Our home wasn’t too bad at first. It certainly was big enough, but to get the first floor clean, we used a dozen pails of hot water and eagle lye just to get the kitchen and dining floor clean. It had been used to store the winter supply of coal and wood and also some dogs.

A young family was moving out of the second floor. The house was built into a hill, so the porch of the second floor was level with the ground. Upstairs there was a big hall, four bedrooms and a very large living room. These people were very particular, clean people so we just moved in there for a few days. Downstairs the walls were stone like a basement and to make it look clean we calcimined the walls and ceiling. Every household used calcimine instead of paint in those days. It was sort of colored whitewash. It all looked pretty good for the time being, but oh, how I missed Valders and the easy life there. In Valders at this time of day we would be playing baseball or hopscotch or something like that.

Here Pa was showing us how to put the cows in the barn; how to fasten the tie-chains around the smelly cows’ necks. Then, worst of all, how to milk them and later how to run the cream separator at just the right steady speed to separate skim milk from the cream. The cream was stored in cans for sale and the skim milk was fed to the calves and hogs.

Pa was excited, Ma was pretending to be happy I think. I was so tired after helping and clowning for three days and getting scolded for doing things all wrong, I was just numb and could have slept even on that bumpy wagon. We all worked far into the night and dropped into bed too tired for prayers or tears.

The farmhouse in Bryant as we moved in.

The next day some new neighbors and relatives came to help, unpacking barrels and boxes and putting things in place. Finally mother unpacked a
large barrel. She pulled out towels, blankets, etc., then called pa to come and help her. He took one look, turned pale, then looking sternly at Mother, he yelled, "Mother, we could have got caught, then what would we do?" Ma laughed out loud, and a cheer came from the crowd standing around. By this time, pa was smiling happily as he pulled out the jugs and passed out the glasses. The work went a little better and everyone stayed a little longer than they had planned, and agreed it was the best cherry wine they had ever tasted.

The days passed into weeks and got a little easier and more interesting. I got to like it more and more, but I will always hate the looks and smell of a cow. After a while there was more time for fun and play. But it was mostly work. In the summer we picked all kinds of berries every day and made hundreds of quarts of sauces, jams and jellies. We had berries and cream every morning.

Johnnie had left home to find work. Christine was slightly handicapped so Bird and I were next in line to do the chores in winter while pa had logging jobs and left home each morning before daylight. He usually had one or two men who lived with us during these jobs. Alvin Buboltz was one of these. We usually had good times after supper, popping corn, playing cards, etc., but all day was hard work. The men would cut down trees, skid them together in big piles along the logging roads or at a railroad spur where the big companies would pick them up. One of these was about two miles farther into the woods from where we lived. Sometimes towards spring pa and his men would haul some logs into Antigo themselves. These logs were piled very high with something called a "Log Jammer." When they did haul them to Antigo, they used logging sleds pulled by horses and they usually stood on the top-most log dressed in ankle-length fur coats. It was very cold and took all day to deliver one load, but then came the payoff and it was profitable. These logs were not from our woods, but these were jobs from big lumber companies.

But Bird and I were almost worked to death. First off, the big round watering tank for the stock was outside and first thing in the morning we had to rekindle the fire in the tank heater. This was a round heater immersed in the water in the tank with a fire door on the top and we were supposed to keep it going night and day to keep the water from freezing too much. Because there was no electricity we had to depend upon the wind and the windmill to pump enough water to keep the tank full and sometimes this was not enough.

So pa dug a sort of well or water hole and, of course, I had to help. This was a hole about 10 feet square and as pa dug he lined it with heavy timbers somewhat like you would use to build a log house. We kept doing this as he dug deeper and deeper to keep it from caving in. This was built in a sort of water hole or quagmire between two high hills and always nearly full of water to the top.

It had a heavy platform top with a wood cover. Sometimes it froze over a little and we had to get down on our knees and break the ice with an axe so the pail could fall into the water. Then we dipped a pail that was tied to a rope into the water and pulled up the pail of water and dumped it into two tubs for the cows. This was some distance from the barn and Bird would
would let out about four cows to start with while I was drawing water. When she saw one or two cows coming back to the barn, she knew it was time to let out two more. We only did this in winter and the spilled water created ice all around the tubs and the water hole.

When Bird let the last cow out of the barn, she came down to help me. By this time there were more than two or three cows pushing and bumping to get to the water. We must have had our guardian angels riding on our shoulder all the while because if something would have gone wrong, there would have been absolutely no help available.

After watering all the stock, we had to clean the barns, feed all the animals, milk a few cows (not many in winter), and that just about used up our day. But we found time for some fun and foolishness, too. When pa came home he was tired and all the work had to be done and a big supper ready.

In the winter, we went to the city of Antigo once or twice for supplies. We bought sugar and flour by the 100 pounds. Raisins and prunes by 25-pound wooden boxes, karo syrup and peanut butter by gallon pails, lumberjack fashion. By this time, there were 12 or 13 people at the table. We would go with a bobsled with the sleigh box full of hay and blankets to keep us warm. I think it was a good three-hour trip one way. About three weeks before Christmas, pa and I would do the Christmas shopping. It seemed ma was always pregnant or not feeling well enough to go, but she always had a list of things for us to bring and I enjoyed it.

It took a long time to get there, so as soon as we did we tended the horses in a livery barn. Then we went for a big dinner at the “Farmers Home,” an eating place of plain good lumberjack food.

If I got too cold on the way, pa would make me get out of the sleigh and walk or run. Then he would make the horses trot and I would have to run until it seemed I would drop. This really made me warm, then I would crawl back into the sleigh box, cover with the blankets and ride on.

It was getting more enjoyable now (sometimes). We had card parties, birthday parties, snow parties and even work parties when some of the neighbors would help with butchering and sausage making. We all knew how to have fun all year long with the finest and best neighbors in the world, but most of the time, none of us had hardly a buck in our pocket.

To the south and east of us most of our neighbors were hot-blooded, fighting, shooting Kentuckians. Some of them carried a gun or knife and hated someone, but if you got in their good graces and they liked you, then they loved you and would do anything for you. They proved this when we moved there, but among themselves they were always feuding and fighting and threatening and there was even a shooting now and then. Moonshine helped this all along and they sure made and drank plenty of the stuff.

They warned us about becoming too friendly with the tricky Buboltz’. Said they would cheat us out of everything.

Now the Buboltz farms were a little south and west of ours. There were the Otto Buboltz, Henry Buboltz, Ed Buboltz and Albert Buboltz families, all our neighbors. Later we really learned they were not what the Kentucks had said, but the finest, loving helpful people you could find. More about that later.

I always said when I was old enough I would move back to Valders. When I was about 17 Bird and I went back just to visit, but it wasn’t the same as we had dreamed. Everyone and everything were different and we were glad to get back up north.
The Big Hill

On the north end of our clearing just over the line fence was a very high hill. It seemed to look down over the land and buildings in protective way. We called it The Big Hill.

On the south side toward the buildings this hill would be covered with wild flowers in the spring. In June or July, it would be covered with wild strawberries. Many big berries on long stems. We picked stems and all to keep them from squashing together until we got them home. We picked every day while they were there, fresh for breakfast or supper with cream or canned into jam or sauce.

On the north side of the hill there was more brush and trees, we called them slashings, because of forest fires or being logged over, only dead fallen trees and bare tree trunks covered the hillside and down into the valley and into the swamp.

Here on the edge of the marsh grew the blueberries. They grew like small bunches of grapes on bushes about one foot high. These berries did not make good jam but the sauce was thick and rich — unlike the commercial canned blueberries we buy today, which are bland and watery. Sometimes this was our main dish for supper, just bowls of thick blueberry sauce, fresh homemade bread, spread thick with butter and slices of cheese.

Below this marsh was the swamp covered with a thick carpet of greenish brown moss. On this moss grew the cranberries. They grew on threadlike stems out of the moss and they looked as if they were spilled there. They were very easy to pick and store. We kept them in boxes in our walk-in attic, where they usually stayed frozen until we used them up. We used them as a condiment sauce with fowl or pork, but better still, Ma made a pudding that we all liked. It looked like a coarse somewhat heavy white cake, baked in a large cake pan, then cut in squares and served on sauce dishes. Ma made a soft vanilla cream sauce that she would put in a pitcher and we would pour this generously over the pudding. Sometimes for a change instead of the vanilla, she would use a little cherry wine for flavor. This would make the sauce sort of a pink color and so good. She also made some very good cranberry bread which we usually ate with cheese. We always had cheese in the house because the milkman delivered it on order when he picked up the milk each day.

The winters were always severe up north in the woods, but I don’t think we realized it then. We just took it for granted and lived with it. But in that isolated place, if anything had gone wrong, it would have been quite frightening and hopeless.

The worst winter was in 1929. It seems it never really cleared up. Our house was built in a hill and the bottom story was the stone wall of a basement with wide casement windows. The cellar and kitchen were in the part that was in the hill, while the sitting room was in the front part. It all seemed airtight and very warm with our box-type air-tight heater and heat from the cook stove because Ma was always cooking something, so we didn’t feel the cold or never heard the wind here.

But upstairs was a different story. It was very cold so we kids would undress by the heater downstairs, then hurry for the bed upstairs. Sometimes Ma would warm small blankets, then wrap them around our feet before she
covered us with the blankets and homemade patchwork quilts. These were made from many small squares of wool cloth cut from old suits and overcoats. They were very heavy but warm. In the morning we hurried downstairs and dressed by the heater — real togetherness.

These were very busy days. Each evening we carried in about a cord of heating wood piling it in the sun porch, also wood for the cook stove. We filled the reservoir on the back of the cook stove, filled the big teakettle and the water pail before it got dark.

During the day we had to chase the cattle from the barn to drink at the water tank. There was always plenty of wind these stormy days to keep the windmill active which kept the tank full of water. The cows were always very reluctant to leave the warm barn and we would have to really chase them out, then they would hurry to get back in.

Then it was clean the barns and feed the animals, and get feed down from the upstairs hay mow for the next morning. All this was very cold, hard work but after an early supper it was fun and relaxation time when we popped corn, played cards and other games or read books or did fancywork.

After the storm, it was get out and shovel and open the roads. The snow really drifted in and piled up a couple of feet high at the edge of the woods, below the hill just before entering the driveway.

Pa would use the team of horses and bobsled to break a trail through this. I can still see the horses as they tried to get through. They would lean back on their hind legs and then jump ahead with both front feet at once. Pa would coax them on again and again until they got through these drifts. He would drive through here a few times until he opened the road.

This stretch of road was in the clearing. There was no trouble in the two miles of woods where the wind didn’t have so much sweep and the snow did not drift. But when we came out of the woods near the schoolhouse and onto the flat lands, the drifts were terrible again. Here the farmers would cut the fence wires so you could drive into the fields and around the big drifts then back onto the road. We never saw a snowplow in those early years on the town roads, and it seems one snowstorm just followed another that year, and we were really shut in most of the time.

It’s a good thing that we were all kept so healthy with Ma’s good cooking and weird remedies. With a doctor six miles away, bad weather and roads and no transportation, it could have been quite frightening. I really think someone up there was watching over us all.

We really were a religious family, saying our prayers each day, before meals and bedtime, and always praying the rosary together on Sundays when we could not attend church. I really think that helped keep us safe.

Summer was a happy time, but Ma kept us very busy, with about one-half acre of contract beans for a canning company. The hardest back-breaking job, but fun, too. We would pick half the patch one day then the other half the next day alternating that way for about two weeks or more. According to Pa they had to be picked at the right stage to bring the best price, and I guess we did that because Ma managed to buy a new stove with the money. It was a beautiful thing mostly white enamel trimmed with a lot of nickel-plate. She was proud of it. When the house burned later that was the one thing that just had to be saved.
Then we also raised contract cucumbers for a pickle factory. More hard work. Both the beans and cucumbers had to be planted by hand, then hoed a couple times (and the quack grass was thick). And again the cucumbers had to be picked almost every other day. They were harder to pick than beans, but the job went faster. We delivered both to a station in Bryant. Again Ma saved her share of the money and in the second year she managed to buy a new gasoline powered wash machine. What a luxury — no more washboards and a washing was done in half the time. Things were really getting better.

Next came the onions, we raised some called Red-Wetherfields. They were a large purplish red onion very sweet and crisp. We had no trouble selling them by the bushel or half bushel and taking orders from the neighbors. We just ate them raw sliced, made in a salad with cream or in sandwiches. This was the only fresh vegetable we had in winter. I think we got $2.00 a bushel for them.

Raising them was another hard job. Tiny seeds planted by hand, then weeded on our hands and knees a couple of times, then when the growing season seemed over we would break over the stalks so they would quit growing and ripen. To do this we bent over and broke the green tops. We would do two rows at a time, bending one row to the right and the other row on top of this one to the left, very neat and they would ripen and dry off in about a week or two.

The folks left for the day and told us kids to break over the onions, I guess they thought we might get into mischief if we were not kept busy. The onion patch was on a hill just beyond the barnyard down to a creek, so we thought if we started a barrel very square on two rows it would roll over and bend down the onion tops on the way, and we would be done in a hurry for more important things. Forget it, it did not work. The barrel rolled so fast it jerked some onions out of the ground, but worse it broke the tops over every which way but neat, and it took us longer to straighten it all out and repair the damage. But it was laughable for a while.

What onions we did not sell to the neighbors Pa would take to the market in Antigo, along with cabbage which we also raised and sold at the market.

Raising the cabbage was easy but making sauerkraut was something else, and we made lots of it, in twenty gallon and smaller jars. It was messy and smelly but the worst came when it was fermenting, outside on the porch of course. After a couple weeks when the fermentation process was finished Ma would clean off about two inches of really spoiled stuff then she would cover it with a clean white cloth then a cover weighted down with a heavy stone. I hated this job and decided never to make homemade sauerkraut even after we were married. The canned stuff tastes pretty good too. But then we had it on the menu a couple times a week.