

*Come with us on a whirlwind tour of Northern Illinois.*

## Waltzing Through My Memories

The pitter-patter of little feet upstairs tells us morning has arrived. Ah, yes, Amelia (age 11) is doing homework and Miranda (age 4) and Isaac (age 3) are at full throttle. Amelia wows us with her latest word puzzles and scientific experiments involving a dish of water, a pepper shaker, a dish of sugar, and some liquid soap. Isaac and Miranda finish off the experiment with sugar and water all over the place. *That's Randy and Monica and their family below:*



We down a quick breakfast, and then Randy loads Jim and me into the van for our Northern Illinois excursion. Randy is at the wheel this morning and Jim is “riding shotgun”. Today is May 29, 2009 and it’s gonna be a good, emotion-filled day for this old grandma.

We travel west out of Janesville on Highway 14 but I am immersed in my own world. The lush, green Wisconsin farmland is dotted with cows, cows, and more cows. The farmsteads are neat and well-kept. Oh, this is the stuff of my childhood! Beside a mailbox is parked a bright pink bike, its basket filled with purple and hot-pink flowers. The whole world seems to be neatly groomed, much like a kid on his first day of school. One house sports a flag with the message, “Spring has sprung!”

Brodhead, WI, is the site of snowmobile races from so many years ago. This morning I can’t pick out the exact spot of the festivities but it does not matter. I am clomping around the parking area in my moon boots and warm, down-filled coat. My children are still in grade school and they are all with me today as we go about the serious business of racing snowmobiles down a 500’ track in a hayfield in the dead of winter. My fingers are so cold but we are preparing the machines for yet another run. In the rear of the truck is a crock-pot, filled with Bar-B-Qs or escalloped potatoes, wrapped in a heavy quilt, waiting to fill up my hungry family at noon.

There might also be a big batch of freshly-baked rolls, filled with Velveeta cheese. Oh, I can taste them now! It is time to collect the trophies for today. My two sons and their dad did well today. (Our best day yielded 17 trophies but that was not at Brodhead.)



At the end of the race day tired and cold family members and friends pile back into that truck for the trip home to Florence Road.

Back to 2009, Lin. Today I see signs indicating the snowmobile trails of today's "Winter Warriors" but it is time to move on. New-mowed alfalfa is in long rows, just waiting for a baler. Rain splatters on our windshield promise that hay will be there a few more days. A truckload of firewood proudly displays the sign, "Firewood for sale - Kids' college fund".

We drive around the north side of Monroe, WI, and I am back to the days of visiting Bill and Sue Pickett. *Bill and Sue are pictured below:*



We had some good times together. One episode that stands out in my mind was the day we were

delivering a demo 10' satellite dish on a trailer to Bill's front yard. It was a very windy day and I ended up standing on the trailer, hanging on to that dish for dear life, as we drove along. The dish made it in one piece but my nerves were shattered. We traveled to many a snowmobile race together too. I remember coming through Chicago about 2AM, holding Bill by the back of his jeans as he leaned WAAAAAY out the window to check on the snowmobile trailer as we whizzed along the Skyway. I am also reliving one cold evening when Bill and Sue arrived at "The Farm" to help put up a CB antenna. The plan was to attach the antenna to the end of a 50' pipe, then pull the whole assembly upright along the side of the granary. That shouldn't be a problem, should it? My kids' dad was positioned at the peak of the roof and the other three of us were manning guy lines as the project was pulled upward into place. All went well until disaster struck. That antenna and pipe made a huge curl toward the ground and the party was over. Bill's description of the sight... "It looked like the Saint Louis Arch!!!!" Sue is a super friend who always knows just the right things to say and do. What memories I have with those dear people! She recently reminded me of Pinner. On our way home from snowmobile races we often snuggled under quilts to keep warm in the back of the pickup truck topper. One VERY heavy quilt earned its name, Pinner. Once you got under that thing, you were pinned to the mattress. Randy owns Pinner now. *In the picture below you will see Cindy and Pinner:*

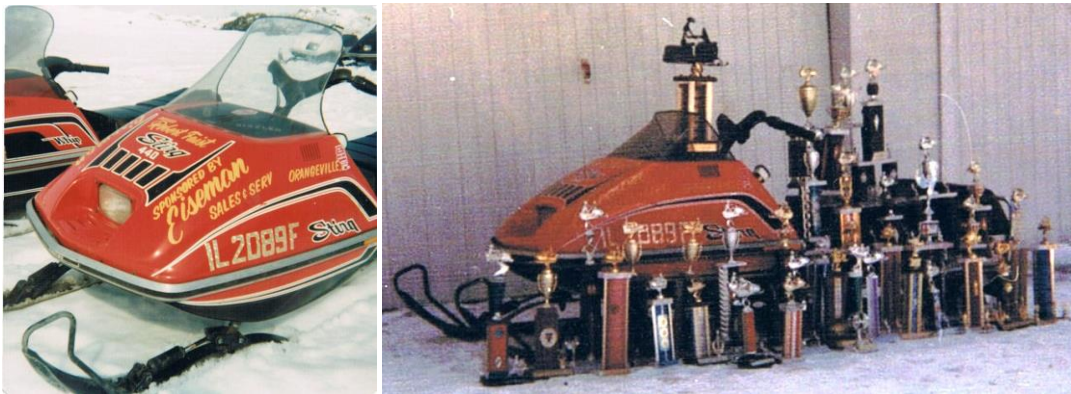


On the south edge of Cedarville, IL, we stop to see Bud and Pat Eisemann. These are good "salt and pepper folks". *That is Bud (in cut-offs) and Pat (in the chair) with the Baer family below in 1978:*

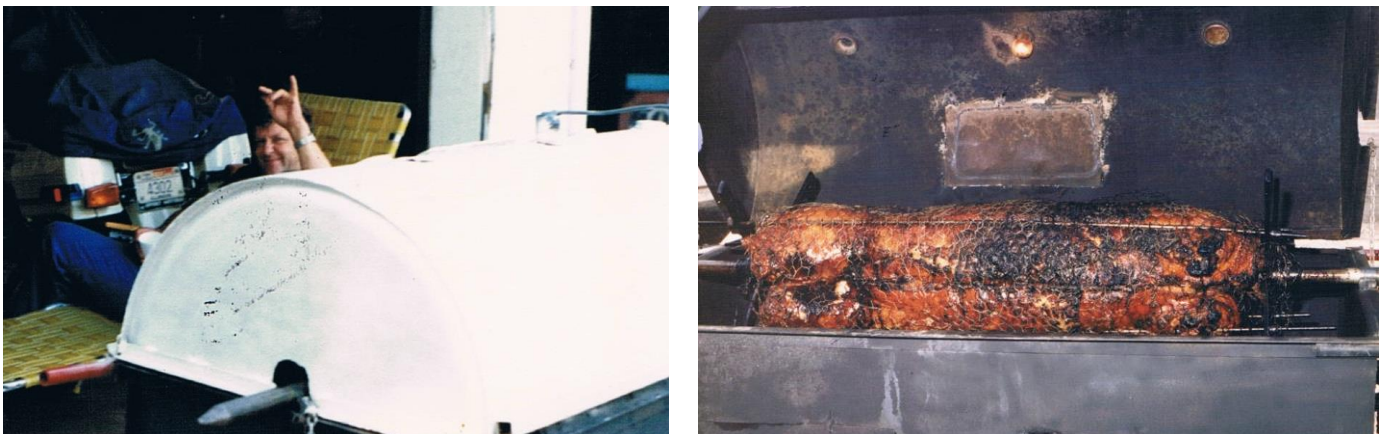




We sit around their table as they show us pictures of their family and a special album celebrating the life of their son Roger. Don't you just know my mind is soon free-wheeling; it is very late on a rainy summer night and I am standing in the garage at their old house in Orangeville as Bud rebuilds the engine of one of the Scorpion snowmobiles? Well after midnight the work is done, Duane and Roger pile into the truck with us and the next day that machine does its thing and wins yet more trophies.



Now time slides forward and I am immersed in preparations as Bud and Duane roast a pig for Lori and Jeff's wedding reception.



Pat, thoughtful as ever, shows up with oodles of gravy to use with the celebration meal. These friends and I have shared many a laugh... and tears too...and I cherish them.

Back to today....Carol Jean Midthun needs to leave for work soon so we must hurry. She is out front pulling weeds as we drive up to her house. It is so good to hug her again. She has kindly picked up a cookbook (written by my pal, Olga) for me. But my mind slips back to the teenage years as Carol John and I do the things young girls do best.....talk about boys! We are, once more, going to ball games and slumber parties and church youth meetings.



But today we enter her house and I walk into her living room. My mind is seeing another scene, as usual. It is such a cold winter night (January 2000) and Carol's daughter Karen is hosting a farewell party for me with the loving people from my church's care group. Precious Bev and Bud Kruse are there as well as Mary and Jim Thom with their Michael and Michelle. There is Vicki Olson and beloved Ada too. Those folks were so compassionate and held me up in prayer during some difficult times. I will appreciate them always.



More hugs and we back out into the street. I see the Redeemer Lutheran Church and am reminded of the days of attending that church with my parents and of the funerals of loved ones there. Pastor Schuth's son Chuck was a mail carrier and a real nut in those days.

Near the north edge of Freeport's downtown business district stands the McNess building. Today we park in the visitors' spot.



In 1994 I came here as Kelly temp, expecting to work for two weeks. Twenty-six months later I left with tears. I LOVED that job! My assignment was to make credit reference calls all over the country and I touched bases with so many great people. But today we are here for a different purpose. Karen Miller's daughter Laurie and I have been cooking up this plot for several weeks. Karen appears and, after giving me a quick glance, she walks toward the receptionist, and then does a double take. You know full well lots of hugs ensue. This dear lady has been through so much and is keeping her family together. I've known her since she was a teenager and she has aged well.





Over the river and through the woods...no, make that over the Pec River and past Honeywell we go, then turn into the Ross Glass parking lot. Art does not recognize me when I ask him for a quote on a windshield. Then he spots Randy and another double take occurs. To say the least, he is surprised. Artie helped on "The Farm" for a while and we have oodles of "pig" stories to tell. He remembers the day he ran clear through the hog house with a sow in hot pursuit. We laugh until the tears flow. His son Adam recalls watching out of an upstairs bedroom window as we were chasing oinkers on a cold winter day. Art is such a good guy and I miss his uninhibited laughter! *That is Artie and his son Adam below:*



Still more hugs are collected, then we are headed westward, across town, to Kiwanis Court and my special buddy, Edna Meyer.



Edna May is on her front walk as we pull into the parking place. This dear lady is candy for my heart! I love her SO much! We spent some quality time together at Honeywell. Many a night my phone was ringing as I unlocked my front door on Hardin Avenue after work. I jolly well better get to that phone in a hurry or all heck would be breaking loose. It was Edna, checking

that all was well and I was OK. She and Don kept a much appreciated protective eye over me. We hug our “Good Byes” and she warns me not to cry. Nahhhh....I don’t listen to her. I wanna take her along back to Virginia but her family probably would object.

Edna has already guessed where we are going for lunch....my favorite-in-all-the-world restaurant, Spring Grove! And my favorite-in-all-the-world meal, “The Spring Grove Meat and Potato Breakfast Special” is still on the menu. Oh, how often we second-shift workers at Honeywell ordered out that meal for our Friday night supper. Randy and Susanne, the waitress, have a great time exchanging wise cracks. This is one of my “must-visit” places in Freeport. It never disappoints me.



Our tummies full, we roll out of town on Highway 20 east. I am a little kid again, going home from a day of shopping with my parents and I peer over the back seat of the gray ‘38 Buick at the bridge over Yellow Creek. Hope the sissles don’t get us! (Sissles were a very real fear in my child-mind. They lived in any river or mud puddle and would eat you if you fell in.) The Babler farm looks exactly the same as I remember. The two brothers filled silo for my dad and were such speedy workers. Grampa Bokker remarked once, after they polished off the noon meal in record time, that they “chewed their cud later”. We pass the old Art Koym farm and I, once more, am a young girl attending birthday parties when Maynard and Betty Cornelius lived in the long gray brick house. A right turn onto Ridott Road leads us past the farm where my Suess cousins lived for a number of years. If I close my eyes, I can still see Aunt Rosie’s kitchen with all those tall brown cupboards. Down the hill is that cement bridge where we kids used to crawl under and listen as the cars whizzed overhead. Such a walk through my memories this day has been so far!

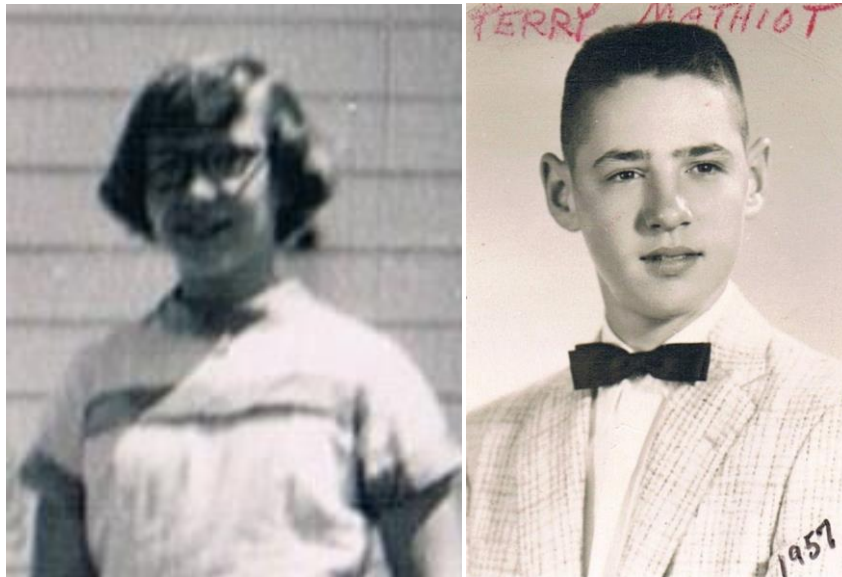
Wessel School, where I attended during 6<sup>th</sup> grade, is just a shell. Its windows are knocked out and it is in shambles. Such a shame! But time has not dimmed my fond memories of this little one-room school. (See my story, “Wessel School Memories”.)





Another school from my past is soon before us, the German Valley Grade School. This one I attended for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. I am transported back in time to a pancake supper with us kids doing the waiter and waitress duties. I can hear Marcie Wilken telling Terry Mathiot to “just look busy and like you know what you are doing”. Her advice is still pretty good for most situations even today.

The pictures below are Marcie and Terry:



My friend Jim Becker now lives in Meadows Apartments (between the two parts of German Valley) and we could not pass by without a hug from him. He answers the door and I am struck by his strong resemblance to his son Brian. Jim has been through some tough times and is adjusting to life without his beloved Nancy. Jim's and my friendship goes back to the days when his two sons were toddlers.



We have leaned on each other many times and I am so glad he is in my life. *That's precious Jim below:*



On the way out of the building I stop to see Mrs. Dirksen. This spunky lady came to German Valley as a young bride from Japan, raised her two children, and made oodles of friends. Today she is letting her freshly-polished, bright red nails dry, in preparation for her big day tomorrow, attending her grandchild's wedding. The generations continue on in love. *Below is a clipping of Cheyoko's arrival in German Valley:*

**ARRIVES HOME FROM JAPAN WITH FAMILY**  
 John Richard Dirksen, who has been serving with the Sea-bees as a Construction Driver 2nd class in Japan for the past three years, arrived home Wednesday, Jan. 19, with his wife, the former Cheyoko Hirano, and their son Jan, who is a year old.

Dirksen is the son of the Rev. and Mrs. John Dirksen, of German Valley. He left for Japan on Aug. 25, 1952. He was stationed at the naval base at Iwakuni. He met and married his wife in Japan. They left for home on Dec. 20, arriving in San Francisco Dec. 30. He received his separation papers from the Navy at the Treasure Island Naval Base near San Francisco on Jan. 17.

The Rev. and Mrs. John Dirksen met their son and his family at the Chicago Airport Wednesday.

The gentle wind ruffles our hair as we stand in front of my parents' grave marker at Silver Creek Cemetery. Someone has decorated all the Saaijenga family stones with red flowers and it looks so pretty. A plastic canvas cardinal is securely attached to one bouquet and the wind blows on. Memories and emotions wash over me. My parents would be so happy to know how good my life is now. I am so blessed!



Another walk thru my past occurs as we drive up the lane to my birthplace on Edwardsville Road. The new owners continue to keep it in pristine condition, lawns mowed, flowers blooming, and everything in its proper place. My parents would be so proud of the place! A new driveway leads up smack-dab in the middle of the old chicken yard (good thing all those cluckers are long gone). Only a few of the original buildings survive. A pretty new home has been built here but the “new part” of the barn is still standing and I can feel the dust of stacking hay in the two hay sheds which mark the south edge of the farmyard.





You know full well that my mind is drifting back to previous times as I relive wild sled rides down the driveway, Christmases past, working in Mom's lush garden, getting a spanking from Dad for pushing my doll buggy right down the middle of the road, mowing all that lawn (the lawn mower was called the Purple People Eater), picking up round bales behind Dad's Allis Chalmers baler (that baler was known as Alice Egg because its bales resembled eggs and it squirted the bales out of its rear), eating dinner (that is what the noon meal was called way back when) out under the bee tree (it was called that because bees seemed to choose that exact spot for their nests) when Dad was in too much of a hurry to come to the house during Spring planting season. I am picking blackberries with Kay and Karen Abbas, racing against darkness to harvest garden produce before the first fall frost hits, listening as traffic zooms down the long hill, searching for the first signs of spring along the hedge west of the house, catching fireflies in the lawn, getting a home-permanent on a summer night, and all the wonderful pieces of my childhood wander thru my heart. I am a teenager watching as the new part of the barn is built, enjoying slumber parties with my friends ("the gang"), getting ready for high school graduation. In my mind I am feeling the cool June breeze drift over me as I awake June Third, 1961. The house is full of relatives who have come for my wedding and I instinctively know that life will never be the same again for me after today. Ah, but, in reality, this is actually 48 years later. I look at my mom's wedding band, which is always on my right hand. It is a physical connection to my beloved parents who travel with me today in my heart.

Life is so very much different than I ever expected it to be when I lived here. The years have taken their toll but today is better than I could have dreamed!

Again Randy fires up the van and we head east toward Buttels' new log house. Oh, it is an elegant home! Nobody is around today but I know Becky's new house is as classy as she is. The sun-dappled breeze blows across the farmland and caresses the rocking chairs on the front porch. I can just picture Don and Becky there.

Next stop: let's see if Joni Cornelius is home. Success! She invites us into her home and we sit on the sun porch, chatting about the things relatives always hash over. Merle is gone now but his memory is very much kept alive by his collection of John Deere tractors and other reminders

of their long life together. Joni is such of good lady!



I look around the front yard and my mind sees Fan and Dick there, Donald making cider in the apple orchard and telling my folks that the worms in the apples just add protein to the cider. I am, once again, at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary party for Fan's parents, at a party celebrating Joni and Merle's wedding, at family gatherings for holidays, and the scenes drift through my mind.

No trip to Northern Illinois would be complete without a stop to visit Lowell and Lorraine Swalve. My pal Lowell isn't doing so pretty good these days but Lorraine is taking such wonderful care of him. She fights like a tiger to make sure he gets the proper medications, treatments, and equipment. She is one dynamite lady! As we chat she sits quietly, holding his hand and you just know he is at peace. Before leaving I step back into the room with Lowell and tell him I love him. With a barely audible voice he replies, "That goes two ways." That comment will stay in my heart forever. I am so blessed to have these people as my friends. Lorraine tells us that she has not attended her Red Hat Society meetings for two years. The last time we were here she was wearing her red hat on her rider lawn mower. Yup! This lady is a keeper.

A call to Kathy and Gordon Merrill reveals that we have missed them. They had to leave for an appointment. They are such special folks and I am sorry we cannot exchange hugs this trip. There are shared wiener roasts, snowmobile rides, long chats over coffee, 4AM visits, laughter and tears, and a host of other memories in our connected lives. Kathy is battling health problems and I love her so much.

Donna Cornelius is waiting for us! Oh, she is such a joy! We sit at her table and snarf down oooy-gooy, decadent chocolate brownies with whipped cream as we touch hearts. Her house

is a sanctuary of tranquility.



This fun lady shares that she is a member of two Red Hat Society chapters. Rocky (the petite 140-pound golden retriever) is no longer here but there are plenty of kitties. One kitty, having been placed in solitary confinement in the bedroom for some rule infraction, is pawing at the door for mercy. Donna lets him out and he roars toward the kitchen. The clock is ticking and we need to shove on. How I wish we could take Donna back to Virginia with us!

It looks as though Drakes will have a fine crop of sweet corn to sell in a couple of months. (That vegetable should be no more than 15 minutes off the stalk when you eat it.) We pass within a half mile of “The Farm” and I close my eyes and remember my five little blondes and all of their antics.





I am so very proud of each one of them today.

Diane Van Raden comes to the door and gives us hugs. Her house is full of pictures of grandkids and she looks so happy. We are sorry to have missed Dick but will catch him next trip. Diane and I go way back to 9<sup>th</sup> grade at Forreton High School; we have a lot of history together. *The picture below is of Diane and me in 1958:*



Freeport looms ahead of us and I remember all the trips to Farm and Fleet. (They are in a snazzy new building now.)

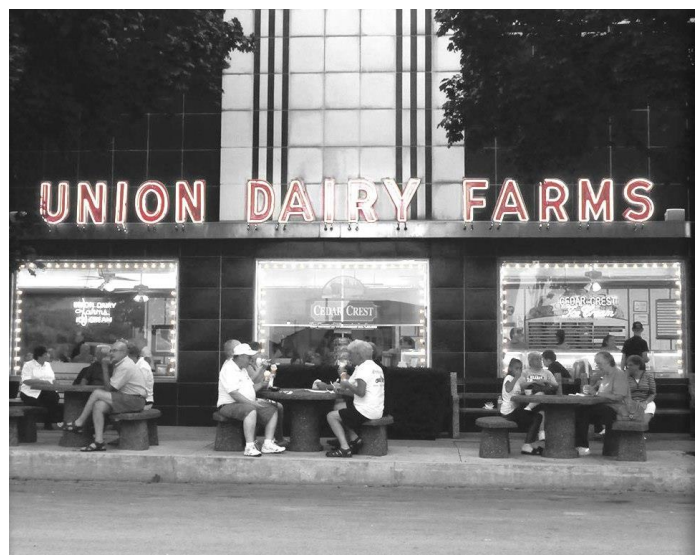


We drive past 538 N. Hardin Avenue, my treasured home from August 1, 1998 to January 21, 2000. They have replaced the siding and it looks so pretty today. A big pot of flowers is hanging on the porch.



I look for Mary and Jane next door but they are long gone to North Carolina. They are jewels in my necklace of friends and I miss our jaunts around Northern Illinois.

There is an impressive new library in town and Debate Square (site of the famous Lincoln/Douglas Debates in 1858.) is a peaceful place of trees, statues, and shaded benches. Two teen-age girls are climbing over Lincoln's statue. I wonder if they realize the history of this place....probably not but someday they will. Next door to Debate Square is the Union Dairy Ice Cream Shop.



We walk in and I am transformed into that little girl, so long ago, with her nose pressed against the glass cases of “zillions!” of tubs of ice cream. What to choose! What to choose! Well, they no longer sell that ice cream for a nickel a scoop but no matter. Just the memory is worth what they charge and we leave with rivers of yum running down our arms and off our elbows.

As we pass through Rock City I spot Don and Jean Woodruff’s old home. I wonder where they are today. We had such good times together and I can remember spending hours at Jean’s table, compiling snowmobile race point records each week. (Don is the guy who loves mayonnaise and sliced olive sandwiches.) *That's Don (drenched in the rain) and Jean below:*



Sylvia and Bill Hillman are waiting for us in front of their spacious new home.



Last time we were here this was just a muddy hole in the ground. A tour of the house reveals one downstairs bedroom that is decorated with John Deere items. I do like that! Just off the living room is a window-filled room that is used for an office/computer/sewing area. I can look out of the window and see exactly what Sylvia described in a previous email, “Lookin’ over the pasture, the oak trees are takin’ on a heathery green color across the hillside. I love that fluffy soft look just before the leaves explode. The cattle are under



the trees just getting going with their morning grazing. It's fun to watch them throughout the day." They have such a peaceful pastoral view and this house is a great fit for them. Now, when I get a message from Sylv, I can close my eyes and see exactly where she is sitting and see the beauty before her.



Randy and Bill take off for the hanger to look at Bill's airplane and they hit it off, talking about planes, guns, and world events. Jim and I join Sylvia at their table as we sift through old pictures and dredge up family "bones". Jim and Bill discover that they were both in the Army in France at the same time during the late '60s. What a small world! Too soon it is time to leave and it hurts to pull away from these good people.



Randy rolls over the back roads. Near Brodhead we pass the Sand Burr Restaurant and I am, as usual, living in the past. This time two events come to mind. First is a day spent with Bud and Bev Kruse and we are enjoying a Sunday dinner here.



They are such special friends and have been with me through some nasty situations.

The second memory is of another day with Lottie Lawrence and we are “enjoying” an entrée of lamb. I would rank that delicacy even lower than turnip greens.



Lottie has been my “Thelma and Louise” buddy.

Randy knows these back roads. I am inhaling all this black dirt and farmland. The sun is poised to set and farmers are busy closing up their world for the day. Evening chores are being finished, a farmer is moving hay bales, one man is filling a tank with water, a lady is taking down her laundry from the wash lines.

Once back at Randy’s home, we are filled in on the day’s events here. Monica has been busy helping my grandkids make memories of their own today. They went to the fairgrounds to get an

up-close look at the Budweiser horses and Amelia is enthralled. Oh, it has been such a GOOD day! Thank you, Randy and Jim, for being such good sports about all these whirlwind stops. I am so blessed!

*Added note: 19 days after our visit, Lowell went home to be with the Lord. I am so glad we were able to see him on our trip.*



*Lowell Swalve*  
*1936 – 2009*

*Lorraine, when you are ready, PLEASE, go back to your Red Hat Society meetings. You are such a loving person and have so much to give to others.*