

## Introduction.

My father, William Alvin Velie, was born the youngest of four boys to Alvin and Anne Velie in a small town in Central Wisconsin. at the turn of the century. George, Oscar, and Lewis were his constant pals and their adventures were a source of entertainment for our family. He always spoke highly of his brothers.

These stories are not meant to be a family history, but rather a recollection of memories over a ninety year period of time. Perhaps you may remember them differently. In some of the stories I see a slight resemblance to a Mark Twain character and maybe you will too.

As I am growing older, I value the look into the past that only my father can give to us. I have chosen to write the stories the way Papa told them to us all with as few changes as possible.

My warmest thanks to my sister Carole for taping many of the stories, to my daughter Mary Jo for suggesting the title and typing the final manuscript, to my son David for designing the cover, and to my father, for just being himself.

"Would you like to hear a little story?"

Marilyn Velie Jensen  
November 9, 1991.

### Compilers Note.

I have the warmest memories of my Uncle Bill, when I took him into the Okefenokee Swamp. He said it was the most fun he had ever had on a trip south. It is memories like this that will always stay with you for the rest of your life. On my trips to Eau Claire I always had to spend some time with, and each time I would tell my wife this may be the last time I'll see him. And it was.

Eugene Velie.  
May 29, 1998.

NOW LETS HEAR THE STORIES.

Big tall pine trees have grown up on the spot where I was born in the country near Sheridan Wisconsin. Of course, that was almost 91 years ago. Now all we saw on our last visit in 1971 were big signs that say "Keep Out." Times and things have changed.

#### School Days in Sheridan.

I went to school only a short time in Sheridan. At the time there were only two schools. One was wooden and dilapidated, and the other was a nice brick building. That was more than 80 years ago. The brick school has been made into a home where people still live. Down the road about a block from the brick school is a Velie Cemetery, but I wouldn't know most of the people buried there.

Later, my dad sold the farm. He had only about ten acres and he agreed on \$500. With the money, we were going to Indiana and he planned to preach.

#### Days In Indiana.

When I was six or seven, we left Sheridan and moved to Bloomington, Indiana. Even though I had been going to school while we lived in Sheridan, I was not able to go to school in Indiana because I was not seven years old. We went there on a train. In Indiana, Pa thought he was going to preach, but he became very, very sick. One time he thought he had died. We were living in a house owned by a Mrs. Pruitt. I remember standing around the bed where Pa was sleeping. Later he told us that he had had a vision or dream and he saw heaven from a distance. He asked someone if he could stay but they said "No, you can't stay because you are not ready yet." Then he awoke and told us about his experience.

While we were in Indiana, we knew of a woman named Mrs. Snoddy who lived in the country. She was really poor and she didn't have any money, but she had a real good cow. She made butter from the milk and cream and sold it. That was how she made her living. Something happened and the cow died. Everybody around the neighbourhood was feeling sorry for her.

There was a preacher named Billy Baxter and he lived close to her, and there was another man that lived close to her, too. He had lots of money. Well, Billy Baxter met the man and they started to talking about poor Mrs. Snoddy's cow. The man said he felt sorry for Mrs. Snoddy, and Billy Baxter said "well, how sorry are you". The man said "well I'm real sorry too." Billy said, "I'm twenty five dollars sorry, Now how sorry are you"? The other man would not give anything toward buying another cow. I think that twenty five dollars would have gone a long way toward buying a cow in those days, because things were cheap. We ate sweet potatoes because we couldn't afford to buy Irish potatoes. Sweet potatoes were only ten cents a bushel. A loaf of bread cost five Cents.

We only stayed in Indiana through the winter. I remember it snowed twice.

By the time of spring, my dad wanted to move back to Wisconsin. He knew someone in the railroad company and they got a pass for us, and we moved back to Waupaca, Wisconsin. We stayed around there for a while. Perhaps about six months. Then we moved back to Sheridan, which was commonly called Cobb Town.

### The Mill in Sheridan.

There was a big mill there and my dad ran the mill. There is no trace of the mill today, but at the time there were three streams near it. One was the race and that supplied the power for the mill. The second was the falls, and it was beautiful. I don't remember the name of the third, but it helped to regulate the height of the water going over the dam.

Later Louie and I went to school. We were the only two kids in the school. On the last day of school it was customary to have a picnic and the teacher would buy the lunch. She gave us some money and we walked over to town to the store. We bought several lemons so we could make lots of lemonade, and I don't remember what else. While we were at the store we met three kids who were not coming to school, but should have been. Well we invited them to the picnic, so we had five kids, and that was more fun.

Later, I went to school in Merrillan, Wisconsin. I don't remember much about going to school there.

### Life In Ella.

When I was thirteen years old we moved to a little village called Ella, Wisconsin. Pa bought a house there, and put in a few acres. He planted a big garden and we had one or two cows. That's how we existed in Ella. My schooling was in Ella and I was a little over thirteen.

I quit school so I could make maple syrup, because I thought it was so much fun. We had a big tank with a regular furnace under it, where we boiled the sap down. We got about one gallon of syrup out of a barrel of sap.

Mother used to make sandwiches for us, and we would take a green whip and put the sandwiches on it, and stick it into the furnace, and make toast out of them. That went pretty good put in the woods. Those were soft maple trees, and the sap was not as sweet as hard maple sap. If you take a dipper of sap out of the boiling barrel and set it out in snow to cool off, then you could drink it. That is the time when the maple has the best flavor.

### House Boat Building..

My dad built the houseboats in Eau Claire. We had a real large tent and we had meetings in the tent. When the meetings were over, he would take the tent and fold it up and would put in the houseboat, and go on down the river to what he thought was suitable for a meeting. Then he would put up the tent there. Now I must tell you a little about building the houseboats. The hull of the boat was upside down. When it was all put together and tarred, and tarred many times, then it is turned over. It is a little closer to the river after it is turned over. The tar is boiling hot, and one houseboat caught on fire, but my dad was able to get water out of the river, and put the fire out. The houseboats were quite large. They were twelve feet wide and thirty six feet long, and that wasn't figuring in the rake of the houseboat.

We had quite a few things on these houseboats. One time we had a flush toilet on board. After you used it, you took a pail and dropped it over the end of the boat and filled it up with water and poured it in the toilet. The houseboat was always parked with the toilet downstream, so the garbage would drift toward the bank. We were pollution conscious even in those days. Also we had a picture and a sink. Our house boat was fixed up real nice. It was even wallpapered. First lumber was used to seal it in. Then we nailed cheesecloth over the surface and finally the wallpaper was applied to that surface.

The outside was covered with tin and then tarred so most of the outside was black, except for the windows and doors which were painted with a yellow trim. Pa put a lot of signs on the outside of the boat. The biggest one was painted in yellow and it said, "4 Jesus R U?" He would tell people that was what we stand for. "We're 4 Jesus R U?" If you ain't you ought to be."

One trip we went as far as Winona, and one we went below Winona, but we did not get quite to La Cross. After the first trip, Pa sold the boat, and then we went back and built another one the following spring. Louie and I made several trips down the Chippewa River. I made three trips with the houseboats and one trip with the raft. When Pa would sell the boats we would take out our furniture and freight it back. Then we would live in Eau Claire until we could get another one built. Then we would move back into that one.

My trip on the raft was on a lumber raft, and I also made one or two trips in rowboats, and one trip in a canoe, and those trips were from Eau Claire to Ella.

When we were living in Winona, my dad bought a launch from J.R. Watkins and he fixed it up. It had canvas curtains all the way around it. He enclosed it all with slide windows. It had a sixteen horsepower motor and that was heavy enough to run a thrashing machine if you wanted to use it for that purpose.

We always went down the river, except for one trip. We went up the river in the launch that we bought from Watkins. When we were going up the Mississippi River and we got into the Chippewa River, about ten or twelve miles, we hit a rock or something and one of the blades broke off. We went a little further, and another one broke off, so it only had one blade on the propeller so it did not run very well. We managed to get as far as Ella where the launch broke completely down. There was a young man at Ella that wanted to buy the launch so bad that he traded a small five or ten acre farm and a real good cow to my dad for the launch. (This story is in Grampa Alvin's book that he printed on his printing press.) I stayed on this farm about five years, from about age thirteen to eighteen.

#### HARVESTING OUT WEST..

Before I was married, Oscar and I went out to Max, North Dakota to harvest some wheat. Later we went to another town called Coal Harbor. We were looking for a pal of Oscar's. We found out that he had left the country. We went down to a grocery store. We had just a little money, maybe two or three dollars apiece. We bought crackers and a ring of bologna. A ring of bologna cost a quarter. Also we bought a sack of Newsboy cookies. Then we sat down on a pile of ties and ate our lunch. Then we went down to the railroad track and found out that there was not any work in town. Now we knew that we would take the first train out of town, and we didn't care which way it was going. The first train back in the same direction we came from, so we got on the train going back toward Minneapolis. We shipped out there. It only cost two dollars to get us to a little town called Lucka. We got off the train at Lucka and got on a freight train and bummed from there on. We got kicked off at Max and a young kid hired us. We went out on a thrashing rig. That was a big operation. They had a forty inch sounder and I think that was the biggest made at that time. Four men could pitch bundles in at the same time. Then we went back to Eau Claire again..

#### WORKING FOR BEN SCHOFIELD.

I worked for Ben Schofield when I was about 14 or 15. He had a little bit of everything for work to do.

He had logs, bolts, (logs cut into pieces) and lumber. After I had been there awhile, Mama (Josephine) came and did all the cooking for all the men. I did not think at that time that she would be the one I would marry. However, I remember that she made delicious cottage cheese and put wild onions in it.

#### MARRIAGE CHILDREN AND RETIREMENT.

Later on I decided that Josephine was the one for me. We got married in the Methodist Church on Lake Street in Eau Claire, on October 4, 1919. First we lived in the country in a house just above the Maxwell Station in the Durand area. Donald was born there. Then we moved upstairs of George's house and I started working at the U.S. Rubber Co. At first I got laid off quite often, then the work got more steady. I stayed there almost 45 years. I retired on November 19, 1965. When we lived upstairs at George's house, Carole was born. When we left brother George's house we moved to the house at 616 Emery Street. Joanne and Bill were born at that house. Dr. Beebe came to the house for each of the deliveries. Marilyn was the only one born in the hospital, and Dr. Beebe was on hand for that event too.

#### FISH STORIES.

During the time we lived on Emery Street we went fishing many times at Marshmillir Pond. My son said the bluegills were so big that they would pull the poles right out of the boat while we were having a little nap. Also he told us that they would put Pepsi Cola on the worms to make the fish bite better. We always had a case of Pepsi with us. Sometimes we stopped at Billy Goat's Island to eat lunch. We always had lemon drops and Black Jack Gum with us especially if George was along. Sometimes we stopped at the store in Eagleton, and bought a big piece of cheese.

#### DYNAMITING THE FISH.

When I was a young boy I didn't have much sense. I did anything that I saw older people do. One day Louie and I borrowed a boat and two sets of oars, and we took it up the river fishing. There was a man with us named Frank Eckler. He sat in the back seat and handled the dynamite. He made fun of us because we had six-inch fuses on our sticks. He said that three and a half or four inches was plenty, and all we needed. We rowed up the river until we found a deep hole, maybe 12-15 feet deep. Then Frank tried to light the sticks. When he struck a match he burned his finger and dropped the dynamite right under him. There was about six inches of water in the boat, and he couldn't see the dynamite because it was under water. He began to claw around trying to find the stick. During the fracas, I thought once about jumping in, but I wouldn't have had time, because it was too close, so I stayed in the boat. He finally found the dynamite and threw it out of the boat. We made two pulls down stream and the dynamite went off. We just escaped by the skin of our teeth.

Louie and I went fishing quite a bit and we caught a lot of fish. Well, the Warden got a little suspicious of all the fish we caught so he asked if he could go fishing\* with us. We took him to the spot where we caught so many fish. Louie reached in his tackle box and got out the fuse and the matches. Well, now the Warden thought to him self "I've got the boys!" I lit the fuse and handed it to the Warden and said "now are you going to fish or are you just going to sit there?" That story didn't really happen. It was just a story many people told as though it really happened to them.

## OLD FRIENDS.

My friend Lem Lem Lepin had a pet pig. He was real tame and would come right up close to your legs, and rub against them. Well, one day the pig came up close to my friend Jim Ward while he was drinking some beer. Jim said to the pig, "What do you want, some of my beer?". Jim took the bottle and put it up to the pig's mouth, and the pig drank quite a bit out of the bottle, and Jim finished it up. He was a good clean pig. Well, pretty soon Jim said he had to use the toilet. So I pointed right out there to a building I knew wasn't the toilet. He hurried out there and pretty soon he was back again, and he said, "That's ain't no toilet, that's a smokehouse." Another time we were thrashing on a big farm. There was a rooster that thought he was the cock of the walk. He just bullied every one. I thought, "I'll have some fun with you old boy". I went into the barn and caught him. I had a half pint of whiskey and I carried the rooster to the spot where I had the whiskey hid. Then I went over to the straw pile and took some whiskey in my mouth. I took the straw and put it into the rooster's mouth. He had to swallow it or choke. I got four or five good swallows in him. Then I let him go. He sat there a little while and pretty soon he started to crow rather oddly, and he crowed and crowed. He jumped on the other roosters, and pretty soon he met his match. Finally I felt sorry for him so I picked him up and took him into the barn and set him in the manger and said, "Now you sober up there, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

## GUN STORY.

When we lived in the Chippew bottoms at Maxwell, George would come down quite often for a visit. One day he brought a pail of live minnows with him, so he and I went fishing. We caught a nice string of fish and among them we got about eight nice Northerns which we brought home. While we were gone, there was quite an accident that happened at home. We had a big old cupboard about as big as an icebox, because we didn't have refrigeration. We had to put our food in the cupboard or keep it outdoors. This big old cupboard sat about six inches from a wall. I had a 12-gauge pump gun sitting behind this cupboard. I had to run my arm way back behind the cupboard to get it. Because there was only Josephine, Ben Schofield, and Me, and no little kids in the house. I wanted the gun handy, because sometimes in the winter when I got up in the morning I would look out the window and see a rabbit. Then I would get the gun and shoot the rabbit from the door. That morning, I didn't shoot so I left the gun cocked. While we were fishing, George's son Ernest got in part way behind that cupboard and touched that gun and pulled the trigger. Well, it blew a big hole right up through the ceiling. Of course it scared Olga and Josephine to death.

## TURTLE FISHING.

Louie and I used to hunt and catch turtles. In the fall we would catch as many as we could, usually around Thanksgiving time. We would go out on the ice in the pond and look through the ice down into the water which was only about a foot deep. We would take an ax and make a small hole, kneel down, and run our arm down that hole and grab the turtle by the tail. When the ice water is so cold the turtle is pretty numb, and he doesn't move much, so he won't snap at you if you grab quick. Then we would take the turtles and poke them in the face so they would open their mouths. Then we would stick another one's tail into his mouth and make a string of turtles.

Those turtles were about one to one and a quarter feet long. Then we would put them into an old hollow tree, because we were about two miles away from home. Next we would get a team and wagon and haul them home. We would put them into a box stall in the barn. It didn't have a floor in it, but it had about one and a half feet of straw in the bottom. We would throw the turtles into the box stall and they would dig themselves right into the straw out of sight. We kept them all winter. Whenever we wanted any we would catch a couple and then we would kill them, and then hang them up after we drove a nail through their tail. Then we would dress them. The chickens would eat all the meat from the bones, and any garbage parts. We had good soup out of the choice meat. We would share with any one who came along and showed an interest in making soup. There are seven kinds of meat in a turtle. The neck is the most choice part, and the legs are like beef. If we didn't make soup, we would parboil the choice parts and then fry them. I remember Oscar making turtle soup too.

#### OSCAR'S STORY.

Oscar did some car repairing while he lived in Omro, Wisconsin. One day he asked his friend Keck Wilson if he wanted to go into town with him. Keck went in to tell his wife that he was going, and told her that he wanted a little money in case he found that he wanted to buy. She asked him what he wanted to buy and he said "Well, nothing that I know of now, but I might see something, so I would like to have a quarter if I want to buy a pack of gum." She said, "You don't need a quarter to buy a pack of gum, because it's only a nickel." So she gave him a nickel. Poor fella, he took it and they went into town.

#### OSCAR'S FRIEND.

A man named Joe Reedy was going to La Crosse to get married. He was late and rushed down to the river and stepped into a canoe. Oscar was going to take him across the river. Somehow the canoe tipped over and both of them fell into the river. Somehow they fell into the river into two feet of water. Joe was all dressed in his wedding clothes so he told Oscar to hurry. They made it across the river just in time for Joe to catch the train at Maxwell. I never did hear if he got dried off before he got married in La Crosse.

#### POTATO STORY.

This is another story about the time I was working for Ben Schofield. One night I couldn't get back across the river because the ice was going out. I slept in his bed. In the bed was a grain sack full of potatoes. I asked him why we had potatoes in bed with us. He said that it freezes in here at night. If we keep our feet on the potatoes they won't freeze.

#### GRANDPA'S 90th. BIRTHDAY PARTY.

November 17, 1990. Actual birthday is November 18.

#### A LITTLE SONG.

In 1922 the girls discard their shoes  
 Bare legs are in style  
 In 1923 don't be surprised to see  
 The dress above the knee  
 In 1924 You'll see a little more

Girlie dressed in style  
 I hope that I'm alive in 1925  
 When girlie wears a smile.  
 Anony,ous.

Well,I'll sing you this and then we'll go home eh!  
 A little black animal out in the woods  
 And I said " ain't that cat pretty?"  
 Well,I walked right over for to pick it up  
 But it wasn't that kind of kitty.  
 Well,it ain't going to rain anymore,anymore  
 Well it ain't going to rain anymore.  
 How in the world can the old folks tell  
 That it ain't going to rain anymose.

#### LITTLE DOG JACK.

I sang this song to Donald many times.

I had a little dog by the name of Jack,  
 And I sent him out over the railroad track.  
 A train came along and Jack did fly,  
 And hit the conductor right in the eye.

#### POOR JACK.

Most of these songs and many more we learned from Oscar. When he was away from home he would learn many songs. Then when he came home he would teach us his songs. Once he worked in St. Paul and drove a mail wagon. It was one of those big wire-cage type that they had years ago. He had a great big horse on the mail wagon.

#### CLAM DIGGING.

When we were young boys, we would go clam digging near Caryville, Wisconsin. Since these were fresh water clams, we did not eat them. We didn't catch them to eat anyway. After we would catch quite a few we would take them home and put them in a pan and boil them until the meat was soft. Also the meat was very stinky. After the meat was cooled we would squeeze them until most of the was out. Then we felt around to feel if something hard was inside the clam. If there was anything hard we pulled the meat away so that we could examine the hard object. Of course, we were hoping for a pearl. Sometimes we would find slugs inside. If we were lucky, they might be shaped like a hounds tooth. If the shape was very good, they could be sold to a jeweler to be made into a tie clasp. Maybe we could get a couple of dollars. I remember we dug for clams many times, and we found a few good hounds tooth slugs and two pearls. One of the pearls was quite nice and the other was beautiful, perfectly round and shone with a nice luster. Finding a pearl in a clam was very rare. Well I remember that Pa (Grandpa Alvin) confiscated our jar of slugs and two pearls and traded them to a man named Mr. Baily, who lived on Water Street. He was a wheeler and dealer. I don't remember how much they were worth, but I do remember that Pa got two davenportes for our treasures. One he brought home. We had it in our living room, and the other one he gave to George and Olga for a wedding present.

#### PENNIES FROM HEAVEN.

When Pa had his tent meetings, he always tried to get Louie and Me to sing. We were not too anxious. One day he told us that if we would

sing without making a fuss, we could have any pennies that we got in the offering. We quietly told many of the people who came to the meeting that we got to have all the pennies, so there were quite a few pennies in the offering. Finally, Pa found out what we had done, so we no longer got to keep all the pennies. It was fun while it lasted.

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Time has passed and things have changed. However, one thing must never change, and that is our Christian Heritage. We are so very thankful that we have had the privilege of having a Godly Father and Grandfather. Soon we will celebrate Papa's 91st. birthday and we thank our Heavenly Father for a Christian Heritage.

May God bless you all.

WALK A LITTLE PLAINER PAPA.

Walk a little plainer Papa  
 Said a little boy so frail,  
 I'm following in your footsteps  
 And I don't want to fail,  
 Sometimes your steps are very plain  
 Sometimes they are hard to see,  
 So walk a little plainer Papa  
 For you are leading me.

I know that once you walked this way  
 Many years ago,  
 And what you did along the way  
 I'd really like to know,  
 For sometimes when I am tempted  
 I don't know what to do,  
 So walk a little plainer Papa  
 For I must follow you.

Some day when I'm grown up  
 You are like I want to be  
 Then I will have a little boy  
 Who will want to follow me  
 And I would want to lead him right  
 And help him to be true  
 So walk a little plainer Papa  
 For we must follow you...