

Remembering Uncle John

He was born in 1933 and he lived 81 years. Until 2014. He was the youngest of eight siblings. His parents were farmers, Stella Ebner and Tommy DeMars. Tommy also delivered rural mail. Their farm was in Hassan Township, less than two miles west of Rogers. At the beginning of WWII, John's folks sold the farm and moved to Anoka.

Tommy worked in defense factory.

John was an outdoor kid and too rambunctious for city life.



JOHN, MAGGIE, JOAN, ROSIE.



STELLA EBNER and TOMMY DEMARS, the day of their daughter ROSIE'S WEDDING,

As can be seen in this and many other childhood photos John was camera shy and beloved by his six older sisters.

The Anoka home was in a residential area but had an oversized lot. Toward the back of the lot was an old, small, gothic roofed barn that

Grandpa used for workspace and storage.

The barn had been used as a carriage barn with stalls for two horses. The property also included a lot directly to the north where Maggie and Benno built their house in 1953.

Uncle John lived mostly with us from 1946, the year he started high school, until 1953, when he joined the Air Force.



GRANDPA TOMMY preparing to deliver EGGS to the ROGERS STORE

He met the school bus for Elk River High School at our mailbox.

In 1953 John used Pa's 9N Ford tractor with a tiny back scoop, to dig the basement for Benno and Maggie's new house in Anoka.

Uncle John told me it took a week and a million trips to dig the basement pit.

I was the waterboy for the small cement mixer on the late fall day when we poured basement floor.

John was an all-around outdoorsman, he became a skilled hunter, trapper, and fisherman.

He took me along sometimes, not many times, but sometimes.

In hindsight, John may have been babysitting me for Mom.

That's me holding a jackrabbit that we shot in Louis Pouliet's pasture. Late fall, 1950.

I say "we" because I was the one who kicked the rabbit up.

Normally, I walked a couple steps behind John, it was easier.



TOM holding a jackrabbit that UNCLE JOHN shot.

But if we were hunting pheasants or jackrabbits, he told me to walk alongside a distance, so I might kick something up. John took me trapping too. Muskrats mostly. Especially early in the season when the ice was thin.

I was never afraid; I knew Uncle John could pull me out. Besides we played on thin ice ourselves.

He taught me how to snare cottontails in the big gully where we threw our trash.

He once took river fishing. On the Elk River, I think. We caught two northerns.

The most important thing he taught me about hunting was to stay out of sight of houses and farmsteads.

Not to be sneaky, but to minimize disturbing people.

In the warmer months, Uncle John slept in a shed in the windbreak. He liked his privacy.

The shed was of wood construction, about 20 X 16 feet, single slope roof, two, six pane windows, facing south, wooden floor, on skids, single door on the west side.

The most notable thing about the shed was that the roof exterior walls were covered by thick, green tarpaper.

Ma told me that Pa's younger brother, Norman, had also used the same shed when he worked at the farm.



ERNIE and JOHN working the 9N FORD tractor in 1950. The dog is Mickie.



UNCLE JOHN shot a big doe in Fall of 1950.

The photo on the right was taken at Albert Barthel's farm. Most likely in October of 1945, at the marriage celebration for Margaret DeMars and Benno Barthel. When Uncle John would be twelve years old.

The next three photos show Uncle John working with our pony. We won Babe in a drawing. The young mare was only green broke, and unknown to us she was just bred. All three photos were taken in the winter of 1949-50. The first of the winter photos shows John on the ground after being thrown. To his credit he still has the reins in his hand. It is not Uncle John's first rodeo. Later in winter, the below-right photo, John showing the well trained pony. Ken is walk toward our original house in background. In the bottom photo Uncle John has Babe harnessed and hitched to the bobsled. Unfortunately Babe died in the spring due to her pregnancy.



Babe bucked Uncle John off.



Uncle John showing off the well-trained pony.



Uncle John driving, Little John, Ann, Ken Croteau, Jim Croteau riding.

John was somewhere between a young uncle and older brother to us. He had been there almost all our lives, until he left for the Air Force in 1953. I tagged around him whenever I could. One day he soaking his muskrat in a liquid that made them rusty orange in color. I asked him why he was doing that. He had done that before. Uncle John said he was going away for four years. I was six then and I knew one that just one year was a long, long time. That is the first time that I remember feeling sad.

Uncle John had a grey Chevy coupe from the late 1940s much like the blue one shown the photo. The only photo I could find of John's was of us kids and lambs taken early in 1953. Our new house was not finished yet, but almost. Some of Uncle John's friends had coupes too, particularly Earl Zimmerman. He told me at the time, his buddies would park in woods, build a campfire, remove the seats from their cars, cook food, and have a party. My Mom especially loved her younger brother John.

When John brought Chris home, she was the prettiest girl I



GERALD, CHRIS, and JOHN.



1947 Chevy Coupe similar to John's except his was grey.



Tom, Judy, John, Ann, Pat, Uncle John's grey coupe.

had ever seen
.
TOM
BART
HEL.



Siblings, JOYCE and JOHN.



ROSIE, JOHN, MAGGIE, JOAN, ANNA, IRENE, JOYCE, GERALD.