, my grandfather bought the farm in 1955 for \$210 per acre. After that, there are no specific prices quoted in the abstract; however, I know that land escalated to at least \$3,000 per acre, because in 1979, I paid that amount to purchase a 20-acre parcel of land. A chart of land values published by the Iowa State University Extension Department shows that the average land price in Pocahontas County reached a peak of \$2,905 in 1981, then sank to \$995 in 1986, gradually rose to \$2,437 in 1997, slipped back to \$2,257 in 2001, and climbed to \$2,762 in 2003.

Roger DeWolf remembers losing his fortune in 1932 when he was 10 years old and his family lived on the first farm along the road. He was in the field, driving a team of horses and harrowing (i.e., tilling) the ground. Here is the story in his own words:

What I remember is my mother walking across the field. The fields in those days had more clods than today, big hard clods. She walked clear across that field to talk to us. My dad was in the same field doing another part of the tillage, and she came out and told us both that the bank in Rolfe was closed. I thought I was wiped out, because I had some 37 dollars and some cents. But it was gone. The news was a blow to my parents. So part of my tears were in sympathy for them, but most were for losing my fortune.

Roger's dad Jim was paid to be a part-time rural mail carrier. He drove his route with a team of horses and went as far as the town of Plover. In the winter, when the snow was bad, he would pull a bobsled. It used to be that citizens had to pay a tax to be eligible to vote, but they could contribute work in lieu of paying the tax. For his poll tax, Jim graded the mile of road that went by his place to keep it as passable as possible. For the job, he built a contraption that he pulled with horses. It consisted of a curved steel bar that was about three feet high and five feet wide and served as a blade to smooth the dirt road. There was a board mounted on top of the blade that Jim stood on while driving the horses.

Roger also said his dad used to pull other peoples' vehicles out of the mud and that the worst stretch of road was a quarter mile west of the highway. The road in that area was low and the ditches on both sides were often both full of water, especially in the spring time. Roger is not the only person associated with this project to note difficulties with that portion of the road. I can recall, even in the years after it was better engineered and surfaced with gravel, when there were muddy springtime ruts and driving was treacherous. The best strategy was simply to hang onto the steering wheel — perhaps pray — keep moving, and hope to stay in the ruts left by other drivers and not slide into a ditch.



Jim DeWolf, circa 1936. The Phyllis DeWolf Thompson collection.

Roger claims his dad was one of the first farmers in the county to grow soybeans and use hybrid seed corn. Apparently Jim planted beans for the first time in about 1933 or 1934. His harvest was less than desirable. As Roger says,

I can remember that the bean crop had kind of a disastrous result in most cases. When it was growing it looked so nice and green, you know those big green leaves. But no one knew what to do with it at that time, and my dad thought it would be a good idea to try and make hay out of it. We cut it and tried to pick up all that tangled mess of stems. By the time we got it piled in the lot, the leaves had all fallen off, so we

stacked the stems. But the livestock didn't much care if they ate it or not. And now beans are used in livestock feed but it's a processed feed. And it's necessary to be processed for the animal to get much good out of it.

I asked if the salesman, who had talked his dad into buying the bean seed, had also told Jim how to harvest and use the crop. Roger replied, "Well, knowing my dad, they might have told him, but he might have thought they didn't know what they were talking about."

Roger also talked about the introduction of hybrid corn seed.

Dad was one of the first — seemed to us he was the first one, but I'm not sure of that — to buy seed corn at five dollars a bushel. In the past, you know, they just picked big ears in the fall and stored them someplace and shelled them out and planted them in the spring. That was the difference between open-pollinated and hybrid corn seed. And this was in the hot, dry drought summer [1936]. I remember that the hybrid corn was standing up, green and straight, and that the open-pollinated corn was down and tumbled all over. It was hard for farmers to accept the results because the hybrid corn didn't have big ears. It had smaller ears that were all the same size and well-formed but not big long ears.

I asked, "So your dad's risk paid off?" And Roger said, "Well, it was the first time most of us had seen 50 bushel corn [per acre] — then as things developed year after year, farmers got more than 50 bushel."

Once, Jim rented 40 acres of slough land from Rosa Dady on the east side of Section 13 of Roosevelt Township where my parents live. When he tried to plow the native untilled land, he discovered it was peat and accidentally triggered a fire that smoldered under ground for a year, with smoke rising like a genie from the snow in the winter.

The DeWolfs had more chickens than most families. They operated a kerosene-powered incubator upstairs in a storeroom of their house, where they hatched chickens for Pat Wood's hatchery. Roger's mom stood on a stool and turned the eggs by hand. She also promoted 4-H, and Roger and Beverly became state officers. At home, Roger had a calf project. In order to weigh his steers, he would lead them to the Brinkman place a mile away where there was a livestock scale.

When I interviewed Roger's youngest sister Phyllis I began by showing her a 1950s aerial photo of the farm and asking her to tell me what she saw and remembered about it.

There's the trees, and the double corncrib and the hen houses. There's the great wind break in the back. There's the plum trees and mulberry trees.

It was home. All three of us kids were born there. We were in 4-H, and the folks were in Farm Bureau and extension work. I think it was either the third or fourth Thursday of every month that was Farm Bureau night. You would go to the different homes. The parents would have their meetings downstairs, and the kids would be playing upstairs in the bedroom, not doing the best of things up there sometimes. I was talking to one of the gals, and she says she can remember trying on all those hats. Of course she remembered Lucille White was the pianist and they sang songs and had programs.

You had your country school and were together then, too. The threshing crew definitely brought people together. Roger tells about the times he got to blow the whistle on the steam engine. One summer when there was a little baby in the house, he couldn't because he would wake the baby up, and that was me.



Left to right: Beverly, Carrie, and Phyllis DeWolf, circa 1936. The Phyllis DeWolf Thompson collection.

I remember getting ready for the threshing crew. It was my job to set up the work bench and the basin for water, to hang the mirror in the lilac bush, and to hang the towels all over for the guys when they came in to eat the big dinner that was cooked on a wood stove. The threshing crew always came on my birthday. I decided we should make that a holiday because we could never celebrate my birthday when they were threshing. That wasn't fair.

There were no [chemical] sprays in those days, just old-fashioned farming: making hay with the dump rake and loading hay in the barn with the forks. Milking a few cows, feeding some cattle. One of my favorite things to do as a kid was to drink warm milk: go out and get it right as Dad was milking. Oh, that was so good. I don't know if I would do it today, but I really enjoyed it as a kid.

I also recall the 4-H projects. We fed lambs during the winter and would take them up to Spencer. We had to do the chores before we went to country school. Sometimes I would drive the pony on a buggy, or I would ride the pony, or I would ride a bicycle. The school was a mile away. We had to do the dishes before we went. Of course school didn't start until nine o'clock so we had plenty of time to do that. We walked most every day. I don't remember ever being driven to school. Of course, we would see all kinds of things along the way. I remember the time that they were going to start paving Highway 44. They had the counter across the road and we used our ball bats to make a really lot of traffic go by.



Phyllis DeWolf Thompson, 2001.

I asked Phyllis about how she felt seeing the farm now when only a lone corncrib and shrub are left standing. She replied,

You're sad, very sad. We had a lot of fun. We hated to move, but that farm wasn't big enough. It was only 160 acres, and we moved onto a bigger farm when I was in eighth grade. As an adult I can see why the folks wanted to move. They had reached a milestone in their life, ready to move on to a bigger challenge. And that was during the war. It was twice as big of a farm. Machinery was hard to get. Labor was hard to get. You couldn't get anything. I do think Dad got his name in and got a new 15-foot disc. The tractor I learned to drive was an old 1020 tractor that had lug wheels. I think it took about 40 acres to turn around in. And I remember having the drag behind it, and of course, I didn't turn soon enough and got caught in the fence with the drag coming up on the lugs. But I survived. You see, Beverly had gone off to college and Roger was in the service, and I was the only one home.

I dream many times about the farm — the creek in the back. We went wading back there many times. We had a couple come from Sioux City, who set up beehives there because Dad raised sweet clover. They set up a trailer house in the grove.

We had a lot of accidents. People tell about the time they were making hay along the road in the ditch. I was swinging on the back of the hay rack, and the horses backed up and my foot was underneath. I didn't break any bones, but I still have a nice scar from where that happened.

I was thinking about the time I had scarlet fever, and Dr. Fuller White came and tacked up the quarantine sign. Roger was shipped off to Uncle Billy and Aunt Maude's place. I don't remember where Beverly went to stay for six weeks. So Mother and I were together. Dad was in and out. He could be there. I was in bed about half a day — the rest of the time, I was out playing around. I wasn't sick.

Marjorie George Simonson, who was a teenager when her family lived on the farm in the 1940s, also has a fondness for the place. She talked about some of her memories.

We had the long driveway, and it was lined with trees. The trees made an umbrella over the whole driveway. I remember there were lilac bushes and yellow roses, wild ones, out by the gate and that when we went to town on Saturday night — to fix ourselves up — we always took a yellow rose and put it in our hair. My mother was not one who paid much attention to flowers. But there were lilies of the valley all over. And there were window boxes in the kitchen, and she liked pansies, so she always put pansies in those. Then there was a lane that went back through the grove that we used to ride the pony up and down. But that pony really wasn't much of a pony because if it



Farm where the DeWolf family and later the George family lived on the south side of Section 7, Garfield Township, circa 1950. The Marcia Smith collection.

wanted to go back in the barn it just stopped. You would go over headfirst, and the pony would take off. Then if you went on farther north, there was a creek, out in back with trees. We used to like to take a picnic sack and go out there. That was like a party. We didn't do it very often, but it was really pretty back there. I liked the place better than the other farm we lived on because there were so many more trees and more personality. Now they have taken all those trees down. My husband says that's the biggest mistake that they have ever made in this farming country because the trees stop the erosion and the wind and dirt blowing and everything. He thought it was terrible. I can just remember that was a neat place. A neat house, even though it didn't have a bathroom in it. The yard was pretty. The lane was pretty, you know, going up and down there.



Marjorie George Simonson, 1940s and 1990s.
From Marcia Smith's and Marjorie's collections.

My dad never raised cattle as such, but he had cows and they had calves in the spring. And a lot of times they were back in that creek area, and you would have to drive them up to the building site. Usually you didn't do that until the hottest time of day in the evening. Now I never did that much milking. My sister, who was just older than me — she milked, maybe one cow; but she helped with the chores so that meant I had to do the work in the house. I never quite thought it was fair. I used to think, why don't I go out and milk the cow and make her stay in and wash the [cream] separator and make the bed because we never would go to school without having our bed made and the folks' bed made, too.

We always had a big garden. We had a potato patch, and the weeds had gotten so tall, that Dad told me he would give me a dollar if I pulled those weeds out. I can remember pulling on those weeds and ended up sitting on my hiney because they were so hard to pull. He thought I was doing such a great job that he said he would give me a dollar a row instead of a dollar for the whole patch. We had a huge strawberry bed. There was a man who lived on the way to Rolfe, and Dad would hire him to come over and help pick strawberries. I don't know if we took them to town or if somebody stopped to pick them up.

Mother liked to cook. In fact, I didn't really know that much about cooking when I got married for the simple reason — and I have thought about that a lot — I could peel the potatoes or something like that but as far as the meat or the gravy, Mom never taught

me that. But back then you probably couldn't take the chance on some kid making a mess of your meal, so she did that part. When my grandmother came, we had these wonderful, wonderful cinnamon rolls. My mom didn't do that much bread baking, but she could really make a pie. And she never measured anything. She just dumped. This, that, and the other. My brother's favorite thing was when Mother would make date loaf cake, and then we would whip cream and put it on the top. And I asked her, I don't know how many times, "Mother, I would love to have the recipe for your date loaf cake." She never could write it down because she just dumped.

My daughters had a special fondness for my mother. They say that Grandma George was a woman ahead of her time — in her thoughts and what she was going to do. Whether anybody liked it or not — it didn't really bother my mother. She didn't really follow the leaders. She did her own thing. And sometimes, I think that was a problem for my father because my mother was very strong-willed and he was too. I used to think they had some horrendous go-arounds. If my mother wanted to have a beer she would have one. Now women back then didn't do that. If she went to town and some-



Lyman George atop a load of ear corn in a horse-drawn box wagon, 1942. The Marcia Smith collection.

body asked her to go to the tavern, she might go to the tavern. Well you know, that was unheard of, but I wouldn't say she ever abused it. But that's just the way she was, and she loved to be outdoors more than she liked to be in the house. I used to say she just liked to follow Dad around.

My mother also liked to have a clean house, and she used to say, "Well, that's what I've got you girls for." So we kept the house up because she liked to have it clean. And I can remember when she lived on your grandparents' place, going out and shooting squirrels. My husband couldn't believe she did those kinds of things. And she loved to fish. So there were different things about Mother. I don't believe I am being critical of her at all, but that was just the way she was, and we all loved her.

My dad had every magazine there ever was: *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, *Reader's Digest*, *National Geographic*. You see, my dad only went through the seventh grade, but he a was self-educated man and an avid reader. I think he educated himself through his reading. But we were never to touch those magazines until after Dad had read them.

I don't ever remember going without food to eat or clothes on my back. The things we had weren't necessarily the nicest, but they served the purpose. My sisters and I have talked about that. We didn't know we were poor. It just seemed like everybody was poor. My father had more or less been raised like an orphan, and he wouldn't go into debt unless he absolutely had to. I think Dad could have been a bigger farmer and owned the land himself, but he didn't take that step. I don't know if that's a criticism or not because when he retired from the farm, he had enough until he died. I think I have adopted that philosophy. I don't need a lot. Things aren't that important to me. I especially remember the people who lived in the house where your folks moved to. The father was a hired hand, and the family hardly had anything. But I remember, I think her name was Margaret, a girl who was close to my own age. She was always so happy-go-lucky and her parents were too. We had a lot more than they did.

I asked Marjorie if her parents would have voted for the Equal Rights Amendment in Iowa if they had still been alive in 1992. Marjorie replied tentatively and with long pauses, "I don't know. I don't think so. My husband wouldn't have either. And I don't know if I would either because — oh, I don't know — I would have to do some serious thinking about that."

"What do you think would be the pros and cons of it?" I asked.

"Well I think there are things women can do just as well as a man, but there are things they can't do, too, and you just as well be realistic about it. I really think there are enough laws on the books already without doing any more."

Lyman and Arlene George moved from this first place along the road that they rented from my grandfather to our family's homeplace after Grandpa died in 1956 and Grandma moved to town.

Then Hank Baade signed on as a hired hand for my parents from about 1960 to 1962 and lived on the first farm with his wife Marie and their children Karen, David, Joyce, and Susan. Next, John Schurr became a hired hand for our family from 1963 to 1971. He and his wife Katherine and their daughter Elaine lived on the farm. Then when Dan and Mary Allen were first married, they rented the acreage and lived there from about 1971 to 1976. Dan, who gradu-

ated from Rolfe in 1968 — five years behind me — has a long history with the road. In his toddler years, he lived on the farm on the far west end of the road where his dad Les was a hired hand for the Arlo and Mildred Ives family. Then the rest of Dan’s growing up years, he lived a mile away from my road where his dad rented a farm in the same section where my parents lived. After Dan graduated from high school, he went for a short time to an arts school in Omaha, met Mary, and returned with her to the first farm along the road. During some of those years that they were on the acreage, I would often visit my parents and go jogging along the gravel road. However, it was a fearful challenge to get past the Allen’s long lane since they had a mean, lean Doberman pinscher, who if it sensed my presence, would threaten to run me down. That era was a difficult one for Mary, a city girl from Omaha now living on an isolated acreage with little job training. Eventually she earned her college degree and worked two jobs for several years — teaching in the town of Manson some 20 miles from Rolfe and serving as a counselor for troubled youth in Fort Dodge some 40 miles away. Currently, Dan and Mary live at a home he built in Rolfe where he and his brother Roger have a splendidly renovated barn. Dan has also created novel landscape art such as “the world’s largest rocking horse” — a Clydesdale statue on huge rockers. Dan and Roger operate approximately 1,500 acres of land in the Rolfe area, owning some but renting other property, including large tracts for my parents and sister, Martha, along the road.

Gary and Kathy Dahl, along with her relatives, now own the land where the first farm once stood.



A lone corncrib stands in the middle of a field of wind-rowed hay. The crib is the only building left of the farm on the south side of Section 7, Garfield Township, and the hayfield is the last one along the road, circa 1995. The land is farmed by the Dahl family.

From the yet to be published book *The Road I Grew Up On: Requiem for a Vanishing Era*
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