

From FLORIDA

Dear Ma:

Haven't written to you for some time and thought I would at last sit down and write what should be a series of letters to give you the current information and also try to bring back some memories of the years gone by. Maybe you can fill in some of the forgotten areas along the way.

The weather here is naturally beautiful. I don't believe we have had a bad day since we came down here 5 years ago. Of course, having been down here, you know how nice it is. The fruit is off all the trees now and we will have to wait till late summer for the new batch of oranges and grapefruit to come back again. I do have about six hands of bananas on my banana tree and they should be ready in about a month. Boy and are they tasty. The garden is about finished. we will start planting again in August in order to get about four crops before next summer sets in again. The sun is too hot on the plants in the summertime. A lot of people plant all year round but it takes a lot of water to cool the ground off. You have to cut the grass two times a ~~xxxx~~ week during the summer. Stuff grows like crazy.

I am sitting in the rectory of our new St Francis of Assisi church answering phone calls while Father Cottrell is out checking on the building progress. Lib and I were in the new church yesterday and it is so beauty. It's not one of the modern churches, fact is it is real Spanish, you know, with the low tower and a cross on top. It's going to be a nice church and we can't wait to get into it. Possibly by September.

Anyway, being the oldest in the family, I suppose I have more memories of life in the Van Laarhoven household other than you. I thought it might be nice to go over some of these with you. I am sure some may be embarrassing, some happy and some real sad. Not many families have had such a worldwind of experiences as we have had, I believe.

I know that from listening to you and Pa that Pa came from the Netherlands when he was 16. He was not expected to live on this trip but somehow he reached America in pretty good shape and became healthy over the years. I know he was born in Oostlebeers in the province of Friesland in the southern part of Holland and he got his schooling there. His handwriting showed that he had some terrific schooling. His writings were perfect script type and straight as an arrow. My writing is terrible and almost unreadable with ALL THE SCHOOLING I HAD AND IT ~~XXXXXXXX~~ became worse during my years in business. (you have to forgive my typing and spelling. This is an electric typewriter and it does things I am not familiar with. Besides, I am not a typist and my two finger method is not the best, but I am sure you will get the meaning of all this.) I know you were born in Mellen Wisconsin about 100 miles north of where you lived the rest of your life. We had to make a trip up there once when I was real young to find out if you were registered at the Catholic church in Mellen and if you were truly baptized. I remember how good you and Pa felt that this was all taken care of when you were a baby. It was an old church dating way back. I am sure a new one has taken its place by now. However, it was still standing when I was active in The Superior diocese some years ago.

I listened with wide open ears to your stories of your childhoods. Yours of course were all in the farming community of Little Black that I came to know so well. I know you mentioned many times that being the oldest you had to help on the farm and consequently could not make it beyond the fourth grade in school, even though the school was so close to your home. We listened to how you worked in the woods, sawing up wood into tie bolts and hauling them to the railroad cars in Little Black and that you yourself would pick up these 8 foot long poles and pitch them onto the railroad car. I not only heard this from you but also from many of the neighbors. Ewald Jockimsen liked to tell this story also. He would tell me how you and your sister, my Aunt Clara, would cut down the trees with crosscut saws and axes all winter long. Then came crop time when you would have to get the fields ready, plant the crops and pick the rocks, weed and care for the crops and finally harvest them. You must have slept very well each day after all this work. I never ever heard you complain of this. It just seemed to be something to pass our early evenings away. I also listened to many stories of Roman Hummel who later became my Godfather and also to some of the sayings of old Charlie Kaemmerer. These were some of the old residents of the farms in the immediate area.

Pa's stories were a bit different. They were sometimes so interesting and different that we wanted

if they were all that true but they were interesting. I guess the one we wonder about the most was when as a little boy he has to pass through a cemetery at night and that he was wearing coideroy pants. As he walked, the pants would rub together and seemed to say. "~~catch him, catch him~~" "Catch him, catch him", and the faster he walked the faster it was said until he started running and then it got so fast that he was out of mind when he came home and was a very frightened boy. (It could have been!) Anyway, he told of skating to school down the canals etc. Most of the experiences he told us about was what happened to him after he reached this country. There was a lull of a few years until the family went west into the Montana area where he and his brother or brothers became cowboys and herded and broke wild horses. Apparently, it was at this time when my Grandfather and Grandmother settled down at the farm next to yours in Little Black. Pa was still in Montana bucking Broncos. Or was it at this time that he joined the fishing boats to Alaska. We'll talk about both. He told us of the awful trips to Nome, Alaska with the smelly fishing boats. The reason for the awful smell was that when the boat would tilt because of high waves some of the runoff oils and slim of the fish would get into the engines and the heat of the engines would cause a burnt fish odor that he could not stand. I know he didn't like the smell or taste of fish all his life although he liked to fish. He told us of Puget Sound off Seattle and of Nome and Ketchikan Alaska. He talked of these cities as if he missed them. they were good stories. I guess he was good as a cowboy because he proved it to me many times when I was a little boy. He would say "Willie, run like hell" and I did because I knew what was coming. He would swing that lariat over his head and let it go at my running legs. He never missed and I would go down into the dirt right now and it hurt. He would roll with laughter and I would get mad for a little while so whenever I saw him mess around with the trip rope for the fork on the hay carriage in the hay loft, I would try to make myself as scarce as could be. He had to try his hand at roping. I remember him roping a porcupine out of a tree once and it was not an ordinary tree. It was a full balsom. I guess he was pretty good with a 6 shooter though. He told us how he would shoot prairie dogs and snakes riding on his horse at a pretty good clip. I found out later when I found this old gun and old ammunition that it was only a five shooter. Fact is, it was so rusty that the barrel would not turn. I got it to turn but had to do it manually. I took a few old bullets, and they were big, to the woods and forced them into the barrel of the gun and then took aim at something. The gun went off but I believe my wrist hurts to this day. I never fired that gun again. Lucky I was that the gun did not blow up because I had done no cleaning of the chambers. But getting back to Pa. I guess he was pretty good. As far as I was concerned, he was good at everything he ever did and there was nothing he couldn't do. I believe this to this day. It was out in the Montana area that he got into a serious accident. Apparently he had roped a horse, correct me if I am wrong, and this horse kicked high enough that it kicked him right off his horse. What was bad was that the horse's hoof landed smack dab in his face. This imprint of the horse's hoof stayed with him the rest of his life. I understand that his nose was hanging loose on his face and that he had to have this sewed on plus much of his face. The story I was told that a hole had to be drilled through his eye socket next to his nose and this is where his sinuses drained the rest of his life. I know he had to keep a constant watch with his handkerchief to keep this area of his eye clean. A good job must have been done by this doctor because even though so much of his face was crushed, he turned out to be a very handsome man. At least that's what you thought as well as all the other females of the area thought. He was liked by everyone and let me tell you ~~whether~~ whether you know it or not, Pa was morally good and never did anything to shame himself, you or his family. I guess this is what makes me so proud of him.

A, back to my old typewriter. This is the one I used to type all my speeches on when I had those Saturday 15 minute programs on radio when I was Mayor. See not a single mistake so far.

Back to getting Pa back to Medford. This must have been an experience Medford will never forget until all the old timers have died off. Pa and his brothers must have packed up a couple trainloads of wild western horses and when they got to Medford the train stopped downtown and Pa and his brothers open the rail cars and left all these wild horses out and herded them down mainstreet and down to the farm in Little Black. The businessmen have told me while I was working at the drugstore that the people ran for their lives. If there was a culvert handy they dove in to get out of the way of the horses. This didn't seem to bother the Van Laarhoven boys because they had the situation in control however the townspeople weren't aware of this. I'd have liked to see this.

Ma, we are now to the point where you and Pa must have met and I became a gleam in Pa's eyes as the saying goes. I never heard too much about the courtship except that your mother, my future Grandmother apparently fell in love with Pa also and he had a rough time staying clear of her in order to court you. I heard so much about that particular situation that maybe some of this is in my mind only.

I heard a lot about the unshaven face Pa sometime had and that the beard was bright red. Also the double dating you did with Aunt Clara and Pa's brother Uncle Henry. I remember him good. He was a very tall, well built hamesome gentleman and I often wished that the romance would have gotten some- place between the two of them. Aunt Clara may have been happier. But they were good days for you because you up and got married without the sanction of your mother. This ofcourse was understandable and I am sure glad Pa got you away from that corner farm, The thing I admire most is that the two of you dared to life on the farm right accross the line fence from your parents. I'll write about my experience concerning that at some later date. It's quite a story in itself.

You and Pa had to have the grandest love affair that first year of your married life to take over a dilapidated farm like that and start from scratch. You see, I remember that old ramshackle barn and I gusses none of us will ever forget the old log house. That first year of marriage is a secret only you will remember because you never told me about the happenings until that ripsnorting day of July 8th 1921 when I made my bold appearance into this world with a lot less hair than I have now, which isn't saying too much. You always said I looked like Father Rueter when I was born. I happen to carry a picture of Father Rueter in my billfold and just took it out to look at it. Yech, only a mother could love a face like that. Anyway, thanks for loving it. As the stories go from then on, I must have been a real thorn during the past 58 years. You never knowing what to expect next and to tell you the truth I never knew what I would do next either. But we made it through it didn't we.

For the next three years I do not remeber much except, again, what you tell me and a memory or two of my own. For instance, I do remember well at 1½ years old standing besides the little white coffin of my brother Vernon who died of pneumonia at 6 months of age. I remember that room upstairs where his body was laid until time of burial. It must have been an awful experience for me that makes me remember that setting. I do remember some of the sisters being born because Pa would go into town and get Doctor LaSage out to do the service. You often mentioned me being an intrument baby. I always thought this was something. Not everybody gets to be an instrument baby but there I was. I was one and had proof as you put it because I had some scars. It wasn't until we had children of our own that I found out wht an instrument baby was. I did know it had something to do with two large spoons. You take it from there.

You used to like to tell about the time you got me all dressed up pretty like for church. Naturally I was the first one dressed and this gave you time to pretty up yourself. During this time, I must have lost no time(The story of my life) to get into mischief. Actually, it was a new world for me and I had to explore it. What an experience this must have been for both of you. I had crawled, I couldn't walk yet, through the barn yard and out into the woods. I was no where to be found. Finnally when I was found I must have been a mess crawling in the dence brush of the woods. If I remember right, a neighbor or two helped you hunt. I probably had fun though.

You know I tire easily lately and this typing is getting to me so I will send this much out to you now and get back to you again later. Take your time reading this and stay healthy.

With love,
your son

Bell

2-11-82
FramFlorida

Dear Ma:

Would you believe that it is over one and a half years since I wrote to you last. I meant well but you showed it to Josephine and she told me it was funny and it took the wind out of my sales. You know she has had a knack through the years of messing me up so I was taking no more chances. But, sister LaVerne kept after me and now Lib has been pushing me so here I am again.

I looked over my letter to you and am I embarrassed. All kinds of mistakes. I'll try to do better this time.

Everybody is telling me you are looking and feeling better everyday. That sounds good. I am getting too fat again and it is bothering me. I have been having some problems lately. But I am happy that I have outlived the doctors prediction and as of January 24th I passed the 5 year limit that I was supposed to live. Now I am free to go on living because noone has given me another time limit. Actually, Lib feels worse than I do. She has problems with diverticulitis again. I told her to send him out of the house.

I understand that there was a thing or two that were partially incorrect in my last letter. Well as I said, it was the way I remembered them and the way you and Pa told them to me. So-o-o-o somebody has to be telling a story. Eh what?

The last of my last letter dealt with my getting lost in the woods in my prissy dressed up church clothes. What a worry I had been for you all my life because not too long after the woods affair (again your story) you had a horse that was very tickish and no one could touch her without getting kicked, but I managed to crawl under the fence and come up to rest under the horse sitting on the ground using the front legs and hoofs, the rear ones, to rest against at the same time enjoying myself with the handful of dirt that always to this day intrigues me.

The next couple years are somewhat vague in my memory except that every once in awhile Doctor LaSage would drive up in his one horse and buggy and when he left, he left us a new baby sister everytime. This is probably the reason things were vague during this time. I probably rather forget about that doctor coming. The things he brought were definitely not for me. It probably gave me work to do since I was walking by this time.

Then came the building boom at our house. We are getting ready to do away with the old barn. The old barn had good memories for me. I remember now that I had more fun there with the barn animals and chickens than I had with those sisters I acquired. I did make an enemy out of one bantam rooster on purpose. Used to get a kick out of teasing him and having him run after me. One time he went too far and flew to my head really picking at me. He left one scar that is very noticeable to this day. As I ran screaming down the alley behind the cows with him on my head, Pa grabbed him off my head as I ran by. Pa was sitting by a cow milking at the time and he was pretty sick of that rooster constantly going after me. So as I ran by him, he just grabbed this bird by the head and gave it a twist in the air. That was the end of the rooster and in later years I would have to train one all over again. I always liked chickens even to this day, the feathered creature is a friend of mine. Back to the building of the new barn. This was an undertaking for me. I was very much involved. I was three at the time and only you know how I got involved. The carpenter, Carl Poehnelt, stayed at our house, except for weekends, until the barn was completed. He was a small man of about 5 ft 4 in. He sported a heavy, well kept mustache, a very agile man and really dedicated to his work. He kept his tools sharp, too sharp for me. I remember only too well that I messed with his planer and gave myself a pretty good cut finger which left a scar I carry today. Oh, he scolded me often but I didn't think he really meant it because he also fooled around with me. This made him my buddy. But how embarrassing it must have been that morning that you were making pennycakes as you will remember we called pancakes in those days. Pulling on your skirt I let you know in no uncertain terms that that man was eating all our pennycakes. It apparently took you some time to convince me that you had a lot more dough to make many more pennycakes. But for a little man, I remember well, he was a great eater. He had everything laid out so well so that when the raising crew, which involved all the neighbors from the area, came, all was in readiness and that by the end of the day, where there was once nothing, stood a huge barn, rafters and all. The next day the roof boards went on. It was an experience every boy should go through. Of course, the meal you prepared was out of this world. When that crew hit the noon meal, those dishes emptied out right now. I don't remember much about Pa at this time. It must have been because he was working at the veneer factory at the time to help pay for this beautiful structure called a barn. The reason my margin is off in this letter is because I noticed the carbon was put in crooked.

But from here on, Ma., I'll tell the facts as they really were since now they are my memories and I am getting older and as you know, I didn't let any grass grow under my feet. Naturally I was always into trouble. This was a great world and had a lot of things in it that I had to try. The fact that you and Pa always scolded me about things and warned me about many others, made me much more curious. There wasn't anything about that farm that I didn't know. Many of which you never knew I knew. I assure you I will not bring up any of the things that I remember that could be embarrassing to you but I will not spare myself.

Again, back to the chickens. I found another buddy, a great big leghorn rooster. I messed up a lot of his sexual encounter with the hens. It seemed that he didn't let any of them alone. They would be contently eating, clucking away, when along he came jumping on them. I kept chasing him and he didn't like me at all. He started chasing me which was my delight. Oh, I had short legs but somehow I could outmaneuver him, but he got bigger and his spurs got longer and he got smarter and I didn't. He would catch me, spread his wings and bring up his feet. He tattoo'd those one and a half inch spurs into my legs. The blood would run and I also have those scars today. One day Pa had enough of this. He couldn't train me to leave the rooster alone so the rooster got it. No he didn't kill him, he was too valuable to the hens, I guess. Pa just put his legs in the vice and sawed off those spurs. These spurs must have had something to do with his maleness because he only lived a few days after that. There was no rooster after that that I could train. The other rooster cared less what I did. About that time I learned that if you put the chickens head under her wing she would sleep forever. At one time I believe I had every chicken asleep. Looked like a lot of rocks laying around the yard. Oh, I woke them up right now. I never could be cruel to things. That's the reason I never became a hunter.

The next couple years were sorta uneventful for me. I do remember getting very attached to my sister Martina. She was a beautiful red head. When it rained on her hair it would tighten up into tiny red curls and she was loaded with freckles during the summertime. But she had one problem. When she cried hard or was hurt bad she would hold her breath and pass out. She ran into the pole of a wagon one day while we were playing and it happened. I didn't know whether she was knocked out by hitting her head on the pole or did she hold her breath. Boy was I worried. She came out of it somehow but from then on I was sure she wouldn't hurt herself while I was with her and I sort of protected her from then on.

Then came school. We had it nice since the school was a short walk from home. Actually it bordered our land to the east. Other kids brought their lunch but I went home for my dinner. This probably kept me out of trouble at school. I was always expecting challenges. If a schoolmate said "I Bet you couldn't do this or that", I'd do it just to prove I wasn't chicken. Well, on many occasions, as a result of the kids getting me in trouble, Mr. Heglemeier, our teacher the first two years in school, took the rubber hose and tried to convince me these things were wrong by using it across my behind. I knew I had it coming and I never held it against him. Fact is I was very happy that Pa never found out about it because the licking I would get when I came home would have been much worse. And they were. Pa had a way of taking me across his lap and as small as he was he had a lot of power in that hand. My rear was warm for hours after, it seemed. Again, I had all this coming so there was never any hard feelings. But did I learn? Huh uh! I was quite forgetful about the punishment until I knew I was going to get it. That was one of Josephine's famous sentences, "I'm going to tell on you, you're goin' to get it". She always kept that promise and I almost always got it. No hard feelings about this. Someone had to tell. I had to be straightened out and Pa could do it. I've got to say it here that I always thought well of Pa. Never got angry at him, knew he knew what he was doing and why and he wanted me straightened out. I still think the world of him. Back to school. Whenever there was a knock on the school door, I knew who it was. There is only one person who knocked on that door during school. It was Pa checking on me with the teacher. Apparently the teachers always gave a good report. I was always worried stiff until I got home and nothing was said. Had a bad report been given, you can bet your life I would have known, so would my rear end. I think the reason he came must have been the result of my report card. My deportment mark was not always so good, fact is it never was. Oh, you and Pa had a problem on your hands and you must have spent many hours wondering what you were going to do about it. One time he came to see the teacher, the teacher was in trouble. I was constantly putting up my one finger, meaning I had to go wee-wee. He got fed up with it after awhile and wouldn't let me go until recess. Well remember the blue, short pants I used to wear? I was standing in front of class one time trying to read my reading lesson and having to go wee-wee at the same time. Well, I couldn't hold it and I left some trickle. You want to see what kind of a dark blue that pants changed to and at that point, wouldn't you know, Laverne Michler piped up and said "Look!" as she covered her face in shame laughing at the same time. Of course, by then everyone was laughing and I turned a bright

shade of red. The floor wouldn't open up and swallow me. I don't know what happened but I do know I was at home being questioned about the two shades of blue on the front of my pants and told all. That poor teacher always let me go wee-wee after that and from that time on I sorta had an ill feeling about LaVerne M. All I did was let a little go just for a little relief and she had to make an issue of it. I did have my legs crossed but this time there was too much there.

Then came the third grade, the real turning point in my life. I fell in love. Oh did I fall in love. I was sick with it and she never knew but my grades showed it. Her name was Tillie Johnson our third grade teacher, I shouldn't say that because she taught all 8 grades as did Mr Hegle-meier. She was a beauty, all round and soft and a sweet voice she has to this day. Her father died during that year and I was happy because I had a chance to go to their house for the wake. I never paid attention to the basket or Mr Johnston. My eyes were only on Tillie. I told her about this many years later. She had married Earl Hartwig at the end of the school term and my dreams smashed to pieces. I only told her of all this a few years ago and she got quite a bang out of as I did telling her. I hope every little boy of 6-7 gets this type of crush. You certainly in a hurry what a waste of time it was. I was so taken up with this that my grades suffered and she visited you and Pa one day asking your permission to keep me another year in the third grade. You gave her permission so I had to do that year all over again. Well, this wasn't the one I liked that year. I was very close to Martina and became very jealous of any one taking her away from me. She was 4 years old. The kids walking to school would stop by and ask to take Martina with them. You dressed her up and she was beautiful. I was still all dirty from doing barnwork. Oh, yes, I was not only old enough to do some chores, I also had to do them. Well, they would pick up Martina and I would clean up and come to school later. I'd never get a chance to be with Martina. The teacher, Tillie and the other girls just took to her. She was such a doll. Anyway, one thing led to another and Tillie got permission from you and Pa to put her in the first grade. Not only was she in the first grade at 4 years old but she was sharper than any one in the first grade.

And then tragedy struck and things would never be the same again with us. Not only was I doing chores at that time, I was also actually milking cows the? Martina, Josephine and 6 month old LaVerne were left in the house while you and I and Pa did the chores. Every few minutes you or Pa used to look out the barn door checking on the kids in the house. It was on St. Nicholas night December 6 when Pa looked out the barn door and without a word busted open the lower door and was gone. A minute or so later you looked out the door and immediately you were gone. Then I looked out the door and to my horror I'll never forget. It's as vivid as if it happened last night. There was the house on fire and Martina standing on the porch with the flames leaping off her. Josephine was half way to the barn seeking help and she was burned. Pa was in the fire searching for LaVerne among the burning clothing which hung above where the girls were playing. The only bit of clothing left on Martina was the cloth around her neck which was there because she had a sore throat and a cold. This what I saw. Apparently they were playing with the Sears catalog tearing out pieces of paper and when there was too much paper they felt they would burn some in the stuff. In doing this, some of the burning paper came back out and this was the start of the serious tragedy. Our car was on blocks but Mr Paul Bach's Model T touring car took all of us to the hospital in Medford. I remember little LaVerne was all taped up with only her eyes and mouth open. She died shortly. Martina was in terrible pain and kept calling the Paul Bach, "Paulie get me some water". She said this several times. She lasted three hours. I was there and it was terrible. How you and Pa took it, I'll never know. God must have given you some special strength. Josephine's arms were burned and she had to stay in the hospital while we must have gone home. There were holes burned in the floor. All the winter clothing was burned and on the floor from where they were hanging but the rest of the house was intact. This was strange because nobody was there to put out the fire, everybody left and it was an old log house. I'll never know why it didn't burn down, It was such a big fire. The next day we went into town to the funeral home and talked to the funeral director Mr. Hartwig. He took us into where LaVerne and Martina lay on a bench being readied for the funeral. It was a nightmare. Wish I hadn't seen them laying there in that funeral home with no cloths and they were not living. But you were not about to leave me alone after this happening so I became a very part of everything. My children all know that I saw black whenever they were even thought of playing with fire. I didn't use reason in spanking them for this. It was a terrible experience. Then the two little white caskets were brought home and the people from all over came to see them. LaVerne's casket was not opened but Martina's was. She looked pretty even there. The undertaker did a nice job covering the many burnt patches you could see on her face. It was sad for everyone. Then came the funeral. The two little white caskets being lowered into the grave. We put holy water on them and then some dirt and that was the last I saw of the little red headed sister I loved so much. The papers around

The country carried the news of this tragedy and the country was sad. The people all around were so nice. This is where I first got to know Charlie Andreson. He gave us lots of things and for many years he would show concern and say nice things to me and give me candy or something. I also remember Mrs Carl Klossner who ran the milk factory at Little Black. Remember the toys loaded with candy they gave us? Everybody was wonderful and took some of the pang out of the loss. But as I sit here today I still wonder how you and Pa could take all this. There still was one in the hospital. When Josephine came home you became very protective with her and understandably so. You didn't have too many left. Anyway Josephine was 3 and I had to get back to school. There was a very empty feeling I know but then there was Tillie left. I still was no saint. I was still the all american boy.

Remember the time I was poking Josephine in her crib with a stove poker. No the poker was not hot but I was always in trouble because she always tattled on me and ofcourse now I didn't get away without getting a licking, so this may have been a hangup for me.

School let out and I was still in the third grade. Now you can fully understand that it was the third grade that stands out in my life the most and probably that's the same year that stands out in your life also.

From then on I was kept pretty busy on the farm, what with picking rocks, breaking land and picking potatoe bugs and weeding the garden and the rutabegies, turnips. Tramping the hay on the wagon as you spread it around, loading the manure spreader and a thousand odd jobs. It seemed to be school and work, work and school. It was not a happy time after that. The sadness was finally interrupted when another sister was left at the house. Another LaVerne.

Ma, I am going to end this letter now. I am very tired, my eyes are blurred and I might add, I am not as happy as I was when I began writing. I'll try writing to you again soon. Now that I finally got LaVerne into the picture I am sure she won't let me alone. Anyway, I hope I haven't made too many mistakes and that You can read these notes. I'll be seeing you sometime towards the end of April.

Keep up the good work. So until I see you I remain,

Your son,