

## THAT CORNELIUS FAMILY!

For as long as I can remember, the Cornelius family has been a part of my life. In fact, without the Cornelius family, it is doubtful I would ever have existed at all and would not be here boring you with this story today.

One very cold day in December 1940 my parents met at Fan and Dick's home. The Cornelius family lived in a small house near my dad's home north east of German Valley, Illinois. Mom was in Illinois from Nebraska, visiting her distant cousin, Fan, and my dad was shelling corn that day at the Cornelius place. As they say, "The rest is history."



This is the house where my parents met in Dec. 1940. It was about ½ mile south of the Holland Church (northeast of German Valley, IL). Mom's second cousin Fan Cornelius and her husband Dick and family lived there. Now all the buildings are gone and the spot is in the middle of a corn field.

See the Cornelius boys peeking thru the window.

The home I remember the Cornelius family most in was the Jake Cordes farm several miles north of German Valley. Whenever we visited them, we were entertained in the dining room/den. The door was usually closed to the parlor, but, in it was a fascinating player piano. Oh, how I loved that thing!

Fan's Christmas tree was often in that room, too. Most years the tree was flocked with white artificial snow and sported lots of bubble lights. Mom never put fake snow on our tree and I was enthralled by Fan's decorating choice. One year the tree was covered with PINK snow. The only thing that sticks in my mind about celebrating Christmas with them at their house is the year all four boys (Maynard, Merle, Donald, and Elgin) got wrist watches -- and all four watches were taken apart by the end of the day to see what made them tick. My folks got a kick out of those boys! My family, the Corneliuses, and Dick's sister's family (Grace and Art Gerloff) were together for most holidays and birthdays.



My best guess, considering the background, is that this was taken at a holiday dinner at the Cornelius house on Bunker Hill Road north of German Valley. That's my dad in the middle left and the man far left looks like it might have been Art Gerloff. The back of the head sure looks like Maynard Cornelius. Dick Cornelius is in the center, then Don and Merle Cornelius.

This practice continued for many years until we kids grew up and had families of our own.

One fall the boys raked up leaves in the calf pasture north of their house and built huts with long winding tunnel entrances. I think they had chicken netting strung between posts to make the shapes and support the leaves. I thought that was the “funnest” thing I’d ever seen.

Sometimes Fan left me stay overnight and I felt so grown-up to be sleeping over. I remember playing in the front lawn which was enclosed by a fence and lined with catalpa trees. In the early summer those trees were a fairyland of white fragrant blossoms. On that lawn was the first time I ever saw a croquet set.

One summer night my cousins, the Millers from Lincoln, Nebraska, were visiting and we had a picnic at the Cornelius farm. The four boys and several neighbor kids were riding their bikes downhill from the front yard and gaining some great speeds. One of the Ackerman boys ran into a barbed wire fence and things got pretty serious. In those days ambulances were not available out in the country so I remember my uncle, Fred Miller, applying a tourniquet to the boy’s arm and riding along to the hospital in the neighbor’s car. That fence did some real damage.

During the winter, after a good heavy snow, on Sunday afternoons, people from Freeport came with their sleds to coast down Bunker Hill, which was about a mile long past Cornelius’ home. The road was a beehive of activity and everybody had a great time.

One year my folks and I went to a program at Wessel School, where the boys attended.

*Below is an entry from Mom’s 1949 diary.*

THURSDAY, MARCH 24

.00 went to Freeport this a m. .00.0  
.00 chicks are taking it now .00.01  
.00 gee they looked swell after .00.11  
.00 all warm spring like weather  
.00 went to wessel school program  
.00 tonight gee we tired out  
.00 Windy must still be march  
.00 Winds  
.00 made 3 pies for the freezer and  
.00 one for supper

Thursday, March 24, 1949: It was a warm, windy, spring day. The baby chicks were doing well and we went to Freeport after morning chores. Mom still had time to bake 4 pies, one for supper and 3 for the freezer. (That freezer was very large but she had to have it almost full of meat...3 hogs and a quarter of beef... and baked goods.)

After evening chores we went to the school program at Wessel School where the Cornelius kids attended. (We lived in the Iler School district and there was no way to guess that I would be attending that same school just 5 years later, due to consolidation.) The picture is of Wessel School.





Little did I know then that someday I would go there, too. (See Wessel School story)

As life evolved, the boys grew up and began to drive. I vividly remember Merle and Don coming home, going upstairs, and dropping their shoes on the bedroom floor above that dining room/den area. It sounded like cannonballs dropping. I suspect they put a little extra oomph into the drop for effect.

Donnie was my buddy. I adored him -- still do. *Below is Donnie in 2011.*



(During my high school years, I learned to know Don's Darlene. She is a sweet gal who took time to talk to a teenager. In 2002, Don and Dar took time out of their schedule to come to Donna's home to see Jim and me when we were in Illinois. That really impressed me.)

I do remember the day Maynard and Betty were married. The reception was at Betty's parents' home and it was

just so nice. People ate cake out on the lawn until a July thunderstorm hit. Then everybody who didn't fit in the house clustered on the open porch toward the highway. Betty was such a pretty bride. I still have the newspaper clippings of that wedding.

**Cornelius-Nieman**

Miss Betty Jane Nieman, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Simon Nieman of Ridott, and Maynard Cornelius, son of Mr. and Mrs. Dick Cornelius, Freeport route 1, were united in marriage Sunday afternoon at 2 o'clock in Redeemer Lutheran church of Freeport. The Rev. C. J. Schuth, pastor of the church, officiated at the service.

The bride wore a gown of white satin and a bridal veil, which was held in place with a bandeau of flowers. Her double strand of pearls was the groom's wedding gift. She carried an arm bouquet of red roses.

Miss Shirley Janssen of German Valley was maid of honor, wearing a light blue silk gown and carrying a colonial bouquet. Merle Cornelius, brother of the groom, was best man and Russell Nieman and Donald Cornelius ushered.

A reception followed at the home of the bride's parents, which was decorated with garden flowers. The bridal table, with its floral decoration, held the tiered cake, which was served by Miss Virgil Mitchell of Freeport. Miss Mary Seeman poured

and Miss Lois Borchers was in charge of the guest book.

The bride and groom left on a wedding trip to the northern lakes and will reside with the groom's parents for the present, later living on a farm.

There were many out-of-town relatives and friends at the wedding.

1950



Betty and Maynard used to come to my parents' home for holidays sometimes. One year Betty got a puppy for Christmas and the little critter snoozed on her lap. I can still picture pretty Bets, sitting on a stepstool in Mom's kitchen with that puppy. Later, when Maynard and Betty lived on the Koym farm, I loved to visit them there. That large brick house was always so cool and I just loved the long porch out front. Jimmy and Barbie were toddlers there. They were such fun little kids. They had a wiener dog. When that dog walked behind the heat stove, it had its head on one side of the stove and the tail still on the other side. One thing that sticks in my mind is my mom talking about how Betty used to give herself permanents. I thought that gal could do just about anything well -- still do.

About the time I was in the later years of grade school, Fan and Dick moved to the Stykel farm south of German Valley. I remember that long galley-type kitchen. Part of the house was built of stone and I thought it was so pretty. The boys were teenagers by then and several of them brought their girlfriends to birthday parties and picnics there. I was in awe of all those pretty girls.

Along the road west of the farmstead was a large cement culvert. Very early in the spring the sun made a cozy spot along the south side of that culvert and it was out of the wind. Sometimes early violets were blooming there. Patsy Harbers and I spent some time enjoying that place. She lived across the road from the culvert.

PATSY HARBERS



In a few more years, Fan and Dick were, once again, on the move, this time to a farm north of Adeline. That place had an almost half-mile long lane. It had a gorgeous brick house with lots of rooms. There was an apple orchard south of the house and one year the boys made apple cider. I can still hear Donald telling my mom that any worms in the apples just gave the cider more flavor. They also had some sort of rodents (guinea pigs, maybe?) in a chicken house there. I think it was a money making endeavor but it didn't last long.

It was while Fan and Dick lived at this house that Merle and Joann were married. I liked Joni so much.



40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1998

I remember visiting Merle and Joni when they lived in a tiny house near Ridott Corners. Steve was just an infant then and Joann proudly showed my mom all of Stevie's outfits. (Many years later, at his cousin, Sue's, wedding



reception, I finally had a chance to sit down with Steve and get to know him --a really nice guy.) Then they moved to a huge house near the Forreston gravel pits and I remember some nice parties there, too. Now they live on the farm near Adeline. (Merle and Joni's daughter, Valerie, and I touched hearts many years later at Elgin's funeral and I am sorry I did not get to know her better.) I've visited them several times at the Adeline farm and they always made me feel welcome --such good people. They even welcomed Jim and I when we showed up at their door unexpectedly in 2002. Valerie's husband and son came to meet Jim that afternoon, too.

During the years Fan and Dick lived at the Adeline farm, I remember Elgin as an older teenager. Oh, that jet black hair and "killer looks"! He even played the guitar.



He and wonderful Donna were married one day at a tiny church near Dirinda, Illinois. When Elgin was in the Army, one evening I spent some time with Donna while waiting between school and a ballgame. She was very worried at the time that her Elgin would be involved in the battles with Cuba. They did not have their daughters yet then. In later years, their daughter, Sue, became my "daughter of the heart" and I love that kid so much. Oh, the stories I could insert here about Sue and my daughter, Lori's escapades during their high school years! Donna and Sue even made the trip to Virginia for Jim's and my wedding reception. Twice Donna and Sue came to Randy's home in Janesville, Wisconsin, to see us when we were there. In September 2002 we stayed at The Donna Cornelius Hotel one night and, in December 2003, she hosted a Cornelius family supper so we could see everybody. The Blue Ridge Parkway is waiting patiently for Donna's next visit.



**Donna**

My time line is fuzzy as to when the Cornelius family lived in which place, but I do know that I always felt good whenever my parents went to visit them. Later Fan and Dick moved to a house in Forreston. Because I had a family of my own by that time, I didn't get to see them very often there. The only thing I can honestly remember about the house is Fan's display cases of her crafts on the enclosed front porch. It was a wonderland of "pretties".

Fan and Dick, as well as three of their sons, Maynard, Merle and Elgin, are gone now. What remains are pleasant memories of good people who treated me kindly. This makes me appreciate the remaining family all the more. They are especially welcome in our home anytime. I love them all so much.