CHAPTER THREE

During the first World War the railroad couldn't find enough men to work on the section, replacing rails and ties, straightening rails and leveling them so they hired high school boys. About a dozen of us signed up one summer. We were paid $3.00 per day and worked six days a week at ten hours a day.

The railroad was a spur of the Soo line out of Appleton and called the "Wisconsin and Northern" and before prohibition it was nicknamed the "Whiskey and Northern" but after prohibition it was known as the "near beer and water line".

At first we worked out of Appleton and covered several miles north of Appleton. Most of the crew would take the early morning train north and a couple of us were designated to pump the hand cars to the work area. We had a main boss and a straw boss. The boss seldom spoke to us, he went ahead to see what work had to be done and then told the straw boss what had to be done. The straw boss was a real slave driver and we all hated him.

For the first two weeks I would eat supper and fall into bed completely exhausted. I would dream of this guy all night and be tired in the morning. I finally decided I had to stand up to him or quit the job. I figured behind his bravado he was a coward. I talked to the other boys and they felt the same way. So we decided to stand up to him and all stand together. So the next time he started to get rough we all ganged up on him and told him to lay off or we would beat hell out of him. Just then the real boss came along and wanted to know what the fuss was about. We told him we had had it with the straw boss. He turned to him and told him that hereafter he was to give us our instructions and see that the work was done but no more bullying would be allowed. He told us if we had any further complaints we should come directly to him. After that we got along very well.
After we had been working about a month they needed a crew to work around Lily. Ralph and I and a number of others thought it would be fun to go so we signed up and took the train north. We were stationed at Lily and we slept in a box car which had been converted to a bunk house. We soon found it was already occupied with bedbugs. We ate in a box car next to us which was occupied by a male cook and one-half was the kitchen and dining room and the other half he lived in. When we asked him what he did about the bed bugs he told us he had a small sack of caraway seeds tied around his neck. I think a bag of peanuts would have done as much good.

One day we were working north of Lily and when we were through for the day we piled on the hand cars and headed home. There was a train standing at our bunk car so we had to lift off our hand cars and wait until the train unloaded and pulled out. We had stopped in a wild blueberry patch and as they were ripe we ate them, and we ate and ate until the train pulled out.

Lily had a movie in the town hall once a week and as this was the night we all went. About half way through the movie I had to visit Mrs. Jones, and it wasn't long before the rest were leaving the show. As there was only a two-holer there wasn't room for everyone so we had to pull our pants down in the back lot. We got very little sleep that night. We would hardly lay down before we would be called again. If we had been given a big dose of castor oil plus croton oil it couldn't have been worse. By the time we were supposed to get up and go to work we were all too weak to get out of bed. NEVER eat ripe blueberries on an empty stomach.

Sundays we roamed the woods and lakes in the area. As there were no houses once you got out of town we didn't need any swim suits to go swimming, and we often went skinny dipping. One afternoon we were having a good time swimming in a beautiful small lake when mother nature called me and I went ashore. Not having any toilet paper I looked around for a substitute and found a vine near by with shiny leaves so I used them. After a couple
of hours I started to turn red and itch and swell. None of us knew what caused it so we went back to town but we got no help there except the proprietor of the local store thought it looked like poison ivy.

We went back to our camp and all the time I was swelling more and more, my fingers became so stiff I couldn't bend them and my eyes were nearly swollen shut. The railroad gang boss put me and one of the boys on the evening train to Appleton. I couldn't see and the itching was terrible and my friend had to lead me home from the station. When we got to my house my mother made a soda solution for me to bathe my entire body in. She had to cut my clothes off as I had swollen enormously. In a few days of this treatment I was back to normal. I wouldn't advise anyone to learn about poison ivy the way I did.

After I was fully recovered from my bout with poison ivy I returned to working on the railroad north of Lily. I now knew what poison ivy looked like and I kept a goodly distance from it; we had one boy working with us who suffered from it whenever he can near some. He didn't have to touch it. I am told you can also get it from the smoke of burning poison ivy vines.

One evening several of us borrowed a hand car to go to the movie in town. After the movie we put the hand car back on the rails and started for camp. Suddenly one boy saw a pair of eyes behind us and we heard the paralyzing scream of a wildcat. I don't believe that handcar ever traveled so fast, it almost left the rails, and when we reached camp we were so exhausted we almost passed the camp before somebody stepped on the brake.

One day we were unloading rails from a flat car. There were at least a dozen men (including boys) helping unload. The boss would have us spread out the length of the rail, tell us to take hold of the rail and when he said "lift" we would all lift together, walk to the edge of the flatcar and on his command drop it over the side and step back. One of these times those on the
end away from me stepped on a "frog" and when we had dropped the rail and stepped back the sharp point of the frog came down on my right foot crushing a toe. While it hurt like blazes I kept on until we had unloaded all of the rails and then I sat down and took off my shoe. My shoe was full of blood, my sock was soaked and one toe really smashed.

As there was no doctor in the area once again I took the next train home to have my foot taken care of. The railroad was very callous. When you were injured on the job and had to take time off you received no pay, and they didn't pay any medical costs nor any compensation for the injury.

One really bad feature of working with railroad men was the unprintable language we learned from them. They just didn't seem to know any clean words, and we began to talk the same way. I got into many embarrassing situations when I got back to school, and my mother threatened many times to wash my mouth out with soap if I didn't stop. It took me quite a while to get back on a normal basis.

The Winter of 1918 the flu went through the county, and mother, father and my sister came down with it, many died of it as you can tell by checking the old parts of the cemeteries. I stayed home from school to take care of them, but I didn't get it. Later they all came down with the mumps and again I left school to care for the family and once again I didn't get it. I must be one of the Lord's favorite people or he decided I could stand all the work of caring for the family.

I worked after school my last year in high school for the electric company who also operated the street cars. I was told Appleton had the first street cars in the nation, and they were one of the first to get rid of them. I repaired electric appliances and set electric meters in homes. At that time many people were having their homes wired for electricity. (About 1919 and early 1920s)

I was paid thirty cents per hour, and I had a pass to ride on
any street car in Appleton and on inter-urban cars that ran to Neenah, Menasha and Kimberly and to Waverly Beach on Lake Winnebago. On one occasion I set a meter in a farm house while linemen ran wires from the transformer to the house. We were always supposed to carry a test lamp and touch the wires to the switch contacts to make sure the linemen had run in a live wire instead of two ground wires. If I didn't have the test lamp along I would touch the switch with two fingers and if I got a shock it was O.K. On this occasion the switch was not located where the meter was to be installed and the electricians were not through wiring so I decided to let it go and went out to eat some apples (the linemen were already eating them). The linemen had run in 33,000 volt primary wires instead of the 110 volt secondary wires required then by an ordinary household and when someone threw in the switch it blew out the back of the house and caused a tremendous amount of damage. If I had touched that switch I wouldn't be here writing this story. Again the Lord looked after me by enticing me with apples.

I became fascinated with electricity and the future of electricity and read all the books I could get my hands on and I almost lost my long time ambition to become a lawyer.

From the time when I was in the sixth grade I had decided I wanted to be a lawyer. I was in a declamatory contest that year and I remember our expression teacher saying:

"Carl, in spite of being home for the better part of a week with a cold, you were able to come back and win first place with your rendition of 'The White Lilly'. I hope you will enter the contest again next year when you are in the seventh grade. Have you any idea what you would like to be when you grow up?"

"Oh yes?, I replied, "I am going to be a lawyer!"

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"Well", she said (she was our part-time expression teacher), "You have a long and difficult road to travel to make your dream come true; one ability you do have, I know, is the ability to get up before an audience and not be afraid to speak."

In high school I entered every declamatory and oratorical contest I could. My mother was a great help, she would hold my script while I recited the piece, and would make me go over it again and again until I knew it perfectly. I didn't always win but the experience was good for me.

Socially I didn't make much headway because I was too bashful. I went to a lot of dances with friends and would usually end up dancing a couple of times. I had no older sister to teach me to dance and mother couldn't dance. At our senior class dance the boys all congregated at one end of the gym and the girls at the other with only a few couples dancing. A girl that I had longed to date all through high school was there, Estelle Hagen, the most popular girl in school. Mother would tell me to call her, she couldn't do any more than say no. Many times I looked up her number and went to the phone but always lost my nerve.

At this senior class dance some of the girls got their heads together and decided something had to be done to liven up the party so they came across the floor in a group to ask the boys to dance and I couldn't believe my ears when Estelle walked up to me and asked me to dance with her. I couldn't get a word out but I danced with her and I was in Seventh Heaven and didn't come down all evening.

Another time I took a girl home from our church young peoples meeting and asked her for a kiss, she turned to me and said:

"Carl, never ask a girl for a kiss, just kiss her".
I had taken the commercial course in high school which included bookkeeping, shorthand and typewriting. The Spring of my last year in high school my mother sprained her ankle so I had to stay home at the end of the school year and help do the farm work for a month before I could get a summer job. I still had not decided whether I should accept the bookkeeping job I was offered, or whether I should go back to work for the electric company or should I go to college to spend another seven years in school? And if I could, how could I meet the expenses? My father was a big help.

He said "Carl you better accept that bookkeeping job. I've taken you as far as I can. You are on your own now".

During the next several weeks I spent a lot of time trying to decide whether I should accept the bookkeeping job, go back to the electric company and learn more about electricity, go to Lawrence College a couple of years and take a chance on losing some credits when I transferred to the University of Wisconsin at Madison, or should I try to make my dream come true and take my chances on being able to work my way through law school. I finally decided I would chance working my way through the University and Law School.

The last couple of years on the farm my father had sold our horse and bought a second hand Model T Ford, 1914 vintage which I had to learn to drive, and now that I had decided to leave home I had to teach him to drive. It had an armstrong starter and you had to be sure the spark lever was pushed up so it wouldn't back fire and break your hand. You really had to learn how to crank it. Many times it pinned me in the garage because it would creep forward and I would have to crawl over the hood to get into the seat to back it out of the garage.