

Uncle Clarence

Clarence was one of my Pa's two older brothers. It was a big family. Pa was sixth of thirteen. Clarence was born in 1914. He never married. I seem to know that he was in the army during WWII. I only remember that he was a cook someplace cold like Greenland. He never had what we think of as a career but he always worked. I recall that he drove a lumber truck and a school bus, he did concrete and construction work at times.

I think he was a good man. Quiet, gruff but kind. When I was between ten and driving age he often just showed up on Sunday afternoons to take me ice fishing or squirrel hunting. He was heavy and getting old by then. I was impressed with his patience. He would hunt squirrels by sitting quietly and waiting for them to come out of their hiding places. Something I'm not sure I could do even now.

One day my older sister Ann called to tell me that Clarence was in a Minneapolis hospital and that he was dying. Ann has always been good about such things. I'm sure I could find out just when that was but for the moment lest just say it was around 1990 which would make Clarence 75 or so. It was ok that he was dying. He had been ill for some time. He was worn out and his death was expected.

I went to his hospital room. He claimed to recognize me when I said it was Tom. He said, "O, Tommy". He wasn't really alert, drifting in and out and talking sometimes from his dreams. I intended only to spend some time with him, to hold the old man's hand and to touch his forehead.

After a time he got agitated and said, "Louie, Louie, the heifers are out and are down at Arnold Zachman's". Louie is another of Clarence and Pa's brothers. Louie farmed the "home place", the farm where they all were raised. Clarence was not a farmer but he often helped out at Louie's. He lived in Albertville just two miles away. Arnold Zachman's farm was about a mile east of Louie's. No doubt the heifers had gotten out at some time and did end up visiting the cattle at Arnold's.

Clarence kept worrying and talking about the runaway heifers so just on the spur of the moment, I decided to help him bring them home. There was only the two of us passing time anyway.

I said, "Clarence if you drive us to Zachman's we can bring them home". So he drove and when we got there I said, "Clarence turn the car around and I'll round them up and turn them toward home". I knew he wouldn't be able to do any cattle chasing, his knees had been worn out for years. We got them going and I followed them in the ditch while Clarence drove just behind on the road. I told him not to go too fast so I could keep up and later I told him to head them off because a couple were thinking of crossing the road in front of him. Those jersey heifers can be pretty frisky. When we got to Louie's they turned down the driveway and went nicely around the barn and into an open pen. I closed the gate and when I told Clarence they were back in, right where they belonged, he was pleased.

He died that night or the next day, I don't recall exactly which.

I don't think I ever told this story before.