

## **Jean Aplin, Roamer, Lewandoski's Writing's as of 1986**

**Not many details are available about my birth. What if I had become a celebrity? Oh, there's a certificate stating "Female - January 13, 1919." The doctor attending was Dr. Charles Dodson of Palmyra, Wisconsin**

**The intimate family account has long been forgotten. I've tried to learn who was there besides the doctor? Did Grandma Perry come? How was she alerted? Did she come by train, cutter or buggy? No one can come up with the answers. Even Dad was hazy about my questions and I hadn't been curious when Mom was still alive. I'm sure she would have known. Dad was to ask Aunt Mattie about the event, but Uncle Ed got into the act and wrote an exaggerated fictional account. There's a letter in my possession from a friend of the family offering condolences because I wasn't a boy - could account for my inferiority complex.**

**It's probably safe to assume it was a very cold Monday unless the January thaw was taking place. It's probably safe to assume also that I was not a planned child as Mom was very young when Helen was born four years earlier, and had had a most difficult delivery. However, she must have had an easier time at my arrival, and praised Dr. Dodson, even recommending him to her friend "Ted" Smith Jones, wife of Dennis Jones and daughter of the local undertaker, who was in near panic when her second child was on the way, since this lady, too, had had problems with her first born.**

**My birthplace was on a farm just outside of Palmyra. It was owned by Stella Stubs, one of the Jones girls (no relation to the undertaker). The folks rented from her and it seems she lived in a room upstairs for awhile. She was a widow who later married a Mr. Ed Walters and the folks were friends with her many years.**

**Mom was the oldest of seven children born to Charles Perry and Anastasia Fardy. They were Hazel, William, Mattie, Orville, Evelyn, Elinor and Virginia. Orville died when he was very young and Grandma Perry mourned him all her life. She kept an arm full of wood he had carried into the house just the day he died and his shoes, clothes, etc. It happened very suddenly around Christmas time, in fact he was buried**

on Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>. They were very poor and Grandma was very disturbed because they couldn't afford flowers. She was pregnant with Evelyn at that time and after the funeral she had to tell the rest of the children that there wouldn't be any Christmas that year.

There were five boys in Dad's family and he (Clyde) was the oldest. Then came Harvey, Walter, Howard and Gaylord. Dad's mother was a beauty and Grandpa was very handsome. They both died in their 40's - Grandpa first with Addison's disease and Grandma two years later with cancer. My Dad said his mother died in his arms.

Aunt Lou (Louisa) made her home with the boys and tried her very best to keep them on the straight and narrow Methodist trail.

Back to my early years. I can vaguely recall the house. The earliest I can remember was holding Mom's hand while we walked around the front yard. Helen, about 6 years old at that time was having a tonsillectomy on the dining room table. Such operations were often done in the home. Checking with Helen about this event, she said: "I was about 6 years old, and from that time on I was fat!"

Those years must have been hard for the folks. Dad milked cows by hand, and hoed the corn fields - imagine acres to be done. He recalled how hot it was one summer while he was hoeing, and how he decided to go in the cellar under the house for a glass of cold cider. He downed a couple water glasses of it - not realizing it had become "Hard Cider" by fermenting. When he got back to the hot cornfield it hit him, and he said he was crawling down the rows and laughing!

We played under an apple tree by the milk house and windmill, digging in the sand with spoons. The shepherd dog, old Mushy, was always around. Helen said she rescued one of us who fell in the water tank but she didn't remember which one.

Mom had pretty hair, soft and fairly light with a reddish cast. She wore it long and a bun at the back. She was young and one summer decided she'd have it cut short, flapper style. I was heart broken and cried about the hair cut.

Elinor (Perry) was then Mom's youngest sister and would spend some time with us during the summer. We'd usually have tea parties on

the lawn and on especially hot days, we'd skinny dip in the round galvanized wash tubs.

Between Stella's farm, where we lived, and the home of the Jones family, lived a sweet little pair, a brother and sister Ole and Annie Schye, Norwegians, I believe. It was fun to walk thru the woods to their place and Annie usually had a treat for us. They had a summer kitchen detached from the main house. The cooking was done there during the summer to keep the rest of the house cool.

Enough of the days on Stella Stub's farm! We moved to another farm a few miles away, on upper Spring Lake. This farm belonged to Stella's family and was called the "Dickie Jones Farm". Perhaps the father was no longer living. I don't remember him at all, but there were two spinster daughters living at home, Iva and Leone. Leone was the good Cinderella, worked hard and was pleasant, but Iva was a tyrant, witch-like in appearance and had a miserable disposition. Poor Leone jumped for her every whim. These were sisters of Stella, who you have heard about, and Nettie of whom you are yet to hear.

No one really explained why we moved to another farm - it was probably bigger and since there wasn't enough money to buy our own, Dad rented. The years on this farm were my happiest, mostly play - and Mom and Dad were getting along well. Doris was born before we moved from the Stubbs farm. I don't recall when she entered the family, as I was not quite two years old when she joined us. When she was able to be a playmate, I was quite devoted to her. Since she was tiny and real cuddly she was nicknamed "Stubby." I don't know who hung that on her, but it stuck and she's often called Stub to this day.

Dad's pet name for Helen was "Puss" and she was old enough not to appreciate being called that. We had gone into town for shopping and we were at Koch and Barthoff's "pickles to harness" general store where you could buy hardware, clothing and groceries. Dad was most likely at the back of the store exchanging "fresh eggs" for the things we needed. We were wandering thru the other merchandise when Dad called from the far end of the store, "Where are you Puss?" Helen was embarrassed! At one time while in that same store with Mom, I fell down an open stairway to the basement - no serious injuries.

Since my gender was not as hoped for, I rather took the place of a son, and was usually out with Dad - carrying the lantern for evening chores and in the barn or field with him. His nickname for me was "Spider". I was lean and lanky and also the only one who could crawl under the grain binder to gather eggs that a hen decided to deposit there rather than in the nest in the chicken house.

Stubby and I played under a big tree, setting up imaginary house keeping with dolls, kittens and mud pies. One season we were preserving pods from the Blue Flag Iris that grew by the lake. We had jars full in our play house and Helen generously contributed the yeast she was supposed to be eating to control teenage pimples. We did have a fizzy shelf of pickles! After we had prepared a "dinner" Helen and Mom would dress up and come out to be our guests - once to a "mock" chicken dinner. Doris and I had dressed a chicken which had been killed by accident. We "baked" it in the sun.

This farm house was enormous, six bedrooms upstairs, two down, a big kitchen plus a summer kitchen, dining room and parlor. There were two large attics and a full basement. Apparently the house had gone thru several building stages, and there were a couple strange cubby holes no one could account for. The kitchen had a pump inside for rain water, which was caught and funneled into a cistern. A trap door in the floor gave access to the cistern so it could be cleaned.

Central heat was provided by a coal wood burning stove in the large dining room. This was our main living area. It was very large and the parlor and spare bedroom were closed off during the winter. In this room the stovepipe crossed overhead to reach the chimney, and passed below another stovepipe opening thus warm air could rise at the opening and afforded just a little heat upstairs. We liked to stand over this opening when we were ready for bed and let the warm air billow our nighties. No one, not even men, wore pajamas then. After toasting ourselves we'd jump into our soft feather beds.

It could be downright drafty in that big house, and when someone mentioned that fact to the Jones girls, they jumped to old Dickie's defense and said, "Papa built the house real good!" There was no insulation or storm windows to my knowledge. I can recall all the rooms

and the doors and the tiny closets.

We all slept in upstairs bedrooms at this farm - the two closest to the heat source. Stubby was little so she had a trundle bed in Mom and Dad's room. It was a loosely jointed affair and squeaked noisily when she moved about. Helen and I were in the next room, extremely irritated when she squeaked her bed. Of course we ranted about it, and of course sweet little Stubby delighted in rocking her bed as much as possible.

Later Helen graduated down the hall to a room of her own. Stubby moved in with me. She was the cuddly type - I was not and worried if she got too close. I threatened to put our black stockings down the center of the bed and she was to keep on her own side, vowing to move to the closet floor to sleep leaving her all alone.

Perhaps the barn was the best structure of all. Big heavy hand hewn beams upstairs where in the hay mow was. On the lower level where the animals were kept, a concrete driveway crossed the length of the barn. Room for six horses was at the end and long rows of stanchions for the cows were on either side of the driveway. A big box stall at the far end was for calving and calves.

Another building was attached to the outer end for more young stock and pigs. A stone milkhouse was a short distance from the barn. A water tank to cool the milk was inside and extended outside for the cattle to drink.

Both Mom and Dad would go to the barn to milk the cows, morning and night. Doris and I usually went along. Some times we would sit behind the cow to hold her tail so she wouldn't switch the milker. Other times we'd brush and groom the young Guernsey heifers. They became so gentle we could crawl over and under them, sometimes snuggling along side them in the deep straw to keep warm while they were lying down. We "gentled" all the cattle so much they were completely docile.

Doris was the baby and had lots of attention. She usually lopped against Mom while we were eating, often with one hand down Mom's bosom. Helen loved to pinch her little fingers because they were so soft and warm. I too was her slave and offered to clean her up one time

when she had an accident. Without the bathroom facilities we enjoy today, it was a major operation, and tho I did my best, Stubby was unhappy and said "I can still smell it Jeanie" to which I recommended that she "Run away from it, Stubby."

At some point while we lived at the Jones farm, Aunt Lou came to live with us. She was Dad's unmarried Aunt who had moved in and kept house for Dad and his brothers after their parents died. She was very old as far back as I can remember. Aunt Lou was a tiny, wispy little woman, very pious and strong willed. Dad and his brothers were to observe the Sabbath to the letter. I can't recall ever hearing her laugh or even smile.

Aunt Lou's room was right off the main room in the house (with the central heating stove.) We weren't allowed in there very often. Every year the Hamilton relatives in Chicago sent her a Christmas gift, usually a fine pair of leather gloves - so tiny and narrow!...but then she was tiny and narrow! No one else could have worn these small gloves. She took over the household mending, sitting in a rocking chair near the heater and on cold mornings she'd warm her thimble and scissors before she attacked the pile of mending.

As per normal, even that big house was not big enough for two women. Mom wanted to rule the kitchen and would be upset to come in from the barn to find Aunt Lou busy at breakfast preparation. One morning she got into a tin can of skunk grease stored in the warming oven of the stove, and ruined Dad's "staff of life"- (fried potatoes) for that day. Also every morning Aunt Lou would ask Mom from which way the wind was blowing, and even though Mom would check the weather vane, Aunt Lou would ask Dad the same question when he came in from the barn. That irked Mom some!

A fence enclosed the front yard between the house and the road. This area was called "the door yard." Why I'll never know unless because it was mainly accessable from the front door. This was our favorite place to play - raking the leaves in autumn to form rooms in our imaginary house. The fence couldn't have been to protect us from traffic. To see a vehicle of any kind go by was a big event. Neighbors from up the road aways, Ada and Bob Charley, occasionally passed in

their horse and buggy on their way to town. We always reported when Ada and Bob went by. She generally wore a robe over her lap.

There also was a cherry tree in the yard and one day little Stubby pushed the pit from a cherry with the stem still on it, up her nose! The stem broke off and she told Mom that I had done it! I was sent up to bed while they took the baby to the Doctor to have the pit removed. Aunt Lou must have suspected the truth and she released me from prison before they returned. That was the day I decided Stubby was not the Cherubic Angel she appeared to be.

Some how diplomatic arrangements were made for Aunt Lou to move in with Aunt Nettie and Uncle Bev who were closer to her age and childless. Aunt Nettie, not a true Aunt, was one of the "Jones girls" and Mom was always close to her. Aunt Lou lived with them for the rest of her life, except for spending summer months with Aunt Madge and Uncle Walt at Weyerhauser.

We saw more of Mom's relatives than Dad's especially on her Mother's side. One Uncle, Gramma's brother Uncle Jack, worked for the Milwaukee Road Railway. Every summer he and Aunt Mary and two foster children would come to the Jones farm to camp in the cow pasture near the lake. They pitched a tent and spent a couple weeks at a time.

We often fished that lake - cane pole, bobber and worms - and did catch sun fish and blue gills. Dad also trapped muskrats on that lake and when he'd go to check traps, Stubby liked to go along. She was the best sailor in the family.

Our closest neighbor was Orrie Moore. He and his Dad, "Wally" "batched" and farmed the next farm. Orrie's wife had died and left an only daughter, Eva, near Helen's age, who lived with an Aunt and Uncle in Palmyra. Eva would come out once in a while and liked to come up to see us. She was a real tomboy - kept her hair in long braids and wore knickers. One time we fished the little steam that connected Upper and Lower Blue Spring Lake and caught a bucket full of little pan fish. Mom cooked them for us and we had quite a feast.

Money was always scarce and though we never were hungry, we

didn't have any coins to jingle. One fall we picked up potatoes, Eva included, when Dad and Orrie dug the crop. We were paid a penny a pail and we statched our loot in neat piles on the upper ledge of the buffet.

Dad and Orrie helped one another with farm work and cutting wood. While they were doing some blasting one time, Orrie was hurt. The doctor came to stitch him up and I was elected to hold the kerosene lamp while the sewing took place.

The Cummings boys, who were cousins of Dad, were sailors on the Geat Lakes. When the lakes froze up they would work on the farms around until the shipping started again in the spring. They were like big brothers to have around and we each had our favorite. Mine was Roy who was the most handsome, in a Robert Valentine way, and he called me "Cootie". Helen and Tom entertained us a lot, Helen playing the guitar and Tom singing. Both Helen and Doris had musical talents and Dad often played the harmonica along with them. The girls were called on to sing for social functions - Helen the guitar and Stubby the ukulele. I couldn't even keep time tapping my feet and only sang "Soft Alone and Far Away." However we all have gifts of some sort, and tho they could play and sing, I could sew! There was no extra fabric around to practice on so I made a dress for Stubby out of newspaper.

Very frequent visitors were Uncle Howard and Aunt Gertie. Uncle Howard taught in Milwaukee and was courting Gertrude Sharman. They came too many Sundays and Mom became tired of fixing a big Sunday dinner week after week. Mom decided we'd get away early one Sunday and avoid this visit only to find these relative there when we got home. They had managed to get into the house tho Mom thought she had locked up. Gertrude was an up-to-date flapper - short fizzled hair, short dresses and the works. I was bedazzled by her glamour and loved to sit close and feel those slick silk stockings!

If we did get to go visiting on Sunday, we girls considered it a real drag especially going to Aunt Nettie and Uncle Bev's. As mentioned before, they had no children and for pastime we went into the parlor and tried out all of the chairs of which there were far too many for the room. They were arranged in rows more like a theater and I believe



there was an organ in there too, which we could touch very carefully.

Uncle Beverly Aplin was not a true uncle, probably a distant cousin of Dad's. He was a big blustery fellow, very inflated ego, enjoying modest financial success for a while then suffering just the reverse. When he was successful he bought an Essex, a very impressive vehicle at that time. Unfortunately, it was very different from a team of horses, and when parking at the bank in Eagle one day he couldn't remember how to stop the machine and was bellowing "Whoa! Whoa!" as the Essex made it up a few steps to the bank.

Perhaps Uncle Bev considered himself a gentleman farmer and he usually had a hired man! He'd leave a long list of jobs for the man to accomplish while he'd tour the area in his fine car. One time he happened in at the Jones farm. My pet cow was way back in the pasture and couldn't get on her feet. Dad and some of neighbors went back with the stone boat to rescue her and bring her back to the barn. Uncle Bev went back there too and immediately took over as foreman shouting "All together now boys!" and he never flexed a muscle or extended a hand!

Dad often had a hired man and the wages were about \$1.00 per day plus room and board. Mom was a prankster and thought up many tricks to play on the workers - salt in the sugar bowl, a small pool of water in kitchen chairs which they didn't expect so got up with wet pants. She tied small pieces of furniture in their bedroom with long strings leading out into the hallway. When the occupant was most likely near sleeping, she'd pull the strings and furniture would mysteriously move around the room. Often these hired men were Dad's sailor cousins so no harm done.

Ole Schye worked by the day when Dad needed help. He'd go back to his own house at night, but had his meals with us. We were small and tried to get him to play games with us. One time we wanted him to be the troll under the bridge like in the story of the three billy goats. Our imaginary bridge was an old wire couch. He agreed but it was a tight squeeze and was fairly trapped under there when Mom came to his rescue and scolded us for coaxing him to participate. Ole was backing out and kept saying "I guess I don't tink!" "I guess I don't tink!"

Asparagus grew wild along the fences and we made regular runs of the circuit in the season - hot sand, bare feet, sand burs. In the land between our place and Orrie Moore's farm there was a big marsh abounding with wild flowers. Every week a different species was in bloom. On Saturdays we'd hike down there and bring home a bouquet for the weekend.

A daily chore in the summer was to go get the cows from the pasture. Sometimes they would be at the far end and the chore became tiresome. Our secret wish was for a little foot operated car, a toy shown in the Sears Catalog! No doubt that would have been more strenuous than the walk but dreams were cheap! With a little planning and urging we could get old Babe to take the path between two trees with a stump in the appropriate place for one of us to be ready to jump on her back for a ride home.

Money was scarce and the folks raised some poultry to dress for Christmas money. With the back seat loaded with dressed chickens, ducks and possibly a calf, they would leave early in the morning to drive the Model T to Milwaukee, sell the load and do their Santa shopping. Helen was old enough to take care of us this year I recall and the folks were late getting home. It had been stormy sleet and freezing rain, no automatic window wipers. The windshield was a split arrangement and they had to travel with it partly open to be able to see. Then, after all that, go to the barn and milk a bunch of cows!

Mom was in charge of discipline and her word was law! She never spanked but kept control by being firm. About the worst she did was to make us go to the garden and pick beans without speaking a word to each other because we had been quarreling. And even tho she was not close enough to hear, believe me, we didn't talk! She did chase Helen with a cornstalk one time after Helen hit a turkey gobbler over the head with the clothesline stick. The gobbler did the Virginia Reel for a while, but recovered. Helen escaped the swithing by crawling way under the grainery.

We went to school in Palmyra 'tho there was a one room country school across the lake. Our neighbor's daughter, Dorothy Mason, drove and we were able to ride with her. Dorothy was in high school and we

were often late getting home as she'd have after school activities.

My first grade teacher was Miss Fonda and I loved her. She was sweet and gentle. Two grades were in her room, quite an assortment of kids. Lulu and Lola Wallenstein from the backroads and definitely "the other side of the tracks" were classmates. They were twins and possibly a little slow, for they spent most of the day just grinning at everything. One day a powerful stench filled the room and the teacher discovered Lulu hadn't asked to go to the bathroom but just lowered her bloomers and decorated the seat of her desk! **CLASS DISMISSED!** And big sister, Mary, had to come and clean up the place!

When I advanced to 3rd grade I was about the only one who brought a bag lunch and ate in the room at noon. As Miss Eberle would be writing 4<sup>th</sup> grade work on the board, I would be able to answer questions to it. Finally she went to see the Principal then called my Mother in and decided I should be transferred to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I cried a lot and wanted to go back, not to be with Lulu, mind you, but I had missed some of the math and phonics. That made class hard. I did well tho and was 1<sup>st</sup> in my 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation class.

While in grade school Helen was very sick with pneumonia and was home from school for quite a while. The doctor came often and when I came home from school it was my job to put cold cloths on her brow to help reduce the fever. I was the daily reporter at school telling the teachers what her progress was. Dr. Dodson and Mom and all the rest nursed her safely thru these dark days and Dr. Dodson was once again man of the hour.

There was another doctor in town and the citizens were lined up about equally behind their favorite. It was almost a Martin and McCoy situation and kids were ready to go into battle to uphold their family's choice. I know Mom would not have allowed the other doctor to minister to the cats the season an epidemic kill off the mousers we had in the barn.

Mom's Aunt Rose, Grandma Perry's only sister, lived in Janesville. She was a real favorite, had traveled more than anyone I knew and kept herself made up and rather fancy. Once in a while I could go and spend a few days visiting her and she'd take me downtown and buy a

dress for me, makeup etc. She took me to her home for a visit one summer and when I came back I learned the folks had had a chimney fire complete with fire department and all. Those who stayed home had far more excitement than I'd had, Janesville, new dress and all!

Aunt Rose was married to Uncle Fred, the tallest, leanest, homeliest man I knew. He was good to us and one spring brought us a young billy goat kid. Baby goats are precious but they soon grow into pests as Billy did. He loved to ride on the platform of the old truck Dad had made from the Model T Ford, and would chase Dad half the way to town if he left without him. He did just that and finally stopped at a farm enroute when Dad left him in the dust! What ever happened to Billy? The answer to that is missing! Perhaps one of my consultants can recall.

In the early years an the Jones Farm a Model T Ford was our means of transportation complete with isinglass side curtains and an "ooga horn". We must have prospered some because the folks bought a brand new Model A, green in color which was quite smart looking. Every thing else was black. Mom kept the new car so dazzling clean that on one Sunday outing, Dad spat his chaw of "tobacco" right at the window thinking it was open. He did some fancy one-handed driving while cleaning up his mess with the other hand! It's a good thing he wasn't facing 1986 traffic at that time.

The folks learned of a man who was trying to raise several children by himself. The reason for his being on his own is not clear but Mom and Dad decided to make a home for one of the boys, Lester by name. Lester moved in but didn't fit in. He was assigned a few chores, watering chickens and the like, but was not at all dependable. I was not old enough to know if there were other problems, but it was decided we wouldn't be able to keep him and things were better when we were back to our normal family. It must have touched Lester tho and years later he found us again and planned to visit every Sunday. That resulted in some more diplomacy, not necessarily ethical, to rearrange his plans. It does seem there were quite a number of people who warmed to our family, even becoming too warm for our comfort. Perhaps Mom's good cooking and generous tables were partly responsible.