Growing Up on Rt. 66

Farm Life outside Ocoya, Illinois

Theresa M. Ripley & Raymond R. Ripley

---

pdf Edition

Preface 3
No More Corn or Beans 4
Aren't We Having Fun 7
My Sibling 11
Carrying On 15
Life in the Slow Lane 19
The Farm 24
Ocoya 32
Neighbors 35
My Hometowns 39
Money Makes a Family Go Round 44
Twigs 50
Author's Note 57

Preface

The stories included in this collection were written in the 1989-1990. They were started when I lived in Tucson and then continued when I moved back to Portland, Oregon. The one exception is the last piece, Twigs, which was written in 1978 by Ray Ripley, my brother, and given to me that year as a Christmas present.

By 1989 I was the remaining person in my nuclear family for 3 years already, my parents dying summer 1977, and my brother in April 1986. I moved with my husband, Jack Loughary, to Tucson in late 1987, leaving friends and work I'd known for almost 20 years and into a situation where our job prospects did not turn out as anticipated, and we knew none of our neighbors and had no work connections. In other words it was a time of enforced leisure, which I'd always said was something I wanted, having taught classes on same for years at the University of Oregon. Now I had leisure whether I wanted it or not, and I decide it was time to write something besides professional books and articles. The stories came very quickly. It was a time and era embedded in my brain and just waiting for me to put words to paper. I started these stories when I was 44 and over 25 years away from living them on a daily basis.

I have not included all my recollections in this ebook edition. Some are personal or reflect unfavorably on people whom I believe treated my parents less than well as sharecroppers. What remains are the pleasant memories of a childhood growing up in rural Illinois. Thank goodness there are mostly pleasant memories. It is a background I cherish and the people contained within are a part of me now, for that I am ever so grateful.

Theresa Ripley, August, 2011, Eugene, Oregon

No More Corn or Beans

I never met a person raised in the country who did not proclaim a great childhood. What was it: 4-H, chores, isolation and dependence on family, idolization of the tough life, or respect for the land and raising crops? It is a bit of all of this, but mainly the latter. Many rural kids are now city slickers who have no crops in their lives. A part of them will always miss that.

It was my dad, more than any other, who taught me to respect the land. Dad, the man who worked from before sunrise to after sunset in the already long days of spring, summer, and fall in Illinois. It is in the summer days I remember him most. His costume was the same: a gray long-sleeved shirt rolled up to his elbows where the suntan stopped, gray work pants, Sears work boots, canvas work gloves, and always the work cap emblazoned with the insignia of his current favorite tractor (Massey-Harris, International Harvester, but never John Deere) or seed corn (usually Pioneer).

One image of Dad during the summer is especially vivid. Mom and I would wait at the end of the bean or corn rows to bring "the boys" (my dad and brother, Ray) a drink, which was usually Kool-Aid, and something to eat. Dad gets off the tractor, takes the water jug in both hands and puts it to his lips and at the same time uses the upper part of both arms to wipe the sweat off his brow. This motion, all done without a stop, never got the sweat on the tip of his nose. It dripped to the ground as the water jug came back parallel to his stomach. My brother, years later, perfected this action, but the sweat never dripped off his nose the same way.

Dad loved the land. Even "the mudhole." That was a small piece near the house which always flooded at least once a year and had to be replanted again, and sometimes again and again. As the season progressed and the crops were growing, we saw the stunted plants in the mudhole lag behind. Because money earned from the mudhole was minimal, it became a standing joke for my brother to try to garner the profits for a current fancy. The mudhole served as a comparison for the rest of the land. "How does the mudhole look?" was shorthand for, "How do you think we are going to do this year?"

Dad farmed the same land for over 60 years. His parents farmed this land and Dad became a helper at an early age. He and Mom took over when my grandparents moved to town. Most of our neighbors thought my folks owned the land. It was a natural mistake because Dad treated the land as if it were his. Some people knew better. The manager of Ocoya Co-op Grain Elevator sent half the annual profits to the landlords and knew Dad and Mom were sharecroppers. Others probably learned years before that neither Dad nor his dad owned the land; but as their own farms were passed to the next generation, that was forgotten. Most just assumed that Dad and my brother Ray were the owners of the 200 acres, instead of tenants. That's as it should have been as far as the land was concerned because it was in good hands.

Dad responded to the ebb and flow of the seasons. Spring meant the beginning. Summer was caring for what was there. Fall was harvesting. And winter was the catch-up season, time to patch things and take naps. For a man who worked 16-hour days during three seasons, it always amazed me how good he was at doing nothing in the winter. He was a master at naptaking; he trained my dog, Rags, to lead this alternately frenzied and snoozeful lifestyle. The two of them would be within three feet of the oil-burning furnace sawing away hour after hour. At times they would wake to watch wrestling or football on TV or drive to the grain elevator to exchange stories with other farmers and the elevator crew. Then back they would come in the gray pickup with Rag's head and long, dangling ears hanging out the window ready for lunch, which in rural Illinois you call supper.

Dad dropped out of school after the ninth grade to help his father farm. All in all, Dad had been chief steward of our 200 acres for 46 years. I learned early that to be able to say, "the crops are in" was to report the greatest accomplishment possible. After each field was harvested, the family tradition held that Dad would stand at the end rows and give his "vast acres" speech. This amounted to a wide, opening gesture of both arms at shoulder height and saying something about the grandness of this particular field. For all of us it was the exclamation mark that acknowledged the work was done, and we had done it together.

Dad brought in his last set of crops in the fall of 1976. His health had not been good for years. A heart attack 25 years before started the decline that was exacerbated by having Parkinson's disease for 15 years. It was the shaking tremors of Parkinson's, more than aging, that forced him to change his farming style. A man with a shuffling gait and shaky hands has great difficulty operating farm machinery and doing the many necessary tasks required of farmers. Simple chores like changing implements behind the tractor had become difficult. My mother and brother took up some slack, but it was always very clear who was in charge. Dad.

By my assessment 1977 is a year better forgotten. By year's end both my father and mother were dead, neither one of them seeing the crops in. Now, more than two decades later, the events of 1977 are beginning to be history and a bit blurred as far as sequence, but not in overall impact.

Dad's more rapid decline began in January 1977. By the end of June I made the 2000-mile trip home twice during Dad's 3 or 4 hospital stays, 2 short-term nursing stays, one surgery, and several minor strokes. Family hopes ran up and down like a roller coaster. A hopeful time was at the end of May when Dad left the hospital and the outlook was brighter. He rode out of the hospital in a wheelchair sporting his farm cap and told the nurse he was going home to supervise the rest of the spring planting, and he planned to be ready for the fall harvest.

June followed with more minor strokes, surgery, and another nursing home stay. The next time I saw my dad he was thin, unable to move by himself. His speech was slurred. It was during that visit that Dad looked at me and said, "No more corn or beans." He died within the week.

That was July. In August my mother died in a house fire. That left my brother in charge of getting in the crops, a seemingly overwhelming task now. As often happens in rural communities,

the neighbors came through. In a surprise two-day blitz, dozens of neighbors came with their own equipment and helped. As I heard the news 2000 miles away, all I could do was cry. It was over, my dad's vast acres could rest for another year.

I have lived my life as a teacher and career counselor and though I enjoyed my work a great deal, I never felt the passion for it that Dad felt for farming. As a career counselor I talked to hundreds of people about their careers. None have equaled Dad's feeling for a life calling.

Aren't We Having Fun

People often tell me I seem optimistic and happy. Usually I reply, "You should have known my mom." She personified optimism and was my best teacher on that and many other things.

Mom spent a lifetime being a teacher, a good teacher. She had one year of training at a normal school in the mid 1920's. Her formal teaching career ended after seven years in 1934, turning to marriage, farming, and raising two kids. Nevertheless, she rarely lacked students in her adult life. At Mom's funeral a student from the 1930's said she was a teacher far ahead of her time as far as instructional techniques. She took her young charges on field trips and used everyday situations to teach them the 3 R's, the former student said. On the same occasion two of my high school classmates reminded me that, "Blanche got me through Algebra." I had forgotten. She also tutored me and two other friends through Latin taken by correspondence. We took the course, encouraged by Mom, because our high school did not offer foreign languages. She tutored me in almost every subject I studied through age 18, including catechism and 4-H projects.

In addition to teaching, Mom was a farmer. Dad was captain of the crops, my mother and brother were lieutenants, and I barely made private since I left at age 18. Mom's role in the farm operation, in addition to bookkeeper and loyal helper, was keeping everyone's spirits up. This was a great challenge because we had old equipment, distant landlords, and increasing physical limitations of the prime crew. It was during tough times that Mom was at her best.

I have visions of her unloading the corn. The process started when Ray brought the wagon full of corn back from the field where Dad was harvesting. The corn that did not go to the Ocoya Co-op Grain Elevator was stored in our crib. The task at hand was to get the corn from the wagon into the various compartments of the upper part of the crib, which was about the same height as a three-story building. The needed machinery to do this job was an auger which would tip the wagon and a conveyor which carried the corn to the top of the crib. Ray started by putting the front wagon wheels on our antique auger which would lift the front end of the wagon so the corn would go out the back. Mom, kneeling at the back of wagon, was stationed next to the conveyor. After starting the lift process of the wagon, Ray hops into the trailer with a shovel to give a manual assist. Mom, still on her knees, opens and tries to adjust the gate at the back end of the wagon so the corn will come out in an orderly fashion onto the conveyor and up into the crib. That, at least, was the theory.

In reality either the wagon gate, the auger lift, or the conveyor would break (or sometimes all three). The worst scenario would be the wagon rising too fast, the back gate sticking open, and the conveyor stopping. Mom is then bombarded with hundreds of ears of corn. She tries to stop the onslaught with two small, gloved hands. After the corn is picked off the ground; and it makes its way into the crib, she looks at Ray and says, "Aren't we having fun!" and for a moment we were.

Mom raised chickens and had an egg business. This brought her "egg money." Mom thought chickens were dirty, and I agreed. The season started with buying the new chicks and putting them in the brooder house. Some chicks, like some kids, always get picked on; and those chicks came into our house and stayed around the furnace. During lambing season they usually shared the space with a newborn lamb that Mom had delivered at 3 a.m. and brought into the house. My room was right above the furnace so, "cheep, cheep" and "baa, baa" were the usual sounds of a spring awakening.

Mom's business partners were 400 White Leghorn chickens. Being a chicken, I discovered, can be very dangerous. Those chickens that graduated from the brooder house went to the hen house. It was not an automatic graduation, and Mom lost many of her business partners. First was the pecking problem. The initial remedy for that was hanging strips of liver from the ceiling of the brooder house so the chicks would have something meaty to peck besides each other. The bloody failures from that effort came inside. Those chicks that did not get pecked to death were subject to coccidiosis. As a kid, I loved that word and tried to find ways to use it repeatedly. There are not a lot of opportunities to use coccidiosis in everyday speech or writing. Coccidiosis was a big killer. I can't remember Mom could do much about it except put something in the water. Those that survived coccidiosis (gee, 4 uses in 5 sentences) were moved to the hen house.

The chicken business is a lot of work. Those chickens that had successfully lived through chick life still took hours of daily work. The routine in the hen house was feed and water twice a day, and the rest of the time the business partners were suppose to be devoted to laying eggs. Mom was good at culling out her poor producers. It was a touch technique under the chicken's belly that confirmed a good layer. In addition to feeding and watering, cleaning out the hen house periodically was the purview of Dad and Ray. You can imagine the scene if you have 400 chickens cooped up in one building all the time. Putting down fresh straw was the last step in this process. It was a very smelly job.

The most important daily job was gathering the eggs. Mom went out with a bucket and came back with dozens of eggs. She said it was better to do it at least twice a day, three was better, so you would lessen the chances of cracked eggs. With 400 layers count yourself how many eggs there were.

Getting the gathered eggs from the bucket into the egg cartons also involved a series of steps. We didn't have equipment for cleaning, grading, candling, or boxing eggs. This was all done by hand, Mom's to be specific. She did this job in our basement which was only four-feet high, but it was cool in the summer. In the winter the eggs were usually tended in the house. Her dress for this job, and most others, was usually the same. It consisted of a homemade dress (usually out of feed sack material) that was collarless and very plain. I think she used the same pattern for years. In this outfit she cleaned, inspected, and packed eggs for hours. It was, to say the least, a shitty job. I had to be bribed to do it.

Mom was also responsible for selling the eggs. In today's world we would call it marketing, and Mom did a good job of it. At first she sold her eggs to Callahan and Jones, a local wholesaler of farm dairy products and eggs. After a period of time, Mom decided she could do better on her

own. Because our driveway went right out to the legendary Route 66, we had thousands of cars whizzing by our farm daily. The issue was how could one get them to stop and purchase Mom's eggs. Mom's solution was to obtain a 4-foot high billboard picture of a rooster (god knows where she found it) and nail it to a piece of plywood on which she hand lettered her message: "Ripley's Eggs--Believe it or Not." The sign went at the end of our driveway, right on Route 66, and for years we rarely had to sell our eggs to Callahan and Jones.

The egg business brought a steady stream of regulars and one-time buyers to our door. It was rare for a day to go by without a buyer stopping at Ripley's, believe it or not. About half of our customers were from Chicago, which was 100 miles north. Many customers took 30 or more dozen eggs at a crack. Mom knew they were reselling them, but that was alright because she was making a fair profit, too. One of my favorite customers was a woman from Chicago who baked fruitcakes commercially. She stopped year round, but at Christmas time she would come several weeks in a row and get dozens and dozens of eggs. We always got plenty of free fruitcake from her; unfortunately, none of us liked fruitcake.

Mom's customers also became her friends, and she knew every customer's family members and would often knit surprise gifts for them. "It just goes with the eggs," she said as they protested when they paid for the eggs. The customers remembered Mom in return. Mom had great difficulty in getting enough egg cartons. Many a customer would stop, not even wanting eggs, to drop off scores of egg cartons they had saved for her and also had asked their neighbors to save. Mom rarely met a person who did not become a friend in a very short period of time. This included all of her neighbors in the area as well as the Chicago customers who, in lifestyle, were much different than the woman they met on the farm.

So what did Mom do with the egg money? She bought many things for Ray and I, but in later years the money was earmarked for trips. Mom always wanted to travel. For a person who had never been more than two states away from Illinois she had a passion for wanting to know about far away places. She was curious about people, places, and things; and travel was her fondest dream. She loved everything about travel: anticipating it, doing it, and recalling it. In fact her anticipation and recall hours much exceeded our actual travel. During my early years we spent five days every summer at the Wisconsin Dells. For short trips, there was not a state park within a day's drive we had not seen twice, often taking one or two cousins along with us. Savoring the trip planning during the deepest snows of winter was her special joy. She made road logs, trip books, picture books, and read everything about where we were going. When I was in my teens, we managed three trips out West, all compliments of egg money. These included trips to Mt. Rushmore, or "the faces" as Mom called it; Yellowstone Park; Black Hills; and one long trip out to the Pacific Ocean. These trips were all well recorded and hour upon hour was spent looking at the books and slides and even discussing the expense records kept.

Even though Mom never particularly liked chickens, I note that one of her favorite books was *The Egg and I.* She, too, could see the humor in her life with the chickens.

Mom's last year was a major challenge to a person, who for no reason, would enter a room and say, "Happy, happy, happy!"

The year was 1977. Dad was in and out of the hospital and a nursing home several times from January to June. Mom and Ray had put in the spring crops with exhaustingly long hours, combined with daily hospital or nursing home visits. Dad died in mid July. When I was home for the funeral, Mom said, "I want to come out and see you on August 14. I want to have something to look forward to on that day." It would have been their 43rd anniversary.

Mom came to Oregon. It was the first time she had ever flown. "Yes, I think I like flying," she said as I picked her up at the airport. In the week's visit she met many of my friends, and they marveled at this 69-year-old woman talking about going home to bring in the crops.

Mom returned to Illinois on August 21 and was met at O'Hare by my brother and his wife. Mom phoned as soon as she got home. She was tired, but so excited. She met a widow on the plane who told her to look ahead, not back. She thought she was ready to do that. During our visit in Oregon she talked about taking a trip to Europe with a cousin and possibly even going to school.

During the next week Mom told her many friends and two sisters about the trip to Oregon. I called Mom on the evening of August 27. She was looking at the trip book we had made the week before chronicling her trip to Oregon. She was looking forward to having it this winter she said. "We should plan another trip; maybe to San Diego so I can meet your friends there," she thought. "Yes, we should do that," I said. We said our goodbyes.

About eight hours later, at two a.m., the phone rang and woke me. It was Ray sobbing and trying to get out some words. He finally managed to say that Mom has joined Dad now. There had been a fire, the house was destroyed, and Mom was dead.

The ensuing months were some of the most difficult I've faced. When I was not absolutely occupied doing something, my mind was in constant motion with Mom and Dad. Would life ever seem normal again? Would I ever sleep through the night again? Would I ever comprehend the enormity of the loss?

A new year came, 1978, and I knew it had to be better. Mom's birthday was January 20, and I planned to celebrate it. She would have been 70. Eight months before I had applied for a Fulbright scholarship to Sweden. In the aftermath of two deaths, the application had been forgotten. On that day, Mom's birthday, I received notice that I had been awarded the Fulbright award and a trip to Sweden.

Since then, I have traveled, worked, and lived on six continents and become a traveler. Mom would like that.

My Sibling

He was working in their shoe store on a Saturday afternoon when something exploded in his head. He had just returned from his uncle's graveside service. On the trip to the hospital, mumbling his last intelligible words, he asked Janice, his wife, "Is the mudhole alright?" The mudhole. Ray was back on the 200 acres that he had helped farm since the late 1930's. He had not farmed the mudhole for eight years.

Ray was 51 when he died in 1986. He lived in our Midwest farming community of 1000 for all of those 51 years. People agree Ray was a hell of a guy. The kind who would help people at a moment's notice without being asked or expecting to be thanked.

His funeral reflected that. By the end of the two-day memorial more than 800 people had signed the guest book, and more came but did not have the opportunity to stand in line and sign their name. He was well liked and consequently well remembered. Ray, in other words, was important.

What made Ray important? Was he a community philanthropist? Was he the town banker? Was he the town mayor? He was none of these things, but he was more. I'll give a sister's eye view to Ray and his life.

Ray was born in 1935 and almost 10 years my senior. Even though my memories of young Ray are limited by our age difference, his early memories of me are not. They are recorded with loving care in a book he made for me in 1979 entitled *Twigs.* His title was a take off on the then popular *Roots* TV mini-series and book. He figured the Ripley saga was not quite as magnificent as Kunta Kinte from Africa, so we would be twigs. In it he describes his early years and how much he looked forward to a new sibling. He wrote that his gift for the newcomer was a toy gun, and he was quite disappointed that the baby showed so little interest in his gift. Early on he named me Sibby, short for sibling. The rest of the family shortened it further to Sib. It stuck for a long time.

My earliest memories of Ray are the recollections of a small kid with a teenage brother. I remember the brother who would rather go out with his best friends; Jerry, Dave, and Bob; than spend time with me. Going along with them was out of the question. But there was much fun at home. Our backyard pasture was a quarter of an acre and just the right size for the neighborhood (if you can call Ocoya with its one grain elevator and four houses a neighborhood) baseball field. The cows were in the pasture/baseball field during the day, and many a player stepped on cow dung going back to catch a fly. The area between the crib and machine shed was usually set up for horseshoes; and my dad, particularly, was a good player. Many summer evenings were spent making ice cream with Ray as chief turner and either neighbors or family as guests.

The upstairs of our farm house was reached through a narrow, steep staircase which opened into Ray's room. You walked through Ray's room to get to my room. Because of this arrangement, I had a good opportunity to view many of Ray's activities. Ray's room was filled with pennants and stacks and stacks of comic books, mostly Westerns but also some issues of Archie and Jughead. He read for hour upon hour and catalogued his collection meticulously in an old cabinet. He also went through his woodburning phase and the distinctive odor filtered into my room. Ray also tried having international pen pals and one particular correspondent, Zizzy from Algiers, was notable. Zizzy initially thought she was writing another girl; but even after the gender was corrected, they wrote for many years. Ray got several boxes of dates as a part of that relationship.

When Ray entered high school, I was 4 years old. By then Ray was my idol of all things good and wonderful, and I followed him and his activities as close as he would allow for the next four years. The name, picture, and vital statistics of all Ray's 30+ classmates in the class of '53 at Chenoa High School was emblazoned in my mind. I grew up with these people from 1949-53, and they were equally "my classmates" as I attended all the school games and other class functions. Ray had the lead in the Senior play titled *Me and My Shadow.* I was his at-home rehearsal companion and knew most of his lines by heart. As a member of the audience the night of the play, I remember poking Mom and saying, "He said it wrong."

Even though Ray did not get the best grades in his class (mainly because he never brought home a book), I would speculate he was viewed as the best speaker of both dramatic and comic material. He demonstrated his ability beyond Chenoa on a number of occasions. One was the class senior trip when the group went to Mackinac Island, Michigan, on a boat. There were hundreds of guests, and there was a talent contest. Ray not only competed, he came home with the 1st place trophy for his comic act.

Ray left for college in the fall of 1953. He wanted to be a ag teacher. He was encouraged by his high school ag teacher and his parents. I don't remember many family discussions regarding Ray's occupational choices, with one exception. One Saturday after catechism which was taught by our parish priest, Ray arrived home and announced that he and Father had decided that Ray would enter the priesthood. Mom said, "No you're not!" and that's all we ever heard about that. Other Catholic families probably would have rejoiced, but not this one. My parents occupational choices for their son remained ag teacher and/or farmer.

His college choice was ISNU in Normal, about 30 miles away. It was the same school where his mother had earned her teaching certificate. He lived just across the street from campus and worked at a restaurant right down the street called The Pilgrim, the Pil for short. We made several visits to campus that fall semester. Being eight years old, I do not know what the 18-year-old freshmen was experiencing; but he seemed to be enjoying it and his grades were acceptable.

A couple of months later during the winter of 1954 Dad had a heart attack. It was not life threatening, but he had to quite farm work for a period of time. There was no alternative. Ray must quit college and come home and farm. As I heard my parents talk over the decision, Dad cried. It was the only time I saw him cry--ever.

Ray never returned to college. Instead he worked at Gray Metal Company in Chenoa doing tool and die work as well as farm with Dad. Why this occurred is a mystery to me.

Somewhere in this era Ray met Janice; and, as they say, the rest is history. They married January 27, 1957. Ray was 21 and Janice was 17. In short order Ray and Janice established a farm about one half mile from us. They were tenant farmers on 160 acres. Because Dad and Mom had the machinery and years of know how, it became a joint operation between our 200 acres and Ray's 160 acres. Ray and Janice soon became parents, and I became an aunt at age 12. Because of the close proximity of the two families I felt I had a new brother, this time younger, instead of a nephew.

Ray often had breakfast and lunch at our place. I had two houses that seemed like home, and Ray's house had running water and an inside toilet. Because of this arrangement I never felt I lost a brother; we just had a vacant room to store stuff in upstairs.

The two families blended together and worked together. By the time I left for college in 1962 Ray's oldest son was five and another, age two, was on the scene. When I had finished college, a daughter had arrived; and the two boys were already working in the field.

In the stories I wrote about Dad and Mom I described how this team worked together. They were a marvelous crew. Ray was clearly the muscle of the trio. My brother, at 6'2", in my eyes could do anything he set his mind to, and he often did.

Unlike his father, Ray was always involved in the community in addition to farming. He was elected to the school board for over a decade and served for years as president. Teachers, parents, students, and administrators alike praised his efforts and contributions. He also taught catechism. Anytime I was home to visit my parents, or later just Ray, it was clear he was known and respected by all.

Ray clerked at a local shoe store during the winter season for twenty years. Many area residents waited to buy shoes until the days Ray worked because he was just so darn nice to deal with. Ray's wife, Janice, started clerking at the same store in the late 60's. They purchased the store in 1985 with Janice being manager.

My nuclear family were last together, all in good health, in the summer of 1976. I had gone home to celebrate the bicentennial in Chenoa, where else would one want to be on that particular 4th? Chenoa is renown for its July 4th celebrations. The small community swells 5 or 6 times its size for the two-day celebration.

Dad, Mom, and I were sitting together around the kitchen table in early morning eating hardtack. This is toast fixed in the oven until entirely dry and crisp on which you spread liverwurst or peanut butter. Believe me, it is good. Ray dropped in, got a cup of coffee, and sat down. Mom said, "Isn't it nice--just the four of us." And it was.

In 1977 Mom and Dad died. Even though I saw my brother only five times from 1978-85, I can't imagine feeling closer to a sibling. We had endured Dad and Mom's death, and we knew there was no one else that knew our portion of the Ripley story like we did. Never stated; there

was a bond that was just understood. It was also during this time that we began a true correspondence. Ray was an interesting and skillful writer. He wrote to me about his family and at times would describe his feelings about the folks passing. They are good letters, and I saved them all.

Ray quit farming in 1978 and had his farm auction in December. After 22 years, he was out of farming, more if you count his youth. Next stop was being an implement salesperson for International Harvester. Ray's timing was faulty because IH was undergoing massive losses. His job lasted less than two years. Next, and final stop, was the Soil Conservation Service as Executive Director. My only contribution to getting his job was writing his resume. He got the job over college graduate applicants; and when I found that out, it was hard to keep my head a reasonable size that day. What a great position for Ray; an opportunity to teach farmers about soil conservation and save the precious soils of Illinois. In the end he did become an ag teacher to the most important group, the actual farmers. Ray put me on the mailing list for his Soil Conservation Service newsletter (which he wrote), described every new conservation plan to me, and just assumed I was fully interested. With Ray's enthusiasm you could not be otherwise.

The last time I saw Ray was in August 1985 when I went home for a four-day visit. Ray had arranged to take all four days off work, and we were inseparable during the visit. For one of those days a friend of mine from Sweden, who was currently studying in Chicago, came down on the bus to visit what I told him would be "the real Illinois." Ray had arranged for my friend to see farming operations and described to him the entire process of growing crops. My friend could not believe his depth of knowledge and powers of description. For one part of the day's lesson, Ray took us in the old, familiar grey truck with **Ray Ripley** printed on the side to a patch of prairie grass about six miles from home. Ray described to the Swedish visitor how this grass had never been disturbed, and it was the same as when the first settlers came to Illinois. He went on with stories about the land in such a poetic way that I was moved deeply. It left quite an impression on my Swedish friend as well as myself.

It is many years since Ray's death, and I still get lumps in my throat when I think of him. I tried to think of the essence of the people I am writing about. In Dad's case it was his passion for farming, and in Mom's it was her optimism. For Ray I cannot yet decide what I think captures his essence. There is so much. Maybe later I can write more. I have become more tolerant of time passing.

I have one strong feeling by Ray's passing and that is being left as the sole survivor of our nuclear family.

Who is left to tend the land? I am a very poor steward. I did not pay attention to the excellent teachers I had when I had the opportunity. But I have learned from that and now try to learn when opportunities present themselves.

Carrying On

I was born during harvest season in 1944. My first three weeks were spent at St. James Hospital in Pontiac, Illinois. My mother went home 10 days after my birth (the typical stay for an OB patient then) to help with the remaining harvest, and I followed a week and a half later. This was my introduction to farm life. First come crops, and then people.

We Ripleys, meaning my dad, liked to have clean bean fields. Are bean fields dirty? Yes, in my dad's judgement, if they had any butterprint, corn, or thistle plants in them. It was a yearly job to walk through our bean fields (as much as 100 acres) and weed out all disreputable plants.

My initiation to the Ripley Hoeing Club was at age two. Apparently, I had neither liking nor enthusiasm for the task. As we finished one swipe of the field, Mom observed that I was hoeless and asked me where I put it. I responded with something like, "me tired, put it down." This was bad news for the combine that would go through the field later in the season. So the rest of the Ripley Hoeing Club had to spend a few hours searching for my errant hoe. It was at this juncture that the Ripleys probably began to wonder if I was good farming material. They were a perceptive group!

I was introduced to another major farm job when I was about 8. It was working on the haying crew. Hay bales were brought in from the field on large flat-bed wagons. As each wagon arrived from the field it was parked under the large trap door of the barn loft. The two men on the wagon, usually Ray and one of the neighbors, stuck large tongs into the bales. The tongs were attached to a rope and tackle which were used to lift the bales into the barn. That's where Mom and I came in. We would both pull on the rope until the bales were even with the barn loft. Then after the bales worked their way into the barn, there was the final jerk on the rope which loosen the tongs from the bales. Mom and I did fine, except for that final, special jerk. It was not uncommon for Ray to get off the wagon and give the needed jerk and then scamper back to the wagon to set more bales. I attribute our difficulty to lack of strength; and as Mom would say, not keeping our lips pursed correctly. For whatever reason, my farming career was continuing to falter.

I did not do much better with chickens. I really hated chickens, and I especially disliked working in the henhouse. Feeding the chickens was a barely tolerable task, but gathering eggs was not. Mother was a natural at this, and I often watched her and tried to imitate her technique. It appeared simple enough. She slipped her hand in under a laying chicken and produced a lovely white egg. If I tried to do the same thing, in the same way, all I got was a pecked hand and a cracked egg. I knew what was wrong: my exit was too quick. Because I feared the pecking so much, I began to devise my own techniques. The one that worked the best was to take a handful of corn cobs with me into the henhouse and throw them at the chickens in the nests until they vacated, leaving the coveted eggs unattended. It took Mom a while to discover why the hens

always seemed to be upset after my departure. When it was clear what was happening, Mom decided I was not suited for this work and turned me to feeding the calves and lambs.

This is one place I can report some success, up to a point. I liked the baby lambs and calves and was assisted on these chores with one to 25 of our resident cats. Our farm was never without cats. They lived in the barn, under the house, and were always underfoot. But they were great buddies for me. We, the cats and I, made quite a parade during chore time as I went to the barn to get the feed and then walked across the barnyard to the respective baby animals with at least 10 cats following me.

When the calves were young, I brought them warm milk in a bucket. I usually had two calves and two buckets. I would gather the calves and hold on to the two buckets as best I could. You needed to hold on to the buckets because the calves would immediately kick or knock over their supper. As soon as the calves got a little bigger and stronger, they would buck their heads; and as soon as one would finish, it would try to nuzzle out the other calf. I began to understand clearly the saying, "don't cry over spilt milk" because I spilt a lot of it. It seems I had found another farm task at which I was inept.

I was equally inept around grown cattle. Every night in the summer we had to move the cows from one pasture to another. The job of every Ripley present (too bad there were only four of us) was to stake out 1/4 of the open area and make sure the cows did not come through our area but moved on to the other pasture toward the barn. Somehow I imagined that the cows were more sinister than they were (too many Western movies, I guess) and hated the daily job.

My mother, father, and brother were beginning to wonder if I had any promise at all. My brother got a horse called Sonny Boy; and I am sure they thought Sib (that's what they called me) would like the horse also. What girl does not like horses? The first time I rode Sonny Boy I fell off and that was the end of that, thank you.

It was getting discouraging for all of us to find something Sib could do even moderately well. By this time I was about 10, an important time in a rural kid's life because at 10 they are eligible to join 4-H. 4-H was the largest organization of rural youth in the world. Our symbol was a green four-leaf clover with an H on each leaf. Many people have seen the symbol, but not all are sure what it means. The H's stand for head, heart, hands, and health. The pledge, which we recited at every meeting was, "I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service, and my health to better living for my club, my community, and my country." Our local club was called The Busy Pikers (a pretty bad start, I know, but we lived in Pike Township).

I was eager to do several projects that first year, but Mom helped me decide to take just one. It was You Learn to Bake. Each 4-H project came with a stapled book with green covers, front and back. In between the covers were the instructions for how to carry out the project and places to record everything you did. Mom did her best to guarantee success during that first year. She even got rid of the old cookstove which burned cobs and coal and got a new gas stove.

Her hopes were higher than my achievements, but nevertheless I was awarded a B and red ribbon at the Livingston County Fair that year for the cookies. The cookies were displayed in the very precise measurements of a regulation 4-H display box. The box took me, or more correctly Mom and Dad, much longer to make than the cookies. It actually looked better than the three little shortbread cookies inside. We reused the box for the next 10 years.

The next year the 4-H projects selected were You Learn to Sew and ABC's of Foods. Mom had worked her way up to supervising two projects. The sewing project, especially, was a challenge. It seemed simple enough. The project required a gathered skirt with an elastic waist and a matching fringed scarf. But there is something called "the 4-H way" which is evidently very different than anything Mom was use to doing. Mom and a neighbor woman whose daughter was also a You Learn to Sew-er worked for hours getting our skirts done as Connie, the daughter, and I played.

Mom learned a lot the first two years I was in 4-H. For the rest of my 10-year tenure in 4-H I mainly did my own 4-H projects. My family suffered through Swedish Tea Ring, Chicken Fried Steak, Stuffed Pork Chops, Funny Cake, and lots and lots of Banana Bread. We also learned how to serve meals in compromise and family style. Although I cannot remember entirely the difference between the styles of service, I believe the Ripley crew preferred compromise style service which meant Dad did not have to dish up the meal.

I can say I had some success in 4-H at the local, county, and state level. At the local level I eventually became a junior leader where I assisted first and second year 4-Hers. It was then that I first got to make one of those gathered skirts with a matching fringed scarf. At the county level I had the opportunity to participate in speech, talent, and demonstration contests. The local club, which was The Busy Pikers, chose members every year to compete in the various county contests. I had this opportunity during the early years in my 4-H career and was often the youngest participate in many county-wide contests. My only experience with the state fair (other than our yearly family odysseys to it) was with a photography project. I received a first place at the county fair; and my photography project went to the state fair, where it received fifth place.

But all of this did not really make me a better farmer. One year I joined what was then called Boy's 4-H and took gardening. We always had a large garden so that seemed the natural and easiest thing to do (by this time Mom was out of the picture and I had to do my own projects). The best I can say about Boy's 4-H was you were around boys, all wearing their blue 4-H jackets with yellow stitching.

My farm career was not enhanced by high school. During my era girls did not take "ag" courses. Most girls took home economics. I had two years of home "ec" and even won the Betty Crocker Award my senior year. (Betty Crocker probably would not be pleased to know that I was the only girl in class to wait until her 40's to marry.) But home economics, like girl's 4-H, does not really teach you to farm. I considered careers as both a high school home economics teacher or a county home extension agent. But by my senior year in high school I had decided to pursue a career either as a business education teacher or a business career (in that era meaning being a secretary).

The closest I came to being employed in agriculture was working for the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), which was housed next to the Soil Conservation Service. Both are under the umbrella of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). For three summers I worked for the ASCS at the USDA. A standard office joke was to see how fast you could say ASCS at the USDA. Starting at age 17 it was my job to assess whether or not farmers were complying with the government programs. In order to get subsidies, the farmer had to comply with planting only so much corn, beans, wheat, or whatever. This, like all government programs, had very long, complex procedures.

First, aerial photos were taken of the land. ASCS employees went to each participating farm in the county and measured the farmer's actual crops and plotted it on the aerial maps. Then the aerial maps were brought into the office where we had to calculate the acreage of each field in the government program. It was taxing math work because there are very few regular shaped fields. I found creative ways to make triangles, rectangles, and squares out of odd-shaped fields and then come up with the total acreage. It was our responsibility to indicate whether or not the farmer was in compliance with the program. If he was over, it was marked in big red letters. If the farmer was not in compliance, it could mean thousands of dollars to him. As you might well imagine, farmers who got an over compliance letter came right into the office. It was the job of the person who had done the report to deal with the farmer. There I was at age 17 dealing with 50-year-old farmers who were hopping mad, and I was backing up my measurements and calculations of irregular fields to him. It was a growth producing job as we say. It was also another time when I wondered if farm life was for me.

The summer after my sophomore year was the last I worked for the ASCS. After my junior year in college, I worked at a resort in Michigan, something that I had wanted to do for the last two summers. It was the beginning of the drift away from the farm. Even though I had been to college for two years, it was a college just 25 miles from home and I managed not to encounter much new except for classwork. My roommates were friends from high school, and I mainly kept my nose stuck in a book. The junior summer changed that. The Michigan resort was a Jewish resort catering to the Jewish people of Chicago and Detroit; I had never been around Jewish people. Half of the workers at the resort were blacks from the South; I had never been around blacks. The rest of the workers were from all over the U.S., and most of them had never spent any time on a farm. It was an eye opener for the Ocoya farm girl. The year was 1965 and Sib was turning 21.

Now it is 25 years later. What remains of the farm for Sib? First and foremost, farm life gave me a solid base. My last major farm stay was in the summer of 1964 as I worked at the ASCS. Since then I have traveled a great deal and met a wide variety of people. For me that has been a relatively easy thing to do. The reason I think this is so is because I have always been able to look back to a time when I lived with people who moved with the ebb and flow of the seasons. A time when neighbors seldom moved; and grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins lived close by. A time when the work was hard, but the rewards were sweet. A time when all had to be interdependent. It is a time that has passed, but memory keeps it alive.

Life in the Slow Lane

Almost everyone I know grew up in a neighborhood. Their stories about the multiplicity of big and small city neighbors or suburban ghettos interest me tremendously. As a rural kid, I did not have neighborhoods. But I did live by Route 66, which provided all the diversity one needed.

By the time I was ten Route 66 was a mighty four-lane highway. It was the artery between Chicago and Los Angeles, famous enough by itself, but immortalized by TV and song while I lived on its perimeter. I fantasized that Todd and Buzz from the TV series **Route 66** would drive down our front lane in their Corvette some evening. I really believed that because everyone else seemed to drop by. George Makaris, Buzz, was so classically handsome that I certainly would have liked to meet him.

Route 66 had a friendliness about it the modern interstates never attain with their regulated entrances and exits. Everyone who lived on Route 66 had their own driveways to the road. Thus, passersby had access to every farmhouse and small town enroute. We intermingled, and it made my best early education on the variety of people who lived and traveled in America. This exchange allowed me to appreciate the lives of people far different from a tenant farm family tending 200 acres 100 miles south of Chicago. With Route 66 in our back pocket, anybody from anywhere at anytime might venture into our lane; and, as you'll see, they often did.

According to family stories I was born, or more specifically, brought home from the hospital at age three weeks in October 1944. At this very time the first two lanes of Route 66 were being resurfaced so it made getting the new baby into the house difficult. I vividly recall the next two lanes being poured about 1954 or 55 because it impeded traveling the well-worn path to Ocoya which was on the opposite side of the road. My parents were not pleased about the additional two lanes. It meant greater difficulty getting our farm equipment across Route 66, which we needed to do, because the grain elevator and my brother's farm were on the other side. Getting farm equipment, which could be one tractor with two trailers hitched behind, across two lanes was difficult enough; but after 1955, four lanes had to be managed. The median strip between the lanes was very narrow, and my mother always imagined the worst on the days when Dad and Ray, my brother, had to do a lot of crossing. In addition to the difficult crossings it meant "more traffic coming into and out of Chicago," as my dad would say. That translated into more noise and the possibility of more people coming into our lane for a variety of reasons.

I never thought negatively about more people and more traffic because living on the lifeline between Chicago and Los Angeles had an excitement all its own. To meet people going to and from distant places was my desire. Hardly a two-week period went by that we were not assisting some stranded traveler. Dad and Ray were good mechanics, and they would give what mechanical help they could. The most common problem was overheated radiators in the summer. Lots of water was carried out to the waiting, overheated, steaming cars. Running out of gas was a close second to overheated cars. Often we would need to take gas from our large gas

storage tank used for our farm equipment to fill a particularly inept traveler's tank who had reached empty near the Ripley farm. In addition to overheating and running out of gas, the litany of car problems included flat tires and stalled engines. I can still see men standing by their cars with quizzical looks on their faces. Dad and Ray believed city people knew little or nothing about cars or engines. The evidence mounted for this over the years.

Mom always made these stranded travelers feel welcome and often fed them. In cold weather it was not uncommon to have a whole family huddled in our small, cold living room. It seemed the single traveler rarely got in trouble; it was families with small children, older cars, and little money who needed our attention. Mom was particularly good in these cases and ended up mothering the mother as well as the children in attendance. Dad was outside trying to get the car to start or assessing whether someone else had to be brought in to finish the job. It was all too common that these winter travelers rarely had the right clothes. They evidently left home without boots, gloves, hats, or coats to help with the necessary outside work. They stayed inside where a drama was being played out in our living room about the upset plans and the decisions that needed to be made. We housed more than one stranded traveler overnight as they worked through the crisis.

My parents never took money for this except to pay for the supplied gas. Ray might take money for changing a tire. The real payment usually came two or three weeks later when we got postcards from people as they reached their destination and a sincere thanks for the assist. Our kitchen overflowed with such cards; and after we had running water, Mom use to tack them above the sink to look at while she worked. Before that they were usually tossed in the oak sideboard that dominated the kitchen/dining room.

Route 66 and the railroad that paralleled it were also traveled by people on foot, and we met scores of them. Most people would call them bums or vagrants (today's term would be homeless); but as far as I could tell, my parents treated them with the same respect as they would anyone else. A typical scene would go like this. One of us would be looking out the front window and down the lane and see an older man, at least he looked old, with a hat and old wool jacket (even in summer) lumbering up the road. Often they were not carrying anything; or at times a sack or small satchel. We knew the request that was coming; it was for "a bite to eat." Mom would start rummaging through the refrigerator even before they came to the door and fix a sandwich and a glass of milk. If the road traveler was lucky, Mom would have a piece of sour cream chocolate cake available. In the summer the outside well platform was the designated eating area and in the colder months it was the back porch. We did not invite them into the house, but our hospitality seemed congenial enough to our visitors. Even if Mom and I were alone in the house, there was no fear. Usually there was not a lot of conversation with these road travelers. They just ate and moved on. I often wondered where they came from and where they were going, but my curiosity never went far enough to try to engage them in conversation. None of them seemed particularly fond of children, and they did not try to talk with me. Docile, expressionless, and forlorn are the main words I associate with these travelers. I have no idea what they thought of the farm family they encountered; thanks were never overwhelming from this group.

The only times I remember fearing life on Route 66 was when a convict escaped from the Pontiac medium security prison which was about five miles north. The natural escape route was along the highway to flag down a car, hop a freight, or go to a farmhouse near the road. Since almost 100% of Pontiac prisoners were from the south side of Chicago, it was 9 chances out of 10 that the prisoner was black, or colored to use the word of that era. Hard to hide in this 100% white farm area. Many escapes occurred, but no escapees appeared at the Ripley doorstep. Not surprising when I really begin to think about it, since Chicago was north, not south, from the prison. Dad did have a shotgun and rifle hung above the inside kitchen door. He said they were for getting coyotes, wolves, or other varmint interlopers; but who knows, an interloper comes in many shapes and sizes.

Mom's egg business provided the most contact with Route 66 travelers. Most days found at least one egg buyer in from the road, not able to resist Mom's hand-lettered **Ripley's Eggs, Believe it or Not** sign. Mom considered it a wasted day if no one stopped, particularly if she had dozens of eggs on hand. She encouraged me often in a joking way to stand out underneath the sign and wave people into our farm. "Go make yourself useful," she would say. I believe she would have done it herself if Raymond (as she called Dad) would have approved, which he would not.

Mom's inventory was usually good, but some times she was out of eggs. It was not beyond Mom to ask me to entertain the potential customer who had just driven in as she went out to the henhouse to see if her business partners were cooperating. She would come back and say, "I've got a half dozen real fresh eggs. How will that do?" It usually did real well, and Mom could assure herself that if these people ever traveled Route 66 again they would probably stop. Town folks, we discovered, rarely got fresh eggs. Their only complaint about Ripley eggs was they could not boil the eggs and peel off the shell the next day. Mom had to educate these customers that eggs had to be a few days old before they had that thin membrane that made peeling so easy. Store-bought eggs were never that fresh so peeling was never a problem with them.

Route 66 provided two other sources of income besides selling eggs. One was renting billboard space. We had at least three billboards on our strip of Route 66. Payment was minimal ($5 a year and a box of candy), but it must have been worth giving up a few stalks of corn and circling the machinery around the wooden billboard frames. The farmer a mile farther south had the Burma Shave signs. My favorite: "Said Farmer Brown, who was bald on top, I wish I could rotate the crop." The second income from the highway was raising test plots of seed corn. Our arrangement was with Pioneer Seed Corn, and they furnished varieties of seed corn which we planted. Pioneer put up small signs which gave the lot numbers of the particular seed corn. Farmers traveling Route 66 travelers assessed for themselves which variety did what.

Besides all the people who came off Route 66, the road itself provided a daily source of entertainment. Especially in summer. I would perch out on the front porch rail and identify by make, model, and year every car that was heading south. (I knew every American made car of the 50's.) The folks, too, would get in the act and bring their two aluminum porch chairs out to the front lawn and watch the parade going by. Sitting in the back yard was quieter, but it was not

as interesting. The railroad tracks paralleled Route 66. Thus, entertainment widened to counting the number of railroad cars on any one train. It was always over 100.

Looking back, Route 66 was a big part of growing up for me. Being essentially an only child (my brother was 10 years older than I) and living on a farm could have been very isolating. A farming community has a sameness about it which is wonderful and awful at the same time. The sameness means that everyone dresses alike, has the same Midwest twang in their voice, and is concerned about the same things (the crops, weather, livestock, and government farm programs). Route 66 brought new faces, experiences, and challenges. It introduced me to people who did not wear farm caps and overalls. I met my first blacks usually riding in the stereotypical shiny, big cars that often overheated. I also met Hispanics, Polish people, Jewish people, and about every ethnic group that lived in Chicago. It gave me the opportunity to see my parents relate with people under a variety of circumstances, and they did it well.

I also learned that "city folks" did not know much about farmers. Dad was amused for days over an egg buyer asking him whether our corn was "cow corn or people corn." City dwellers seemed to be mystified that we were almost entirely self-sufficient. We grew our own vegetables, fruit, beef, pork, hauled away our own trash, butchered our own beef, slaughtered and dressed our own chickens, made most of our clothes, did repairs on machinery and cars, put up and mended our own fences, and shoveled out our driveways in winter storms. In our spare time we did the main work of tending the crops and livestock and also assisted travelers on Route 66.

Route 66, at least our portion of it, ceased to exist in the early 1970's as it was replaced section by section with Interstate 55. The interstate was built about a mile and a half north of our farm (right next to the farm of my godparents who were very displeased at the prospect of being neighbors to the interstate), and Mom and Dad could no longer hear the traffic of those cars traveling down the road. The interstate, of course, had no exits to the rural farms on its route; but since Mom's egg business had been stopped a few years before, the most positive aspect to being by the road was gone.

By the time the interstate was built I was living in Oregon. On one of my visits home the final portion of our part of Interstate 55 was being completed. My parents always had little treats in mind when I came to visit. For this visit one of the treats was to take me out and drive over a completed, but yet to be used, overpass of the new interstate. The overpass raised us about 20 feet above the surrounding area. To my folks this was a great view of the countryside. Having lived in and around the hills and mountains of Oregon for a time, I was not nearly as impressed with being 20 feet above the flat ground of downstate Illinois. But to them this was great. I would imagine that Mom could tell it would be much easier to get farm equipment across the highway this way, except now we no longer needed to do it since the elevator, our farm, and Ray's farm were all on the same side of the interstate. We had finally integrated.

Old Route 66 remains as a nameless secondary road used by the locals to travel between the small towns that Route 66 had once linked and the interstate now bypasses. By 1983 I had gained a fond appreciation of having lived next to the lifeline of America called Route 66 and had visions of writing a book about the grand road. Many others had done it, but why should that

stop me. My brother encouraged the project and had the local volunteer librarian (who had been my sophomore English teacher, now retired) gather all kinds of material from the state library. Jack, coauthor on many projects, thought it a good idea; and we fantasized a trip across as much of old Route 66 as we could taking photographs and writing stories along the way.

In the summer of 1983 I went home to visit Ray and his family, and we talked and did some research on the Route 66 project and had great fun doing so. Ray took me to the state police headquarters in our area which was still situated on old Route 66 (no longer called that) and the police officer in charge had an original Route 66 sign up on the wall. (The Route 66 signs had been taken down years before much like a basketball team retires the number of a favorite player.) We took the sign off the wall, took it outside, and nailed it up on an old post with Route 66 in the background and took pictures. The favorite picture I have of Ray is him standing by the Route 66 sign with the old highway in the background. That picture now rests on my desk.

More years have passed. My parents and brother have died, and Jack (who is now my husband) and I have not written a book about Route 66 or even traveled it. Last year I found a large poster calendar that featured Route 66 as its theme and immediately snapped it up and loved looking at it all year. The calendar year has passed, but I have been unable to throw the poster away. Pretty soon I will be watching **Nick at Night** to view old episodes of **Route 66**.

Where will this stop? I guess I just like being a part of the folklore that surrounds Route 66. I probably will never write a book about Route 66, but I have tried to capture in words what it was like to be a part of this living piece of concrete.

The Farm

The farm. The words evoke a myriad of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch. Our 200 acres did not differ much from other farms except our buildings were older and the equipment more antiquated. The farm is where I spent my youth, and the images of it are indelibly printed on my mind.

The nucleus of any farm is the acreage, but for me the heart was the farmhouse and surrounding buildings. They were my childhood domain. The farmhouse was supposedly over 100 years old. My parents told me that a similar farmhouse was built at the same time with the same plan about a mile away near the Ocoya Pond. That house had not been lived in for years; the decay was very evident; and it was finally razed. Our house stayed on, and in the 1950s it got white aluminum siding to spruce it up and hopefully to keep out some of the winter's cold, which it did not.

The house had a front porch which faced Route 66 and a screened back porch. The back porch was somewhat cooler than inside the house during the summer time, and it became the place where Mom canned vegetables. The screening was intended to keep out the flies. The back door never did fit properly, and there were usually just as many flies inside the back porch as outside. Mom made quarts and quarts of tomato juice, stewed tomatoes, and other canned produce on the back porch. The last step in canning is to put on the rubber seal and tin lid and ring. One knew the seal had taken when it "pinged" as Mom called it. We would have a cacophony of pinging as the jars did their final part in the process. Mom would often go out and check her jars, like she did her new chicks, to see if they had sealed. Those that failed the test were canned again.

The back porch became a storage area for out-of-use items such as: the wooden ice box that Mom had painted green, an old stove, and boxes of items my grandparents left when they had moved to town. The back porch was also the place where we temporarily kept the store-bought cans that had been used. Because we did not have anything like a garbage man, it was Dad or Ray that took the cans to the dump behind the limestone quarry about a mile away. This was not something they liked to do too frequently, so we had our own version of a compactor. The brand name on the compactor was "Theresa." Every time we used something out of a can it was my job to wash out the can, use the can opener to cut open the bottom end of the can, and then squash it as small as I could by stomping on it with full force. We usually had five huge buckets of squashed cans before Dad would "take them to the dump." It is amusing to read about today's landfill problems and suggestions of what the average homeowner can do to help. One, of course, is squashing cans. I imagine that this plan would be more successful if the average homeowner had to take his unsquashed cans to the landfill just once.

Our back porch had a set of stairs which led down to the basement. The basement ceiling height was about 4'6", which for most of my childhood was fine. The basement was small, no

larger than 6' X 10', and had a concrete floor and combination concrete/large rock walls. There was a concrete shelf 2 feet deep which ran all the way to the floor all around the perimeter of the room. The shelf was cool to the touch and was filled with Mom's canned produce. This included different kinds of vegetables and fruits. One time Mom even tried to can beef. This was not a success story so it was not tried again, but the jars remained on the shelf. (Mom was never one to throw "good stuff" away.) The remaining shelf space held a mixture of dishes and kitchenware from my grandparents (which we never used), and the kerosene lamps used several times a year when the electricity went out.

The main activities of the basement were egg cleaning, sorting, and storing. Wooden egg crates which held 30 dozen eggs, three dozen to a layer, had to be hauled up and down the very steep steps of the basement. But it was cool in the summer, and it provided an out of the way place for Mom to do her eggs. I think she enjoyed being there.

Coming in the back porch side of the house, which almost everyone did, you usually stepped over 15-20 resident cats that lived underneath the steps. The back porch door led directly into the kitchen. The kitchen was small and had the following items: the old hand pump and sink, the cookstove which operated on cobs, and one or two freestanding cabinets. It was a very narrow area, and it was difficult for more than one person to be in it at a time. Before running water was in the house, the water came from the well and was collected in the cistern just outside the kitchen. When I started in 4-H, we traded the cookstove for a gas/propane stove and got a little more room in the process since the cookstove was such a monstrous thing.

The most vivid memories I have of the kitchen when small was helping Mom with the dishes while she taught me phonetics. Mom, who by all reports was an excellent teacher, probably assessed that I was not progressing in reading very well. After supper Mom would heat a couple of gallons of water on the stove, transfer it to the bowl in which she washed the dishes, and began asking me to sound out all words that began with SH. I would recite back shut, shoot, she, share, shine, and so on. After the dishes were done and I had gone through several vowel and consonant combinations, Mom would take the soapy water outside and throw it out on the lawn. (This is the reason the grass in this portion of the yard did so poorly. It always had a yellow, stunted appearance.)

Next to the kitchen was the dining room with the standard dining room fare. We used formica-topped tables and plastic chairs even after we had inherited the oak table from my Ripley grandparents. The oak table was much too massive for the small space that we had. At one time in the evolution of our home this might have been an elegant room. It had the potential. Wainscoting around the ceiling, which I did not appreciate until two decades later, was in this room and the living room. It was covered with layers of paint and both of these rooms were wallpapered.

When we remodeled (that's a loose term for getting plumbing in our case) in the late 1950s and actually got running water, the old kitchen was cut in half, and one half was made into a bathroom. The other half became a mud room. The mud room became the place where Dad and Ray would change out of their coveralls and boots after coming in from the field. In Mom's

opinion this helped to keep some of the dirt out of the rest of the house. In the mud room a water heater and electric belt-driven water pump were added, but the old hand pump remained. Dad continued to use the pump and old enamel dishpan instead of the new bathroom sink for the rest of his days on the farm.

The new kitchen sink was moved into the old dining room along with the stove and refrigerator. All these appliances and two freestanding cabinets plus an oak buffet circled the perimeter of the room with the table and chairs in the middle. There was not a lot of spare room. The room was made to appear much smaller than it was because Mom tended to cover every square inch of the walls and refrigerator door with something. There was no space left on the outside of the refrigerator, and it was adorned with huge and fairly unattractive handmade items. The worse I recall was two large 10-inch high peacocks with feathers and glitter and a magnet that attached it to the refrigerator. Mom also went through an African violet (dozens of them) and parakeet (including bird cage) phase that all ended up in this room (actually a series of parakeets as they kept dying off). One wall contained our oak wall phone that was larger than anyone else's because it had been previously owned by the Ocoya Grain Elevator and evidently was a long distance phone. The phone was right in front of the newly created small bathroom door. Telephone users and bathroom users were in competition for the right-of-way. Our phone number was short-long-short on line 2, and the most common number we called was three longs on line 22 which was Grandpa and Grandma Phillips.

The new bathroom had our first set of built-in cabinets. Even though they were not spacious, it was the first time Mom had anywhere to put towels, sheets, and pillowcases. Space being at a premium, we still ironed towels so any fluffiness they had from drying would be flattened out of them so they would take up less space. The bathroom had a sink, medicine cabinet, tub (no shower), and the clothes dryer. The dryer stuck out enough from the room that it was protruding into the sink area. The tub never got much use, unfortunately. In the winter it was just too cold to take a bath, and in the summer it was just as easy to use the habits acquired over the winter.

The double-entry doorway from the dining room (now dining and kitchen) led into the living room. That sounds grand but it was not because of the small size of the living room that was completely dominated by the oil furnace in the middle. It didn't seem so bad in the winter because of its obvious utility, but in the summer it was a drag to have it there. But it was gargantuan, and one would not think of moving it out for the season. The contents of the living room were three chairs, a small wire basket to hold magazines and papers, a sofa, a small table that held the telephone (after wall phone days were over), a TV (after 1954), and a glass-front dish cabinet. It was very crowded. It was made even worse in the winter with the wooden clothes rack sprawled out to dry clothes. What furniture we had was covered with those silly coveralls. I am positive we did not have nice furniture, but who could ever tell with those drapes on everything. There were family pictures on everything that could hold a picture, and one picture of Jesus that had last year's Palm Sunday palm braided behind it. My three best girlfriends in school all took piano lessons and had pianos at home. Mom often commented that she would like

me to take piano lessons, but that was always followed by the comment, "but where would we put the piano, hang it from the ceiling in the living room?" As I said it was crowded, everywhere.

Next to the living room was the open double door area that led into my parent's bedroom. Mom saved her egg money for a long time to get a new two-piece bedroom set: a double bed with a headboard and dresser. The room also had an older wardrobe and the absolutely gigantic and heavy Pike Township safe, which we had because Mom was township clerk. (This position afforded her $200 a year, if I recall correctly.) Along one side of the bedroom, with barely enough space to pull out the tucked-away stool, was Mom's sewing machine. The sewing machine story is something of which I have always been ashamed. Mom saved to get a new electric sewing machine, and it coincided with my learning the alphabet and the initials of my name. I carved my initials several times into the only new piece of furniture in the house, the sewing machine.

That was the downstairs of our house. You entered the second story of the house via the combination dining/kitchen room. The steep, narrow stairs (on which there were always piles and piles of things stored, the most notable being Mom's bookwork for the farm) led up to Ray's room. Ray's room was a pretty typical boy's room with an old dresser, an older cabinet that he used for all his comic books, and lots of pennants on the wall. He had a very small closet with a door.

You walked through Ray's room to get to my room. Because my room was very hot in the summer and extremely cold in the winter, I was not a kid who spend much time in her room. But cold as it was, my room was still warmer than Ray's in the winter. My room was directly above the oil furnace in the living room, and there was a vent in my floor right over the furnace. The ritual for going to bed was kneeling beside my bed for evening prayers and then lingering for a moment with my hands on the vent before bolting under a mountain of covers with my stocking cap and gloves on. I glorified the day that electric blankets became available, but I was well into my late teen years before that occurred and Ray had already left our house for his own which was warmer than ours.

As far as furniture in my room, Mom early on had purchased (or perhaps purchased at a farm sale) a cedar hope chest for me and put things in it periodically. I never expressed much interest in the hope chest and considering I was 42 when I married, Mom's hope chest was mostly that, just hope. I also had a small display cabinet that had story book dolls from around the world. I owned other dolls but did not play with them much, but did enjoy paper dolls. I also had a small well-made child's chair that an Ocoya neighbor crafted for me. My small closet lead into the attic, a wonderful and forbidding place. I went into it less than a half dozen times in my whole life. It had the real treasures from my folk's combined family history, including great grandparent portraits and many other things. When I was in my 20s and living in Oregon, I became interested in antiques and conjured up visions of all the glorious things that must be in the attic if only I could get to them and bring them back to Oregon.

That was the farmhouse. When anyone would ask me where I lived as a kid I would say, "The large white house across from the Ocoya Elevator." I said this well into my teens until one time I said this when my sister-in-law was in the room. She said, "Theresa, it's really not a big house." It

was the first time that I began to revise my vision of the place. It was tiny, and crowded, and not nearly as white as I would like to believe.

But it was a place that almost exclusively has pleasant memories for me except in 1977 when the living room had been completed dismantled so that a hospital bed could accommodate my father there.

Even though the house was not a mansion, the buildings and artifacts around the farmhouse held a great appeal for a kid. Right out from the back porch of the house was the approximately 4-foot high pump resting on a step-up square concrete well platform. While running down the sidewalk at age six I tripped and fell on the corner of the well platform and still have the scar above my left eye, another half inch and I probably would not have an eye. Outside of this bad encounter, the well platform was a wonderful play device. Going out and pumping on the pump was always fun.

On the other side of the well platform (within 20 feet of the house) was the combination wash house and cob house. As you looked out from the back porch, the wash house was on your left and the cob house was on your right. After the cookstove was gone, which had been fueled with cobs, the cob house had outlived its usefulness. But we never seemed to get rid of the cobs. I often played in the cob house and would walk through mounds and mounds of cobs stored there as well as a lot of other "stuff." The "stuff" in the cob house, which was definitely not weather proof, was the antique oak furniture of my Grandma and Grandpa Ripley. After my parents died, I had the furniture hauled to Oregon. Over half of the legs had rotten away by being stored legs down in the cob house for decades. Luckily, the lovely library table had been stored legs up and they were in tact.

The wash house got a good workout every Monday of my childhood. Mom and I use to heat the water in the copper double boiler (which I still have), wash the clothes, wring them out, and pin them to the line which ran between two trees on the side lawn. The wash house also stored more artifacts from my grandparents: two cane chairs (caning missing), an old camelback trunk (painted green by my mother; she must have had lots of green paint at one time), and my father's baby rocker. The baby rocker had its most recent refurbishing 5 years ago by Ray just before his granddaughter was born. Just to the left of the wash house was the old dinner bell. It was about 2 1/2 feet high and the large handle could be used to make it ring. In former times it brought the men in from the fields to eat. Someone, I imagine Dad, had painted it silver; and it was one of the favorite play items of any kid that visited us.

Walking on past the wash/cob house, you came upon a sight that was wondrous. It was Dad's shop. I have never seen a more disorganized shop in my life that was so clearly cataloged in one person's mind; Dad's. The shop was actually an old one-room school house that had been moved to our farm ever so long ago. Dad's main shop was what had originally been the outer cloak room. To begin to describe this area is more than my fingers at the word processor can do. But I do have pictures. When I got into 35 mm photography in the mid 70s, I took my camera home on several occasions. The shop with its disarrangement of tools (old and new) and hundreds of small compartments filled with items was a black & white photographer's dream.

The second part of the shop was the actual schoolroom. Pieces of the blackboard and chalk tray were still on the wall along with the script and print squares of the alphabet at ceiling height. Before we got the machine shed, we use to store our car in the back part of the shop. The first car I remember there was the yellow-tan '48 Dodge. The back part of the shop was used for working on projects and storing smaller equipment that probably went back to before my grandfather's time. It was marvelous to see Dad responding to Ray who needed a widget size 342 go right to the place in the shop and come up with widget size 342 in less than 20 seconds. That's true, I counted once. Among the thousands of items in the shop was the Ripley's Eggs, Believe it or Not sign after it was retired from Route 66 roadside. I will always be sorry that it got away from me.

Behind the shop was the hen house. A very dilapidated hen house. It housed about 400 chickens. It was not a place that I enjoyed frequenting much. The best assignment to pull was feeding and watering. I can't think of one nice thing to say about having 400 chickens in one house. The hen house had two rooms. The smaller room to the right was filled with nests, and the larger room was set up for feeding and roosting.

To the right of the hen house was the outhouse. Actually, I can't think of many nice things to say about the outhouse either. We, honest to god, did use the Sears catalog in the outhouse. In the summer it was hot and smelly, and in the winter it was cold and smelly but it remained my Dad's choice over the indoor plumbing. After my parents died, I believe the outhouse had its last life as a lawn decoration one Halloween in front of the high school principal's house. This was a yearly ritual for our community, and it seemed a fitting end for the structure.

To the right of the outhouse was the smoke house which was about the size of the outhouse. By my childhood we no longer smoked anything so I acquired a small playhouse. Because I had so many other places to play on the farm, it was not utilized to its full potential. I am sure any number of city kids would kill for such a play area, and I just breezed it off. It was much more fun to watch Dad in the shop, as any farm kid would agree.

Behind the hen house, outhouse, and smoke house was the brooder house. Now that was a fun place. It was circular, I don't why, unless it meant there were no corners to let little chicks get smothered in. The new chicks arrived in the spring, and to be anywhere near the brooder house was to hear a cappella choir of cheepers. Behind the brooder house was an older, more run-down building which had no function by the time I was a helper. I think it had been a hen house. The newer hen house, if that was the case, was little improvement; but at least it did not have big gaping holes in the wall.

In back of this area was our orchard which was planted when I was preadolescent. It was one of the ideas of the landlords. Ideas were often forthcoming from them. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to have fruit trees," they said. After they initiated the idea, all that was left was for the Ripleys was to plant, water, and nurture the trees. We did not have adequate outside water pressure so there are many memories of assisting to water all 40 of those new apple trees by hand. Years later about all they produced were wormy little apples. But these did make delicious applesauce. They were not good enough to eat in hand. Mom offered the produce to everyone,

including egg customers; and we would often go out and get a bag of apples for relatives, neighbors, or customers. I do not ever remember the landlords asking for or getting any apples.

The three remaining buildings on the Ripley farm were the machine shed, crib, and barn. The machine shed was built sometime in the 50s. It was the only new thing I ever saw constructed during my parent's tenure on the farm. It was a half circle shape, made out of aluminum and two double doors on each side. It was very large and kept almost all of our farm equipment out of the weather. Dad was very proud of the machine shed.

The crib's purpose was to store grain, primarily corn. It also had a breezeway through the middle that housed other equipment. The long conveyor grain chute was on one side of the crib and on the very top was the weather vane. After my parents died, my brother wanted the weather vane and his son walked up the conveyor chute to the very top of the crib and took off the weather vane. It was very high and a fairly foolish thing to do, but it was absconded and taken to "young Ray's" farm.

The barn probably held the most fascination for any kid because such a range of activities went on in there. For years the upstairs haymow had one area cleared off and was the neighborhood basketball court. I only watched Ray and his friends, but I imagined myself as the one true cheerleader of the group. The haymow was a wonderful place and my play group (The Ocoya Four) had many wonderful hours there.

The milking took place downstairs in the barn. I spent the most time with my brother while he was milking and I was hanging around watching him. He used a T-stool instead of the traditional three-legged stool when milking. He wore his felt close-brim hat and nuzzled his head into the cow's belly and milked away and talked with me. Every once in a while he would squirt a stream of milk toward the dozen or so cats that encircled us both.

When the cows were not in the barn, they were in the back pasture right outside the barn. In order to keep the cows watered and have enough salt, the water tank was there with a salt block close by. The water tank was elliptical in shape and about three feet tall. We kept catfish in the bottom of the tank to eat the algae which always seemed to be plentiful. The water was always murky, but you could see the catfish that resided there. We never ate any of these catfish, thank goodness, but I uncertain what did happen to them. The resident cats might be suspect here, in addition to their mouse duties.

The only other structure on the main farm circle was the fairly large gas tank which we used to "gas up" all equipment and the cars. A nice thing about having the gas tank was having Mr. Jones, from Farm Services, come to fill it. He was a pleasant, amiable man. His daughter, who was much younger than I, often accompanied him on his gas route and Mom either made or had something special for her for every visit.

The area around the house had huge lawns, and lovely old trees until the box elder bugs got most of them (even the one where I had a tree house in which I spent many hours). There was a main gravel road leading off Route 66 that brought most visitors to stop right in front of Dad's

shop. Then they could either circle around the pump by the water tank and leave the same way as they came or go out the dirt back lane. At the end of the dirt lane was our mailbox.

All of the buildings were wood frame, except for the machine shed, and most of them were gray in color and peeling. These buildings were never painted while I was there or afterwards. There were a few of the buildings that appeared never to have seen a paint brush, and they were all fairly dismal in appearance.

In 1977 the house burned. When I went back for Mom's funeral, Ray did not want me to go over to see the charred remains of the house which was just fine with me. But Ray and his best friend, Jerry Campbell, spent hours trying to go through the charred remains to find what, I'm not quite sure. They did get some of our grandparent's dishes that had been stored in the basement, but they broke when you touched them. Ray found most of the 50 pennies that I had used to frame Mom's high school diploma. I had secretly retrieved her diploma just before her 50th reunion and found a penny dated for each year and affixed them around the diploma. Ray also found my diploma from Indiana University out in the barnyard where it had landed after the explosion of the house, but most of the diploma was charred away. Many other treasures had been in the house. I had been the negligent child who had not yet retrieved the prize possessions of my youth: high school yearbooks, diplomas, and memory scrapbooks. All of the family pictures of previous generations, which Mom and Dad had so carefully labeled, were gone along with Mom's trip books of each of our adventures to the West.

When my brother died in 1986, I went back to the old farm grounds. Jack was with me and all that was left was the crib, machine shed, and barn. All the rest, rightly so, was no longer there. Even the back lane had been plowed over and planted. We went into the barn and climbed up into the haymow. My grandfather's old horse harnesses were still on nails hanging on the wall. It was difficult in a way to be there, but I wanted Jack to have a sense of what the Ripley farm use to be. Which, of course, it wasn't any longer. But the land remains, and the memories are as vivid as ever.

Ocoya

An Illinois map has to be unusually detailed to show Ocoya. It is about five miles from both Pontiac and Chenoa (which, incidentally, do not make every map either) on old Route 66; and it was bypassed by the newer Interstate 55 in the 1970's. My parents told me Ocoya was on the 100 milepost south of Chicago. Perhaps it was, perhaps not. Our farm was within walking distance of Ocoya. The population of metropolitan Ocoya was approximately 25 (not counting dogs and cats); and those of us in the farm suburbs added another 10.

To walk to Ocoya you would go down our front gravel lane, cross two lanes of Route 66 south-bound traffic, wait in the median strip, cross two lanes of Route 66 north-bound traffic, walk 200 yards of a well-worn path, cross the railroad tracks, and that brought you face-to-face with the Ocoya elevator. I made the trip at least twice a day during the school year because I met the school bus in Ocoya. During the summers I also made the trip often because the closest playmates were in Ocoya.

Ocoya (pronounced O-coy-ya) is an Indian word; many nearby towns have Indian names. Ocoya did not qualify as a town, though, because it was not incorporated. It consisted of the following: a grain elevator, grain bins, a combination business office and warehouse building, Ocoya telephone central, a decaying train depot, and a cluster of 4 or 5 houses where mainly the elevator personnel lived. Not exactly the Chicago Loop, but living on a farm it was a center of high activity.

The most recent claim to fame of Ocoya is having a sequence filmed there from the movie Grandview, U.S.A, a film starring Jamie Lee Curtis which I am sure Siskel and Ebert gave the lowest possible rating. You probably didn't see it; but if you did, there was a dream sequence in the film where Jamie Lee Curtis dances in a grain bin. The grain bin was in Ocoya. I know this bit of trivia because my brother was sending me daily newspaper accounts of the film making which was hot stuff for Pontiac and the area residents. Troy Donohue was also in town for the film and many of the middle-age women remarked that he had changed a lot since A Summer Place, of course they had not.

The reasons for Ocoya's existence was the grain elevator. As we looked out our front lane and across Route 66, it was the elevator that towered directly across from us. It was about 100 feet tall, gigantic in a rural area in my childhood of flat Illinois, and was painted whitish-grey with a rectangular feed grain advertising sign painted orange and black on the Route 66 side of the structure. The purpose of a grain elevator is to store grain and keep it at the right moisture content without rotting until farmers want to sell it. That's about all I understand even though my nephew, who currently works at a grain elevator, has made me aware that it is much more complicated than that. In my youth all I realized was an awful lot of time was spent at the elevator by my father. Some of it was business, and the rest of the time (usually in winter) it was visiting with the elevator crew and other farmers.

There were several grain cooperatives in the area, and farmers tended to use the one that was closest to their crops. Being a part of the Ocoya Cooperative was important, but even now I am not quite sure how it all worked. What I did know was that the Ocoya Cooperative had an annual dinner meeting in September which was held in the Chenoa Elementary School Gym. This meeting always coincided with the Miss America pageant so I never got to see the latest Miss America cry as Bert Parks sang. At the annual meeting we got a dividend check and learned how the cooperative was doing that year.

Since all users of the grain elevator were a part of the cooperative we were all treated equally. The equality was displayed at harvest time when all the farmers would line up to put grain in the elevator. No special privilege was shown to anyone. Even though the grain elevator personnel would arrive at work before dawn, it was not uncommon for 10-20 wagon loads of grain to be there, ready to be unloaded. The loads would first be weighed on the huge drive-on scale by the business office, and then the wagon would go to the elevator to be unloaded and the grain stored in the elevator.

I did a lot of hanging out at the elevator because it was one of the activities I shared with Dad. "Wanta go to the elevator with me?" Dad would ask. I would eagerly agree and off we would go in the green '54 Ford pickup to pick up feed, get a Coke, or just talk to other farmers. It was exclusively a male domain, but each of the elevator workers must have taken a shine to me because I can remember being treated very well by the office staff and the outside crew.

A farm wife would occasionally go to the grain elevator business office to transact business, but not very often. It was a fairly dirty place, even though an office, because of all the grain dust. Probably the staff and farmers liked it that way because I never saw anyone sweeping or dusting the office. The business office had a large warehouse attached that held supplies needed by farmers, such as feed and building materials. The most common item we bought was feed, and I liked to choose the feed sacks for future clothing. The office manager of the elevator was a mild-mannered man in his 40's and a bachelor. He did not look or act like the farmers I knew. For example, he never wore a farmer's cap or coveralls. His brother worked in the office as a part time bookkeeper and his dress was also nonfarmer style. Four of the houses in Ocoya were occupied by grain elevator workers.

Another house in Ocoya contained Ocoya Central Telephone in its environs. The person who ran Ocoya Central, Mildred, was a wonderful woman who had a daughter, Connie, my age. Perfect. I often played there and loved to watch the workings of Ocoya Central. Mildred taught her own three children how to run Central, and I was next in line. It was a 24-hour operation that she and her kids operated. Mildred worked the most, but occasionally she needed to get away which was nearly impossible with this job. Mildred slept downstairs so she could more easily get to Central when evening calls occurred. I loved to run the telephone. We had about 48 lines with 5 or 6 farmhouses to a line. There were only two lines into Pontiac (the nearest town), and they were always busy. When working Central, one felt at the core of this farming area. Emergencies happened; people listened to other people on the line; and as main operator you knew who was calling whom about what.

There were two kids in Ocoya one year younger than myself and Connie. Thus we had the Ocoya Four, 12 months apart in age, destined to be playmates by geography. We were 3 girls and one boy. At times the Ocoya Four participated in older sibling's games. The older boys tolerated us playing baseball with them, but usually we managed very well on our own. It was sometimes difficult to integrate one boy with three girls; but since neither Connie or I liked to play with dolls, it was not really a problem. We produced plays for our mothers and sold tickets to them. We organized clubs with officers and seemed to rotate the responsibilities of president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. We generally just had fun.

Growing up in Ocoya was the experience that life has dealt me. I am sure most people are profoundly affected by where they grow up. It is the time when you can observe and really absorb things around you. I feel Ocoya is in my bones and will always be there with the experiences I had and the impact they had on me. I am glad I left Ocoya, but equally pleased with all the memories it has left me.

Neighbors

I just finished reading a book by M. Scott Peck, M.D. who is the author of the popular, at least in terms of sales, *The Road Less Traveled*. The book I read was entitled *A Different Drum*, and it was about building a sense of community in today's society. Dr. Peck writes:

". . .that isolation and fragmentation have become the order of the day.

"I personally know of this isolation and fragmentation. From the age of five until I left home at twenty-three I lived with my parents in an apartment building in New York City. There were two apartments to a floor, separated by a small foyer and elevator. As there were eleven stories above the first, this building was the compact home for twenty-two families. I knew the last name of the family across the foyer. I never knew the first names of their children. I stepped foot in their apartment once in those seventeen years. I knew the last names of two other families in the building; I could not even address the remaining eighteen. I did address most of the elevator men and doormen by their first names; I never knew any of their last names."

Dr. Peck and I had the opposite experience growing up. My family knew everyone within a 4-mile radius, and we were truly neighbors. Our dictionary defines neighbors as "to be friendly; to render mutual favors or assistance." And that describes our neighbors.

The names of our neighbors included Craddock, Wooding, Shook, Wendling, Rutherford, Donovan, Hinshaw, Graves, Weber, Kridner, Cleary, Winterland, Rhoda, Streid, Wagner, Feit, Otto, Cottrell, Stuckemeyer, Boian, Koerner, Reeser, Vercler, Nagel, Whitmar, Sommers, Wilkens, Nylander, Oltman, Trachsel, Murphy, Yordy, Zehr, Stalter, Klein, Seeman, and Heins. There were many more and we knew them all. I knew every kid's name in these families from the oldest to the youngest even if they were a decade older or a decade younger than myself.

Dr. Peck spends much of his book describing how he finally found community by going to a Quaker school and being a part of the NTL Group Therapy movement in the 60's. These experiences, he says, have changed his life.

As for me, I now know I experienced a sense of community from the day I was born. My family and extended family, whom all lived within a few miles, celebrated my arrival. But equally as important, I was ushered into a well-established community that appreciated that I was "Skinny's girl" or "Blanche finally got her girl. We're so glad." And they meant it.

My brother, who was 9 1/2 when I was born, told me numerous people came laden with gifts when I came home from the hospital. My baby book, which was destroyed in the fire of '77, had pages describing the gifts brought to the newborn. For better or worse they all greeted me into the community and wished me well and assumed I was a part of them; and in turn after living there two decades, they became a part of me. Let me give a flavor of our neighborhood. The concept of next-door neighbor was defined by sections. A section is a 1-mile square and contains 640 acres. Our farm was 200 acres so our section was also shared by the Craddocks, Jones, and

Reeds. The Craddocks, who lived next door--which meant about a mile away, were my godparents. They had four girls, all much older than I. As godmother, Sara Craddock continued to send me birthday gifts well into my 30's and her 80's. She had her family bring her to my brother's funeral in 1986 when she was 89. She told me it was important for her to be there for me. Sara gave me my first paid employment at age 10. My job was to dust the house once a week. No small job since, like us, they lived within a mile of a limestone quarry noted for its dispensing of fine, white dust in the air. I am sure I was a lousy housekeeper but I loved to dust all the furniture in the house because it was wood, and old, and beautiful. Unlike us, they had their lovely oak furniture in the house instead of in storage in the cob house outside.

The other main occupant of our section was the Jones. The family consisted of three adult siblings living together. A gigantic St. Bernard took equal family status. Our house abounded with Jones stories. The Jones trio were a bit eccentric.They were quite land wealthy; and if their musings to Dad were accurate, they kept literally thousands of dollars under a mattress and in the backyard. They trusted my parents without reservation and were always telling Dad stories about evening avengers with guns coming to attack them or to poison their dog. They lived in poverty as far as clothes and home furnishings (but not cars I might add), but at Christmas time they would bring us overly expensive gifts just for being good neighbors.

On the scale of unusual neighbors Jones would have been on one end of the continuum but most of our neighbors were just average; and as I look back on it, I think them quite wonderful.

Take the Hemkens, for example. They lived in the next section and were a shirt-tail relative of Mom. We would go to their house with our oversupply of apples and in return we would get their oversupply of peaches. Take the Feits for another example. The Feits had four girls, the youngest being my age. The oldest was my junior leader in 4-H, the next oldest ended up marrying my first cousin, the next married an Ocoya neighbor, and the last married a Rutherford. Now take the Rutherfords. The one that married a Feit was my singing partner for several bridal showers when we were six years old. We were "cute" they said. The next family of Rutherfords, down the road a piece, were first cousins to the Rutherfords just mentioned. One of these Rutherfords was my age and his sister was 9 years younger. The one my age had me help him with geometry on the school bus every day. The Rutherfords lived near the Kridners who lived near the Donovans. The Donovans were Catholic. They had six kids; the last two were the nearest my age. We attended catechism together with Fr. Malady (which shall bond us forever), and we were the kids not having hamburgers at Steve's Cafe after the Friday night football game. I could go on with this stream of conscientious for a long time, but I hope the reader understands that each family was connected to every other family in some way day after day, month after month, year after year.

All of our neighbors were farmers and shared the same life and disappointments. We shared telephone party lines (and thus knew everyone else's business) and cooperated on getting every one's haying done. We would loan out Ray and our hay wagons for 10 haying jobs; and when we did our own haying, we had 10 guys show up and plenty of wagons. We shared butchering. We butchered one winter and shared half a beef with one neighbor, and they would butcher the

following year. (The farmer who butchered got to keep the tongue; I loved tongue sandwiches!) Many farmers would share livestock chores when they had to be gone. In our case we had Ray to do our daily chores when we took our vacations Out West and the shorter one-day trips.

At the same time that we shared, there was an independence about our living that was respected by all. We rarely shared equipment that was not a tit for tat arrangement like haying. You did not take advantage of a neighbor and you allowed them plenty of breathing room to be their own person. Dad did not give unsolicited advice to any other farmer on how to do his farming. If asked, yes; but if not, keep your thoughts to yourself. Families were also allowed to work out their own personal problems. I never knew anyone who went to a counselor, let alone a psychologist or psychiatrist. Even going to the clergy was suspect in most instances. Working it out among yourselves, or perhaps with the rest of the family, meaning extended family, might be acceptable.

The neighbors were at their best when they came together for a common purpose. The Ocoya School brought them together for a long time. It closed in 1949 so I did not attend country school but the folklore of being a part of the school is in my consciousness because everybody talked about it for years after the closing. In fact, they still do. My brother went to Ocoya School through eighth grade and some of his best storytelling (and he was a terrific storyteller) was about those school days.

Neighbors were also brought together by tragedy. All responded upon the death of someone in the community. By the time I was ten I estimate I had ventured inside the two funeral homes of Pontiac and the one in Chenoa at least 50 times, and that is a very conservative number. I knew what to say and do at a visitation and did not mind the somewhat subdued but party-like atmosphere with a corpse being the center of attention. All community members went to either the visitation or funeral and some went to both if you knew the deceased particularly well. If you had to choose one, you usually went to the visitation because you had more of an opportunity to talk with the family and other neighbors. Dad, and later Ray, were pallbearers at least a half a dozen times a year. As Dad got older, and Ray worked up to his 6'2" frame with attending size and muscle, we often got calls asking if "young Ray" could be a pallbearer for X. Sometimes we did not know the deceased particularly well, but Ray was big and, I guess, seemed appropriate for the job by the family in need. It was in this context that we visited all the churches in the community. As Catholics, this was your only shot at attending a Protestant service.

The rest of death and funeral behavior by the community was pretty standard. The deceased's family was inundated with food brought to the house, and the funeral home was besieged with flowers and gifts donated to the particular charity designated. The family usually received hundreds of cards expressing sympathy in the passing of a loved one. Although the ritual was the same for everyone, it seemed genuine in its tradition by rote in the community.

The community also shared in the tragedy of being disabled. In my twenty years as an ongoing part of the community, I witnessed numerous times when neighbors helped neighbor. Sometimes it was an accident, like the year one of the neighbors caught his arm in the dump and the arm was ripped off. The neighbors brought in the crops that year. Sometimes it was illness,

like when my best friend's father had a heart condition come on suddenly and he had to give up farming immediately. The neighbors brought in the crops that year. Finally it was the time that we needed help. The neighbors brought in the crops that year for us. The expression of gratitude was beyond us.

And ultimately it has been the times when the neighbors have helped me face the deaths of my parents and brother. On each of the three occasions their outpouring has been sincere and sustained. Their response has helped to make what seemed untimely, unfair, and just plain awful another part in the cycle of our well established community. I know my family was well liked and respected in their community. That was demonstrated time and again when they were alive and equalled at the time of each of their deaths.

Thus I have experienced what eluded Dr. Peck in his youth. I am ever so appreciative of the life I was given as a child. Yes, there were chains of convention; and yes, I was eager to leave the confines of the community to go to the larger world; and no, I don't want to return and live there now. But it did have a special quality that has become a part of me and has become a part of the way I relate to people, I hope. My adult community includes people living on many continents and many states of the union. I can never have the same type of community that I was born into, but the memory of that initial community often guides how I relate to my adult community.

My Hometowns

Growing up I had two hometowns, both located on Route 66. Chenoa was four miles south, and Pontiac was five miles north. Our farm was in the middle. Living on a farm it was an important event to go into town. It was not uncommon that someone in the family (which included my brother Ray and his family) went into town at least five times a day. Janice, Ray's wife, would do a round trip working at the shoe store. Kid's trips to school did not count. During working season--which meant spring, summer, or fall--there were trips into town to get parts for machinery (this was the biggie), seed corn, information from the USDA on current farm government procedures, and 101 other things. Many of these trips were left to Mom and later to me when I got a driver's license--the men were too busy to go. In the winter after a big snow, Dad took it as a personal challenge to see if he could scoop out the driveway and be the first farmer to be able to get into town and report the depth of the snowfall out our way. Many a winter's day I was the only farm kid to make it to school because Dad got me there and on time.

Before getting my driver's license, I often tried to be a part of the these trips because you never knew what action might be found in town. I must admit, though, there was rarely much action which peaked my interest at Gardner's John Deere Sales and Service; but it was worth a try. If nothing else, going into town was a fast library run for another book towards winning the Chenoa title to Most-Books-Read-During-The-Summer Contest.

In the late summer evenings after working to get butterprint (a dastardly weed, by my father's conviction) out of the bean fields, or thistles out of the corn fields, or watering all the new apple trees; we drove into town with all the windows down to cool off and have an A&W Root Beer float, or as an alternative, a soft ice cream cone with a curl on top. We were hot, dirty, and tired. Curbside service from a carhop was just the right thing for the occasion. It was the last trip of the day 'into town,' and well deserved. Before television and particularly in the winter, it was our custom to go into town to see the latest movie; at least twice a week, and sometimes three. We were partial to Francis the Talking Mule, The Bowery Boys, Ma and Pa Kettle, and Abbott and Costello. The predecessor of the TV sit coms suited us just fine, although my brother favored the Westerns on Saturday.

Saturday was a big day for going into town, usually Pontiac. We often did grocery shopping and other shopping on that day. The pattern for shopping did not change much for years. Dad would drive into Pontiac, the bigger of the two towns, and park our white Ford Galaxie on the town square. He would give the carefully collected coins for the meter to Mom. Mom and I would go our separate ways to shop, and Dad would sit on the square and watch the people go by from the car. Pontiac stores included Sears, important mainly for the catalog section; Penney's; and Murphy's Five and Dime. There were a couple of 'expensive' clothing stores and a 'good' shoe store which we did not frequent. Being a 4-Her I was into patterns and fabric at Penney's, and could easily spend a great deal of time looking through the pattern books and the bolts of

fabric. After shopping, we would go to the band concert or a movie and then do grocery shopping on the way home at Rodino's.

Rodino's was run by a 3-generation Italian family who lived in a house by their store. They had a huge garden in the back of the store. They store had wooden floors, sagging shelves, and chugging freezers trying to keep ice cream cold. The third generation of Rodino's were usually at the tills by age 10, and the younger ones were working the garden or the back room with their grandfather who spoke mostly Italian. He was a wiry little man remembered for driving his black truck through town selling vegetables off the wagon bed. At times Mom would trade eggs for other groceries and, as was typical of Mom, she made each family member something. This might be jam, a sweater, or bring them a package of hamburger or steak from our own butchered beef. The latest gift was probably a bit unusual to bring grocery store owners, but our beef was good and prized gift by many folks that lived in town.

Pontiac was the more metropolitan of my hometowns. It was the county seat for Livingston County and the population was about 10,000. It had a typical Midwest look for a county seat, which means the Courthouse dominated the center of town. The courthouse was a lovely, elegant (at least to me) two-story plus basement brick building with arched windows and a tall clock steeple in the center which had a flag flowing from the top. There were stately, old, gigantic trees and green lawn all around the courthouse. Because of the brick and openness, and one third of it being underground, the building was always cool in the summer. I often went to the Ladies Room, which was quite ornate for a public facility. It had those little octagon black and white square tiles on the floor. The Courthouse gave the appearance of important things happening in there. It was the tall ceilings, the rotunda effect of the entry, and the old time black lettering on the glass of each of the office doors that led me to believe that important and historical things took place there. As township clerk, Mom sometimes had business to conduct at the Courthouse, but mostly I just used the Ladies Room.

If the Courthouse dominated the town, the stores that circled the four-square block around the courthouse had the best position in town. Being 'on the square' meant you were at the retailing and business hub of Pontiac. Driving around the square (or as we labeled it circling the square, a difficult thing to do in a geometrical sense) was the main activity of driving age teenagers on Saturday night. Car and drivers not only came from Pontiac but several nearby smaller towns to circle the square. This was not an activity in which I participated. The folks would not let me take either the car or truck, and by and large they did not want me to go with anyone who did this sort of thing. At the time this seemed like rather cruel and unusual punishment, but now it seems like it all worked out for the best.

Pontiac had two banks, two movie theaters, one drive in, two funeral homes, and a radio station. It also had a chair factory which must have employed a few hundred people, and a minimum security prison which employed a few hundred more. The prison was highly visible from Route 66 and I saw it on every trip back and forth to Pontiac. It had been the custom of the high school social studies class teacher to tour the prison with his students, but he had stopped this practice by my high school days. The Pontiac prison was an anomaly to me. It did not fit in

the community. Almost 100% of the inmates (later the guards would call them residents) were coloreds (later they called them blacks--in private they probably called them niggers) and from the south side of Chicago. The prison guards were often retired or disabled farmers. The match was not a good one. Working in a minimum security prison myself two decades later in Oregon and learning from first-hand experience that there is a real phenomenon labeled conning, I decided my life energy should be placed in prevention and development and not remediation. I, too, would have been a poor choice as an employee in the Pontiac prison.

My other hometown was Chenoa, 9 miles south on Route 66 from Pontiac. The town slogan for Chenoa was Crossroads of Opportunity. This awesome title was suppose to convey that two major highways (Route 66 and Highway 24) crossed and two major railroads intersected inside the town borders. The potential for Chenoa remained mostly that, potential; but it was the place where I attended school for 12 years and will always feel a true sense of allegiance to the place. Many small town people feel this way.

Chenoa had its Centennial in 1954 when I was 10 years old. It was a grand event and seemed like it lasted for over a year. To get into the spirit of things the men of the area were to grow beards. Those that chose not to do so had to buy badges for $2 that labeled them Little Shavers. Dad purchased a badge. He said beards were too itchy. He was in the minority though, and most of the area men grew full beards for the summer of 1954. I remember riding in the Centennial parade wearing the blouse my grandmother had worn for her wedding. It was white and high necked and Mom made a long black skirt to complete the outfit. The Centennial and all the celebrations that surrounded it, even surpassed the yearly Fourth of July celebration and that is saying a lot. Now every time I pass through a community that is about to celebrate its centennial I can't help but remember the time when Chenoa had its day and I was 10-year-old in the parade.

Chenoa's population has varied little in the 45 years I have known the town. It hovers around 1000. The economic base is farming but there have also been a couple of small factories in town. My brother worked at one and my nephew did welding at another. Chenoa's downtown was never as grand as Pontiac's. There was a bank (my parents had accounts in both Pontiac and Chenoa, for some reason), a variety store, two drug stores, a furniture store, a funeral parlor, and several implement dealers near the downtown. My most recent visit confirms that decay is the current reality. The sidewalks are cracked, and weeds dominate the paths. Burned out buildings have not been replaced, and gaping black holes are left in store row. It did not look that bad in my youth--at least it did not seem to look that bad. Even if it was in less than excellent shape, Chenoa had its redeeming qualities for an adolescent. There were several places to hang out including Tronc's Drug Store, Steve's Cafe, and later the Kat-E-Corner and the soft ice cream store. There were places to hang out in Pontiac, too; but there was not as great a change that you would see someone that you knew. And, of course, that was what was important.

There was one thing that Chenoa did seem to have in abundance and that was churches. There were seven that I can remember and they dominated a number of street corners. Chenoa catered to long-standing WASP variety of denominations; but we Catholics had what arguably

was the prettiest church in town. The steeple of St. Josephs could be seen at least two miles out of town, and I loved to view it in the distance as I drove toward town on Route 66 on the flat landscape in front of me. St. Joseph consisted of not only the church but also the parish rectory and the church hall. We shared our priest with the next town down Route 66, Lexington. I considered the priest more 'ours' than 'theirs' because he lived in Chenoa and we had two Sunday masses (early and late; early mass was low--45 minutes maximum, and late mass was high--60 minutes minimum), but Lexington had only one mass which was sandwiched in between our early and late mass.

Inside the church was a statute with St. Joseph in the middle and St. Patrick (with lots of snakes at his feet) on one side and I forget who else on the other side. The Virgin Mary had an altar all her own on the left side of the church and St. Teresa the Little Flower had one on the right. (Because my patron saint was St. Teresa of Avila this had no particular significance to me.) Upstairs was the choir loft and since I was in the choir for many years, this was my view of mass and the priest. My Latin was never very good, but it was easier to sing Latin (because you got to string out the phrasing) than say it in unison as a part of the congregation after Vatican II's new options for mass.

Thinking about church brings a flood of memories to a person who was one of two young ladies who took her first communion at age six and the only one that was a 10-year-old when she was confirmed (my partner in first communion had moved from the area). Since the bishop only came to St. Joseph in Chenoa about every 10 years to confirm the confirmable, I either had to take it at 10 or wait until 20. Mom decided I could handle it at 10.

I have read many stories about adults describing their Catholic background and I certainly could not match those stories in volume and description. Anyway, this story is about hometowns, but I will digress to tell a couple of 'growing up Catholic' stories. My Catholic education was delegated to a succession of sisters who came every Saturday from Pontiac, where there was a Catholic school, with heavy does from our resident priest who was stern and an exacting taskmaster. We dreaded the Saturdays the sisters could not show up or the snow was too deep because it meant our priest was the person in charge. (Dad also got me to catechism come hell or high water or snow drifts.) I actually feared our priest, and I was probably not alone in this. An example of teaching style should give a sense of the Saturday experience. When the the catechism lesson was over and it was time to leave, our priest would clap his hands three times. On clap Number 1 the catechism learners would rise from the church pews (the lessons were taught in the church right in front of the statue of St. Joseph), on clap Number 2 we would all genuflect together, and on clap Number 3 we would all start marching out of the church breathing a sign of relief that the lesson was over. Hopefully you had not been humiliated in front of others when you did not know the answer to a question. In contrast, most of the sisters were pushovers, as least contrasted to our priest.

The incident I remember most vividly about the sister's education was the year we saved money to name (and, we were told, rescue) a pagan baby. It was drilled into our consciousness we should bring dimes and nickels every Saturday to fill up cards with slots for coins. When we filled

the cards, we could name the pagan babies. Now this was too good a deal to pass up. Here was my opportunity to save some wretched souls on the other side of the world and name them whatever I wanted to boot. I brought coins in week after week and just as the school year was ending, I finally had filled up the cards. Sister was quite pleased, I was quite pleased, and I knew some pagan baby on the other side of the world was named Blanche Theresa. It was a good deal for everyone. Blanche Theresa is now 35 and I wonder what her life is like, saddled with that name. I wonder if she participated in the uprising at Tiananmen Square in June 1989?

The most important aspects of Chenoa for me were Chenoa Grade School and Chenoa High School. For eight years I trudged through the grade school halls and four more years through the hallowed halls of Chenoa High School. Pictures of every graduate that has lumbered through the halls of CHS are lined up and down the halls. CHS graduated my mother, brother, me, two nephews, and a niece. We are pictured on the walls with our respective classmates from the classes of '26, '53, '62, '75, '78, and '82. That's a total of 56 years of Ripleys trudging through the halls and graduating. In 1990 Erin Ripley, age 6, will start in first grade at Chenoa Grade School. If she hangs in there (and Chenoa Community School District #9 lasts through its severe financial problems), it is possible that the fourth generation of Ripleys will graduate in 2003 and be pictured on the walls (although they are running out of wall space, I am sure the tradition will go on somehow). In 1981 Chenoa High School asked me to return for homecoming and be the Honored Alumnus for that year. It was an event, in some ways, that surpassed being a Fulbright Scholar to Sweden 2 years earlier.

I still feel enough connected to Chenoa that I take The Chenoa Clipper Times. Every week I pour through it for the news of the week (I always know someone mentioned) and read the news of 25, 35, and 50 years ago (I always know someone mentioned there also). Recently my nephew's picture was on the the front page. He was photographed for his being a member of the July 4th committee. I wanted to go back for the Fourth in the worst way. It's Chenoa's big day; people come from miles around; and everybody is there for the parade, dance, flea market, radio-controlled model car racing, numerous other activities, and the area's biggest fireworks display.

My last Chenoa Fourth of July was 1976. I figured if our country was going to be 200 years old I knew where I wanted to be. I was as good as I expected. The Grand Marshall was a guy a year older than myself who has become the anchorman on the Peoria news. My folks were alive; my brother was alive; and we had a hell of a Fourth together in our hometowns.

Money Makes a Family Go Round

You learn first about the importance of money from your family. The money lessons are not often explicit, but more important is what you absorb by watching your family and how they deal with money, or without it. I received many lessons about money during my early years, many of which I am still trying to unravel in my adult life. Maybe what you learn is not even lessons, but values about money.

One of the more important lessons I learned occurred when I was older (32) and my dad was critically ill, and unknown to all of us, less than a week away from dying. I was home to assist with the current realities of the situation which included a very ill father, an exhausted (emotionally and physically) mother and brother, mid summer farming realities of a growing season with the 'boss' farmer, my dad, unable to help, looming possibilities that the landlord of over 60 years would evict the unable farmer, financial insecurity caused by many expensive months of illness, and the prospect of years of huge financial expense of a nursing home or home health care. It was not a time that the child/daughter thought she would be receptive to money lessons.

It was clear to me we had to get a picture of the 'health' of the family finances. I encouraged Mom to get out all the necessary bookwork and spread them out where we could both look at them. Thus, there we were at the family gathering spot for all important events, the kitchen table. The long, green farm account books were open and I had an adding machine warmed up and ready to go. Mom, the trusty financial record keeper, was at a loss on how to make a balance sheet. This surprised me. Her reputation in accurate record keeping of everything from egg production to seed corn purchased on what date to weather data to minute accounting of food purchases to accurate check keeping was legendary. Upon sorting it all out, Mom had been phenomenal at keeping yearly records, but had never gotten the hang of getting 'the big picture.' Thus, as I had been experiencing the last few months, we began to do a role reversal with me eliciting information from her on assets and liabilities. I had no idea of their financial reality, and I thought my brother had no clearer idea, but that is probably incorrect since he had a better handle on the farming operation than I had.

The role reversal conversation went something like this. "Mom, what do we own?" We went through all the farm equipment and cars which had all been purchased outright (credit had been a no-no forever in my family). Then we went through the bank accounts and savings accounts that I did not know existed. Mom seemed extremely casual as she mentioned this account with this amount in it, another account with this amount in it, and then searched the memory for yet another account. I was sitting at the adding machine, taking in all the numbers as she poured

them out, and pushed the total button. I was shocked. It was much larger than I ever imagined. Next, I asked Mom for any liabilities. No, she could not think of any.

"Mom, do you realize this is what you and Dad are worth?" I said. "No, I didn't honey, you know money was never very important to me."

In the ensuing two months my father and mother died and I was not able to grasp the meaning of what I experienced with Mom that day. In fact, I am still trying to do so.

Since I left the farm in 1962, I have met people and been involved with institutions that give money a much more important status than Mother did. My parents had values regarding money that included: not living off anyone else, paying for everything up front, saving is more important than spending, getting value for money spent, making everything yourself if at all possible, not contributing much to charities, and taking care of their children. Their adult children, though, had internalized their values so well that neither would ever consider borrowing from their parents unless it were a dire emergency.

Now that I have the luxury of time with sufficient money it seems fitting that I should reflect on those values regarding money learned in the heartland of America.

Mom, as stated, was the consummate record keeper. I wish I had just one of the long green account books she so meticulously kept with money expenditures and side notes regarding planting and other things important to the running of the farm. There would be small entries for selling eggs in town to the wholesaler, but I believe Ripley's Eggs, Believe It Or Not operation was kept in a separate book. I think this was our illegal IRS operation, but even that I am unsure of since my parents were the most honest people I ever knew. This can be testified to with another accounting operation I do remember quite well which was after Dad went on Social Security. He was only to work so many hours a week to keep in government compliance, like who would know how many hours Dad was in the field. Mom and Dad would know, that's who, but that is how the government said to do it, so they kept the hourly records of Dad's farming.

The record keeping was down to the penny. I accepted, without question, that every family keeps such records not only for external reasons, but for internal family reasons as well. For example, Mom would ask her adult son, Ray, to pick up a loaf of bread while he was in town and it was 23 cents, or whatever it was in that day. Mom would give Ray a quarter; and because Ray had learned years ago accounts are kept to the penny, he would immediately dig in his pocket for the 2 cents that was due Mom and everything was then fair and square. The no nonsense approach to family financial matters was the rule of the day. This accounting system was also true between Mom and Dad.

The folks each had separate money sources in some system that made total sense to them and no one else. I knew it was special for each of them to give me money when, as an adult, I was visiting home. The folks never offered to pay my way home, nor did I expect them to do so. But the day after I arrived Dad would go out to the medicine cabinet in the 'mud room' and get his wallet (which he rarely carried) and give me a $20 bill to 'have some mad money while you are home.' Then a few hours later it was not uncommon Mom would take me into the bedroom and

get her purse out of the pale ash with grey chest of drawers (that she had purchased with egg money) and give me a $20 bill. I just accepted it was important to both of them. One time Dad gave me his lucky $2 bill with the word Maggie written on the edge. I still have it in a special place, and maybe one day I will give it to his great granddaughter or grandson.

As far as I know, we never lent money to neighbors or relatives. This could have happened, but if it did, I was not privy to the information. My parents were extremely generous with time, farming skills, farming resources, sharing produce, and other types of giving; but you just did not give money to others. Nor did you expect others to give to you. Dad often talked about ending up in the 'poor farm,' which is the county nursing facility. Unfortunately, that is just what happened to him, but not because he did not have enough money to go elsewhere. There was no room in any other nursing homes and the only place was the 'poor farm.' I'm sorry that his last few months had to be there, but at least he was not there out of destitution. Dad died not knowing how well he had done financially in life, contrasted with his poor beginnings.

Even though Dad did not know how the account bottom line ended, he was very well aware of the policies and procedures utilized by the Ripley farm group. These procedures seemed to be in total agreement between he and Mom. As contrasted to other families I observed then, and the many I have counseled later, Mom and Dad never fought about money. Whatever 'rules' they agreed upon seemed to have equal input from Mom and Dad, and to a lesser extent Ray and I.

Some peculiarities of this Ripley financial policies and procedures stick in my mind. For example, we were the only farm family I knew who kept money in both the Chenoa National Bank and the National Bank of Pontiac. Other farm families chose one or the other of the local banks. Perhaps that behavior went back to a story Mom often told regarding her first teaching job which was in the middle of the Depression. She got paid monthly but was unable to cash her checks because the banks were closed. Stories of today's financial institutions made me think perhaps my husband and I should have accounts in two different banks also.

Another banking recollection is how Mom signed checks. Many of the family checks (for grain payment, etc.) were made out to Raymond Ripley. Dad, not being the record keeper, rarely signed over the checks to Mom to deposit. Instead Mom would sign on the back of the check Raymond Ripley and right underneath Mrs. Raymond Ripley. She also signed all checks on the front in the same manner. I don't remember once seeing Blanche Ripley as a signature.

In addition to the actual dealing with money, values regarding the earning of money were also passed on. My first paying family job was swatting flies. Mom had been paid 1 cent a dozen when she was a kid, and my rate was upped to 2 cents a dozen. Doing housework for a local neighbor (who was also my godmother) was the first paying job.

By early teens most of my friends got summer jobs detassling corn. For those city folks who cannot imagine walking (or later riding) through the fields to cut off the tops of corn stalks hour after hour in the sweltering heat and humidity and getting cut by the corn leaves for below minimum wage, think about it for a minute and you will realize that it was a miserable job. But everyone, I mean everyone, was doing it; but my folks would not let me detassle. Dad said it was

job that was 'too hot and dirty' and he did not want me to do it. This was difficult to understand since I was expected to walk our own bean and corn fields to clean them out. Clean them out means taking a hoe and cutting all butterprint, milkweed, and thistles out of the field. For this I was paid by my father. It didn't make sense to me, but you did not often disagree with my father.

The first sanctioned job, outside of neighbor housework, was working at the Dutch Apple Pie as a waitress on Sundays after church. Since Sunday work of any kind was frowned upon, this was a concession on the part of my folks. I started working there as soon as I could get a social security card, 15 as I recall, and worked through the rest of my high school years. My parents thought waitress work in this type of setting was acceptable. However, they would not, for example, ever let me work in a drive in restaurant in Pontiac. Too many things could happen there, and actually they were probably right.

The next sanctioned job, and what I consider to be my first real job, was at the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). I got this job compliments of my dad who was highly respected by the manger of the office, and gave me my first lesson in the value of connections in making money. The manager had never met the 17-year-old he hired, but that was irrelevant because I was 'Skinny's girl' and that was all he needed to know. The days of affirmative action, equal opportunity were yet to come to Pontiac.

The three summers I worked at the ASCS paid for most of my college education. My folks gave me $1000 my freshmen year in college to pay for part of the resident hall fee. Between the ASCS job, working while in college as an office worker for some professors, other summers jobs, and a scholarship, I paid for all the rest of my college expenses. I was proud of that because basically I had internalized my parent's values of not letting anyone else help you with expenses. I continued to earn and pay for all my school expense through a Ph.D. in 1971. A couple of years later I felt a little flush and sincerely wanted to pay back the $1000 my parents had given me in 1962. More specifically, I wanted to treat them to a trip to Hawaii, a dream trip my mother had always wanted. I approached them with my offer of the trip and it was not accepted. "No, honey, you keep the money," they said. I protested, they held their ground, and that was the end of it.

In the early 1970's I began to realize how little money my parents had earned in their lifetime. At the time I was making a miserable beginning salary at the University of Oregon and I was home on one of my twice-a-year visits. Mom was describing with great elation they had just finished one of their better years in making money. I thought how nice until I learned the coveted amount was $12,000. It was then I thought if a reversal in health was ever evident for Mom or Dad I might be needed as a back up (or total) source of income for them. It was only a year or two later that ill health occurred, and Mom and I were sitting at the kitchen table making the balance. sheet. It was clear from the amount of their net worth these two people had long ago learned how to save money in extreme circumstances. When you begin to take into account we grew most of our food, paid no rent, made most of our clothes, and recycled almost everything from machinery parts to canning jars you realize how this household saved money.

Were we poor? That's a difficult question. It was clear while growing up we seemed to have less money than the parents of my best friends and all of our relatives. The friends could buy clothes at Brady's (the best shop in town), shoes at the S&M, and they took piano lessons and a piano in their home. The house furnishings of friends and relative, all of whom owned their own homes, were also superior to anything we had. I do not remember resenting my friends or relatives because of the pride my parents seemed to exhibit in being able to do more with less. I can remember having friends, relatives, and even the landlords for dinner where Mom would proudly proclaim, "everything you see on the table came from this farm." And it did.

I can only speculate my parents were so overwhelmingly respected for their character, personalities, and acts of generosity that material possessions were overlooked by the lookers. And it is probably also true material possessions were not so important in that era. But I can also speculate relatives, and perhaps friends, wished things were easier for us. The day Uncle Don brought a kitchen sink to our home in the late 50's was a day for celebration. Uncle Don managed a plumbing store, and I can only guess how much below cost my parents paid for this item. Knowing my parents and my uncle, who was certainly aware of his sister's values, the negotiation for payment of any price must have been an interesting conversation to overhear.

Thus, to answer my own question; for the times we appeared to be poor in possessions, but we were not poor in respect by the community of friends or relatives.

Were we lower class? This is more difficult. By most sociologists' 9-step rankings (upper-upper, upper-middle, upper-lower, etc.) we were probably middle lower class. We did not own a home or any other property except personal property, no plumbing until the late '50's, electricity in 1946, low income, educational level of head of household was 9th grade, and occupations was tenant farmer. If my perceptions are correct, we were never striving for upward mobility. My parents encouraged my brother and I to further education, but it would have been equally acceptable not to go on to school.

But, somehow, the sociologist's criteria do not get at the heart of the class structure. We might have been lower class by the established criteria, but their criteria rarely take into account community, family, and extended family structure. If we would consider our standing in the community and the support we could expect if disaster or even unpleasantness struck, we would not be lower class. This basic structure of family and community, that seemingly has eroded in today's society, kept me from feeling the supposed burden of lower class.

So where am I with money, and values regarding money, in my adult life? My husband and I share uncanny common views on money and how to spend and save it. His parents were raised in the same era as my parents, and we were raised with about the same amount of family wealth, or lack of it. We have both raised our class standing by occupation, education, and income; and have both had the opportunity to be around people who are upper middle class or even upper class. I find most of these people I have had the opportunity to be around to be different, but not better, than the people with whom I was raised.

I am sorely aware what wealth is doing to this country as well as the world. Wealth, it appears, is the system by which we are using up the resources of the world in a much too fast mode. The values which were common to my parent's way of living seem to be the ones that, in the end, will save us from our own self destruction on this planet. I ponder these things now as an adult who has sufficient financial resources, and I wonder what I shall do as a result of this thinking. This is a work -in-progress and I shall have to struggle with it a bit more. Be patient, I am working on it.

Twigs

Twigs was written in 1978 and given to Theresa, more affectionately known as Ray's sibling, or simply Sib, for Christmas that year. Ray's title was a take off on the then popular Roots TV mini series and book. Ray figured the Ripley saga was not quite as magnificent as Kunta Kinte from Africa, so we would be twigs, not roots.

by Raymond Ralph Ripley

To Theresa:

This would be a simple dedication. While this may never be counted as a book I am sure this as close as I will ever come. The wrestling with words to convey my thoughts has been difficult for me. I have done my best. I feel it very inadequate in expressing our years of farming. As I have said--I have done my best.

So again: To Theresa
With our love
The Ripleys

It is said that the human mind can recall memories even into the womb if it is asked to. I can see no clear reason for this or advantage to it either. The recollections that I put down here have a special meaning to me and I hope to members of my family. I also know that what is special to me might not mean anything to anyone else. This is the danger with memories. As the years go on and the mind's eye dulls, they tend to bend and separate as light going through a prism. So I ask you, reader, please bear with me and I hope that what you read will stir recollections of your own.

The early memories of my childhood are almost all pleasant things. I remember wearing as a small thing, a coverall type of garment for every day wear. Early chores were spent in learning to milk a very gentle cow into a small enamel white bucket.

On my 5th birthday, Grandpa Phillips game me a 2 day old female calf. I remember very well, Dad taking the back seat out of our 1935 Chevy and putting in an old piece of canvas for her to lay on to come home. I looked over the front seat at her all the way home. Even to me she looked small and very frail. I named her "Butch" and she raised many calves for me. I only raised one of her calves to maturity, a pure white Jersey (very rare) who was named Snow Flake.

All of our cows were named and usually raised from our own stock. Dad had quit raising hogs early in the 1940's because of a disease problem that was in the ground. I did not mind this at all because whenever I tried to feed them, they would knock me down in their greed to get to the slop bucket.

In the early days, we would separate the cream from the milk after each milking, and give the milk, mixed with ground oats, to the hogs as slop. The cream was put in small cans and taken to town to be sold on Saturday along with the eggs. This was known as trading. The eggs and cream were dropped off as soon as we reached town, the cream at the creamery and the eggs at the grocery store along with the grocery list.

Our 1935 Chevy had no trunk so the cream can and wooden egg carton and I sat in the back seat on the way to town. Saturday was worth it though. A trip to the movies and a stop at Grandma Ripley's on the way home.

Looking back in recollection my father and his mother were very much alike, both in words and in thinking. Dad was a very dutiful son. He helped Grandma with the heavy work of running her apartment house, and took her to see her brothers and sister in Fairbury many times.

Grandma loved people and was at ease with almost anyone. Almost every Saturday night when we visited her, she would proclaim it time for a "treat". (Her word). Her offering was always the same. Homemade vinegar pie or homemade lemon ice cream. The ice cream she called "cream". Both were terrible.

I would wade through the portion ladled out to me under the stern eye of Mom and Dad, only to find another waiting me. Grandma loved to chew on garlic and at times her breath could have stopped a charging bull at fifty paces.

At this time of my life I remember with fondness these things about Grandma. She was stern and strong willed, but full of love, anxious to give and receive it. I think anyone would be proud to be remembered in this way.

There are certain pictures that a person retains in their mind all of their lives. The pleasant ones you enjoy reliving and sharing with others. The unpleasant ones kind of sneak up on you when you least expect it. I like remembering the Christmas morning when I walked into the living room and saw Charley McCarthy under the Xmas tree. Another special friend of mine was Jake. He was a stuffed dog, black and blue in color.

My grade school days were spent at a one room country school about 3/4 of a mile from home. Fran Craddock escorted me to and from school my first year, then proceeded to graduate and go on to high school.

I remember thinking as a child what High School must be like. I pictured it as a very large building on a hill, (for the word "high") with a lot of very tall scholarly looking people carrying large stacks of books around with them.

The memories that I cherish about country school are so many that I will not even try to put them down here, but a few are; softball games with a 75 to 67 score. The extra time granted so we could go down to the creek and play on the frozen ice in the winter. Especially the Christmas program, practice started for them after Thanksgiving. Each child had a reading or poem to give. The older students had one act plays. The whole evening was climaxed by carol singing and a visit from Santa.

My room upstairs was unheated and upon rising from bed in the morning it was my habit to dash downstairs and dress by the stove in the living room. It was on a chilly spring morning like this that my mother showed me a picture. It was a calendar that advertised baby food, and showed a very small and appealing baby. My mother simply said "this is what we're going to have, a little baby." There was no birds and bees explanation or saying that the baby is growing in my tummy.

She left the picture of the baby so I could look at it, which I did several times a day for next few days so I could firmly set it into my mind what the baby would look like. I never told her that some time earlier, Sara Craddock had told me that I was going to have a new brother or sister. I must have known even at that young age that Mom would have wanted to tell me that news herself.

Saturdays as I have described before were a special day, with going to town and buying the things needed for the coming week. On one Saturday a great many special things were brought home. Blankets, diapers, bottles, scales, and a great many other things. These made a huge pile on our dining room table. I stared at this heap of treasure wondering how such a little baby was going to use all of those things.

Time went on, as it does, and I felt it was time for me to buy something for the new little one. My proudest possession at that time was my gun and holster set. I could think of no greater honor to bestow than one of these. After careful selection one was chosen. A small black gun without working mechanism, but Mom said the baby wouldn't mind, and a small brown holster and belt.

Sept. 23rd was a Saturday like all Saturdays, spent in going to town, shopping and trading and coming home in the evening. However this night would turn out a little differently. On driving into the old shed we used for a garage, a small black and white skunk scurried under the car and across my mother's feet and out the door in a dash for freedom. This is not the type of homecoming needed by a family expecting a new baby. The skunk did not leave any calling cards behind and shortly everything quieted down and our purchases were carried into the house.

To be awakened from a sound sleep abruptly is always nerve shattering but on this night it was especially so. I could feel my shirt being pulled on over my head. I could feel my arms going into the sleeves, but I wasn't doing it myself. Dad's words were simple "come on", but there was a note of urgency in his voice. Downstairs by the light of the old Aladdin lamp Mom waited. I will never forget the look on her face. She had a smile for me and more of a look of apology for getting us up in the middle of the night. The light in her eyes I would not see again until I saw it in my own wife's eyes when we had our own children.

I was dropped off at Grandma and Grandpa Phillips' and awoke to the news that there was nothing to report yet.

The morning dragged on and seemed endless. Even the toy basket in the spare bedroom held no fascination for me. My time was spent in looking out the window for Dad and listening for the proper line ring on the telephone.

Finally the news came, a girl, born at 11:11 and the 11th grandchild for Grandma and Grandpa Phillips. Dad arrived shortly thereafter and took me to town. We even ate in a restaurant, which in itself bespoke of a momentous occasion.

Mom came home from the hospital first. They had left the baby behind so Mom could gain back her strength. I accepted this as standard procedure and still waited to see my baby Sibby.

Sib was her nickname and would remain with her all through grade and high school. After a suitable time we took Uncle Don's blue Pontiac (a much more dependable car) and brought her home.

The homecoming of Sib was evidently a National Holiday. Relations as far away as Chicago came to visit and heap gifts upon her. I carefully awaited my chance. I went to the place that the gun and holster had been kept still in the brown paper sack that they had been brought home in.

It was my observation that none of the things that everyone else had brought had not made much of an impression on her. Just wait until she saw what I had for her! She was lying on the bassinet, a canvas and wood affair that was part of the additional accruement necessary for her arrival. I took the gun and holster from the sack and laid it across her stomach. Nothing--needless to say I was disappointed.

I was proud though, and the warmth and feeling of the day made me feel good. There were enough people in the house to fill it with a hum of conversation and Sib didn't seem to mind the activity one bit. Dad was in the back lane piece shucking corn and I went out to watch.

Sib grew and so did I, our world did not expand too much beyond Ocoya School, Chenoa Church, and Saturdays in Pontiac.

There were subtle changes, previews if you will, of things to come. Of Ronnie starting high school, which meant daily sessions with Mom to help with Latin homework and finally Jerry going into high school, which meant I was in the eighth grade.

Being an eighth grader was a dubious honor in country school. You were asked to do the prestigious jobs in school building maintenance such as taking out the ashes, bringing in the water to wash with, and helping to supervise the younger kids of first and second grades.

Eighth grade also brought out something else in Dad. Chenoa had a good basketball team, and we started going to games. I think at first on the pretext "well he will be there next year and we should see what it's like." Dad and Mom both enjoyed the games as much or more than I did and were really very good about running me where I wanted to go.

By now Dad was letting me drive the tractor some and was looking forward to the additional help I could give him.

In the spring of 1949 we got a second tractor. My life of farming had begun.

Upon entering high school I took agriculture and became a member of the FFA. My entrance into high school went fairly smoothly. It took some getting used to, instead of two class members in my eighth grade class, there were 36 members in my freshman class.

In starting my sophomore year, Sib also started school. The picture of her first ride to school is as vivid as if it were yesterday. Sib sat directly across from me on the bus, her feet unable to touch the floor.

I tried to imagine the thoughts going through her mind. Her small mouth was tight lipped and any attempt at conversation by me was rewarded only by a sideways look. When the bus stopped at the grade school she got off as if she had been doing it all her life. I thought to myself as she went through the bus door, Sib's got her own world now.

My picture is still on the wall at Chenoa High as is Sib's and our mother's. In recent years, my two sons pictures have been added to the list of Chenoa grads. When my daughter's is added, another generation will have left their mark on Chenoa High.

I wish I could boast of an outstanding high school career; but I cannot. I could fill a page with the things that I did not excel in. However, old C.H.S. did leave me with some very pleasant memories such as:

Maude Henline, who taught there for 48 years and could remember and call by name every student she had during that span.

George Ferree, probably the most outstanding teacher I had during my entire education. He will always be remembered for his discipline and his dedication.

But most of all the pride that all students have for their school and its traditions. At the time I thought it most remarkable that people who had been away for 25 or 50 years would want to come back--some of them from great distances--for a reunion. But now I understand.

My social life in high school, while not a disaster, was not what it should have been to prepare me for college.

My stay at Normal was just long enough to acquaint me with college life. For the first time I saw that there was a life other than farm life. At the start of the second semester, Dad had a heart attack and I came home to farm and help my family through this temporary set back.

Dad's recovery was as complete as it could be and by that fall he was where he wanted to be, on the tractor seat shucking corn.

After knowing that Dad was going to be alright from his heart attack, I looked back with pride on the farming year of 1954. Grandpa Phillips and I had planted and cultivated the entire crop. We cut the hay and put it up, and also took care of the stock, which was no small job.

While Grandma Ripley was my sitting Grandma, that is how I remember her. She took care of herself and walked at a very slow pace.

Grandpa and Grandma Phillips were my doing Grandparents. I remember them as active and busy. Grandma was a small, slight, very bright person and a joy to be around. She made the best corn bread I have ever eaten, it was good either warm or cold. Grandpa always called her either Mealy or Dear and their love for each other was a beautiful thing. Grandpa Phillips was getting older and looking back I can see that at that time I had to shoulder the portion of the

load that he could no longer carry, and also take up the slack that was made by Dad's heart attack. Dad would have never admitted it, but he was a dependent on Grandpa as Grandpa was on him. Dad was the son that farmed that Grandpa needed and Grandpa was the steadying influence and extra man that Dad needed. I worked with both of them a great deal, sometimes alone and sometimes together. Grandpa was precise in his work, dedicated to perfect results and oblivious to time.

Dad worked as if every job that took a half hour had to be done in 15 minutes. He worked hard at anything he did and in my mind's eye he was happiest with his sleeves rolled up and perspiration dripping off his nose.

With this conflict of training, sometimes I whisk through a job Willie Nillie and on other times, I have all the care and patience of a master craftsman. It was with this training that I started my own farming operation.

It is said that some marriages are made in heaven and are lived in hell. Our marriage has been nothing like the drippy culminations seen on the daytime soaps.

Myself, I believe trying to paper analyze a marriage and putting your feelings for another on paper cannot really fully show to the reader your successes or failures in marriage.

I only want to say that meeting, knowing and marrying Janice has been the best thing that has ever happened to me. I treasure all of the years that we have had together, and look forward to many more with her.

Our children have long since passed the baby stage and are well on their way to adulthood. Each one has his own distinct personality and to put it simply and modestly, they are the best kids in the world.

I am sure that each parent feels that way about their children and I know that the protection and pride of the young is one of the strongest emotions felt by man.

My farming operation on my own started in the fall of 1956 and will finish Dec. 14th, 1978. It is with mixed emotions that I leave the farm, it has been the major occupation in my life.

It started from the first I can remember with my parents teaching me and showing me what to do. My farming life was hard work but very gratifying. Pride in a job well done, worry over bad weather, but always the same end result, two families working together to raise a crop and work the land.

Mom was the statistician, record keeper, number three helper and in spite of how she felt healthwise, was always there when she was needed. Hours in the field were long and hard, the cold weather and outdated machinery would soon sap your strength. It was always good to look down to the end and see the blue car or the gray pickup truck with Mom, her brown thermos and package of rolls.

She was one of the busiest people I have ever known. Even when she sat down to rest she kept her hands busy with knitting, embroidery or crocheting. She was one of the best spirit

bolsters I have ever seen. Her timing was always good and her familiar "aren't we having fun" made a bad moment bearable.

Dad loved the farm, his appetite for work never was satisfied. He would have been happy nowhere else. His last few years were frustrating for him, he knew what he wanted to do, he had done the work before, but his body would no longer let him do it the way he wanted to. Now it was his turn to ask me for help. It was never put into words, that plea, but it was there. One by one his activities were curtailed, not being able to hook up a wagon by himself, unplug his plow and many others. But he went on.

Some might say he should have quit, but I know now that if he would have, that would have meant giving up to his illness, and I'm glad he didn't. I am proud of what the three of us did those last years. Anyone could have done that work with good machinery and in good health.

On Dad's last day on earth his speech was gone, but we always spoke more with our eyes that with words. I bent over his bed and talked to him as I had on several days before. He was better that day thanks to a massive injection of medication the doctor had given him.

As I talked I knew he understood me and tried to answer. His eyes asked me for help, but this time the wagon was too heavy, the plow was plugged too tightly. I stopped talking and clasped his hand. I held tightly and so did he.

I can still feel his hand in mind, I will forever. That man that I looked up to as a boy, who had seemed so tall, who I knew was stronger than Superman, who was more than my father, who, although we fought, was my friend.

And so we went on--Mom making plans--and me getting ready for fall. Mom had her first airplane ride and except for natural periods of depression was doing okay. We were trying to follow advice of others of what to do. Not hurry into decisions or to act rashly. Mom said she wanted to stay where she was as long as she wasn't scared.

On the last day I saw Mom, we had coffee together and David and I went down to work on the windows in the basement at Church. I called Mom when we got home and talked to her before she went to Church. I can't recall our last conversation, but the meaning was the same as it had been for a long time. To Mom, "I'm here if you need me." Her reply, "I'm doing okay, but it's good to know, if I need you, you're there."

Shortly after 2:00 a.m. the next morning our telephone rang. It was Lucy Decker.

I have thought a lot about Mom's death since it happened. Always with the same conclusion, God needed her.

My last year of farming has been a good one. I have really finished on a high note. I look forward now to my new job and to moving into our new home. I do not think about this as an end but as a continuation. My farming background will help me in my new work. I hope 20 years from now to be writing Memories of a Machinery Salesman. (Ray died April 14, 1986, age 51.)

Author's Note

I had not read most of the stories contained in this series for more than a decade. Rereading and remembering these times and people, particularly this year, has been a pleasure. I am a person who thinks in words and stories and wanting to capture that to the best of my ability. These stories reflect my early memories of growing up in a time and era less prevalent today.

I was privileged to spend my adult years with someone who also appreciated words and stories. It was my husband, Jack Loughary, who encouraged the writing of these stories after I started. He knew how much my nuclear family meant to me and relatively how early they left my life at age 32, and 41.

Now I am at another transition time as my husband died in April 2010. He was the consummate story teller and writer. We always tried to be on the forefront of new ways to share stories by books, websites, and now it is my turn to continue in that vein with ebook publishing. This is my first effort, but I do not intend it will be the last.

Theresa Ripley, August, 2011, Eugene, Oregon