

The Summer of My Thirteenth Year

It is the first of May, finally. At last school is done with for the season and I can go into the fields and help my grandpa and uncle work the farm. Maybe this year I can drive the team and help with the real work rather than just run errands and bring the men water and sandwiches. After all, I do turn thirteen this summer. My name is Erik and I'm almost grown.

Grandpa Anders, Uncle Wilhelm and Uncle Johan came over from the old country twelve years ago. Grandpa is a wiry, bowlegged man who wears spectacles. His sense of humor is sometimes cruel, but always told in a hearty spirit. Uncle Wil is a large, thick man of immense strength, both physical and mental. He is consulted by neighbors on farming issues, and eagerly solicited in matters of physical challenges. No one dare challenge him in arm wrestling if they care for their health. Uncle Johan is a quiet man, tall and gangly. I don't know him as well. He isn't as garrulous as Uncle Wil or as sage as Grandpa.

They were told of fertile farmland that was untouched since Noah's flood in a strange sounding territory called Minnesota. They followed earlier immigrants to the Minnesota River valley and found it was true. Grandpa put in a claim on 160 acres and Uncle Wil and Uncle Johan on 160 more. They broke this land by themselves. It is a pretty big farm. They have almost 140 acres broken to cropland, another 80 left as timber, some more as pasture. When they immigrated, the entire territory was barren and uncivilized. There were thousands of acres of unturned sod just waiting for the hand of man to turn the land into productive, profitable farmland. Hundreds of men like Grandpa and Uncle Wil and Uncle Johan were just the people to make a life out of this wilderness.

Grandpa and Uncle Wil and Uncle Johan came over by themselves and left Grandma Clara and Uncle Wil's wife, Julia, back in the old country until the farm could support them all. My bachelor Uncle Adolph supported Grandma and Julia until they could come over and reunite. They brought me with them. My mother died giving birth to my stillborn brother when I was three. My father didn't take the loss very well and just kind of wandered off. I can't remember what he looked like. I think he was conscripted into the Emperor's army and vanished. I was an orphan, technically, but Grandpa and Grandma made sure I always had a family.

Grandma Clara and Aunt Julia immigrated a few years ago and made the farmstead into a home. Grandpa is a practical man. He knew enough to make sure his time and money was invested in getting crops in before worrying about us folk's comfort. He, Uncle Wil and Uncle Johan built a sod

house into a small hill. It is cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Grandma and Aunt Julia planted some wildflowers on the roof. Next year Grandpa and Uncle Wil plan to build a cabin for Uncle Wil and Aunt Julia to have as their own. Until then, the five of us will live the one room soddy. It is pretty tight quarters, but no tighter than our neighbors have to put up with. I think Grandma misses the ancient but sturdy house she ran over in the old country. She has to continually sweep out the dirt the men and wind bring in through the door. The three small windows in the walls have a curtain of oilpaper to keep out the wind. Still, Grandma is in continual battle with the mosquitoes and biting black flies that come in the still of the evening to torment every living creature. Fleas have taken up residence, bouncing from the dog to us and back and forth in an endless cycle of misery. Summers are hard, but winter's worse. The snow leaves drifts on the floor that have to be swept every morning and the laundry freezes on the clothesline. But she doesn't complain. This is her home, too.

Uncle Adolph is still on the family farm in the old country. He will remain there until it becomes unprofitable. Then he will emigrate to join us.

Uncle Johan was very useful in breaking the land. Then he felt the call of liberty. He enlisted to fight for the Union in its struggle to save the country from the ingrates that call themselves Confederates. He is somewhere out in the East with General McClellan's army of restoration

Other outbuildings (in addition to the necessary privy) are a stable for the horses, a shed for the tools and farm implements, a small barn to house the winter hay and oats and a crib to hold the harvest. We have a small chicken coop, smokehouse and sturdy houses for the swine. Even though we're not far from the river, Grandpa dug a well so Grandma doesn't have to lug water too far. I can appreciate this since I'm often called upon to tote the water for the house. It is a fine farm and more than some of our neighbors have built.

There are a few Indians wandering around, but they don't farm the land. They are mostly thieves and beggars—that's what Grandpa says. They won't bother us as long as we let them have some food once and a while. They are Sioux, Mankato's clan, and they seem more interested in killing Chippewas than they are with us. They have their own ways, strange ways, and will never amount to much.

I know a few Indian boys my age. They are friendly and happy. Mostly they just want to play games. When they come around we sometimes go out to a pasture and drag a line in the ground. The line becomes the tally goal. They have a ball, made of buffalo gut, and a branch about four feet

long. The purpose of the game is to knock the ball over the tally line. The team that does this the most wins the game. The team is usually three or four boys. All the boys, me included, swing at the ball trying to move it to the edge. The rest struggle to keep it in bounds until they could get a chance to push it over the tally line. We spend hours struggling back and forth, kicking at the ball and our shins. The group of players would shift enmasse around the ring until the ball finally dribbled over the line. Then it begins all over again. Between the shoving and clubbing and kicking and bloody shins and dirty, sweaty faces, we have a grand time.

They have hand made toys they use to entertain themselves—tops and such. One fun toy requires some skill. They take a deer rib and eight or ten round bones from the buck's spine with a hole in the center. They tie a short stick or bone on the end of a piece of rawhide string. They string the bones over the rib and onto the rawhide. The object is to fling the bones into the air and catch them with the rib. It requires agility and concentration to carefully stab the rib through the suspended bones. I sometimes catch four or five bones; they consistently catch eight to ten. They have more practice, I figured. Indian boys are just like us, they want to have fun and they want to grow up to be like the men in their tribe. Their ways are different, but we mostly want the same things.

Spring comes late to the Minnesota prairie. Grandpa and Uncle Wil have to make the most of the growing season. There is little time for foolishness once the spring planting begins. They grow crops to eat, to feed the livestock, and hopefully to sell for ready cash. Wheat is the main crop. It grows well in the fertile ground and, if all goes well, will bring a profit. This is the main cash crop. We grow oats and corn for the cattle, swine and sheep. We also take time to plant potatoes and other vegetables for ourselves. Between the garden and slaughtered livestock we eat well and survive.

Some neighbors use a yoke of oxen for draft animals: we use a fine team of horses. Our horses are large and strong and make great companions. They pull a plow for hours, then turn around and give us a ride back to the farmstead. They enjoy being useful. They thrive on the their pasturage, and in the cold season do well on the oats and hay they helped plant and harvest. I don't know if they know they were helping raise their own food, but they seem to enjoy the eating their meal.

Once the ground thaws in the spring—usually in May—Grandpa and Uncle Wil yoke up the horses and set out for the field. They plow the sod under to refresh the soil and restore its vigor. Uncle Wil is known far and wide for the straight furrows he would plow—it is a source of pride for him and the family. After the field was plowed, it is allowed to rest for a day. The men and animals don't

rest—they go to another field and plow. When the plowed field cures enough, the horses pull a disc over it to break down the hard clumps of the plowed sod. When the clumps are broken down enough it is time to plant. Grandpa doesn't have a planter so he sows the old way—he walks the field with a bag of seed and hand sows the entire field. Uncle Wil works with him. I hope this summer they'll realize I'm big enough to help and call on me. They keep a steady pace and can plant two to three acres in a day. The birds like this season. They come down and help themselves to the free grain and sometimes get into fights with each other. The men drag a spring harrow over the seeded ground to bury the seed some. The men do their best to scare the birds, but they know that the birds will always get their share so they plant plenty enough for both bird and beast. Oats, rye and barley are planted the same way.

Corn is planted in rows of hills. It needs more space so the men leave enough room for a horse to pull a cultivator through the rows to cut out weeds. It's hard work, but necessary if we're going to have enough to eat and sell over the next year. Planting season lasts all of May and into June, then it's a constant chore to keep the weeds down, birds and other vermin away, and pray for enough rain to come at the right time for a bountiful harvest. This goes all summer.

I spend much of my chore time with the animals—feeding, currying and making sure they don't get sick. The hog pen is enclosed with a solid fence that has to be strong enough to withstand their rooting habits. It requires constant monitoring and upkeep. If I fail to notice a weak spot, the swine will push through and escape into the fields and woods. The only way to get them back once that happens is to shoot them. I've heard of it happening on other farms, but we've never had it happen to us—knock on wood. Since I can't let them out I have to make sure they have plenty of water and grain. Water is heavy—the twenty gallons they use and waste each day weighs over 100 pounds. I'm thankful for the well. Boys my age on other farms sometimes have to take a wagon to the river and haul water.

The milk cows don't need as much attention. I can let them out to the pasture and they'll just wander around, eating grass and drinking at the small creek that runs through the farm. They have enough sense to know when it's time to come in for milking. There aren't any wolves in the area anymore, so we don't have to worry about that peril. I've heard of Indians stealing cows sometimes, but they prefer buffalo meat and don't drink milk. So far they have left us alone.

Chickens are easy to care for. They just scratch at the dirt and flutter their wings. Aunt Julia is in charge of gathering eggs—I tend to drop some when I try. Still, it takes a good portion of the day to

tend to the animals, which doesn't leave as much time for me to help in the fields as I want. As I get older, I get faster and stronger. Soon I should be able to do my animal chores quicker. Then I can be more helpful.

Sunday is a day of worship and rest. We take our bath on Saturday—Grandpa first, then Uncle Wil, then me, followed by Grandma and Aunt Julia. On nice days we can do this outdoors under a shade tree with some sheets put up for modesty. On not nice days we bathe indoors in whatever privacy we could accomplish. Either way, we'd be ready to drive to someone's place where the Sunday services will be held.

We leave after morning milking to get there early. The services last as long as the preacher could talk—usually three or four hours. After we are sufficiently saved, the congregation retires to an afternoon of eating, gossiping and, for us children, playing. When the weather is good it would take on the aspect of a neighborhood picnic. When the weather is not so good, the adults commandeer all the space in the house and banish us to the outbuildings. There we carry on, invent new games, and pretend we are in charge of the world. Sundays are something to look forward to. This is a day everyone, young and old forgets the drudgery of everyday life and ponders on the good things to come in the future.

Mr. Jacobson, the Preacher, was a farmer who had the call. A small, squirrely man, he has the intensity of a man possessed when giving a sermon. The book learning he has come from the Good Book. He'd be offered the hospitality of a neighbor to host the services. His treasure might be in heaven, but he never refuses a bountiful meal for his effort. His preaching is heavy on strictness and obedience to God, country and family. His message is that by strict obedience and hard work we will lay up our treasure in heaven—sacrifice today is reward tomorrow. He preaches that we are all sinners and condemned people and that only by submitting ourselves to his view of salvation will we ever hope to be written in the Book of the Lamb. He continues on to assure us that most of us will fail and descend into the bowels of hell and burn eternally. The old folks murmur agreement and return the following week for the same message. I am still young and have a long time to fix my errors, so I'm not too worried about damnation—just yet.

Mr. Jacobson is a widower and has no children. He doesn't tolerate childish foolishness. In his eyes, play diverts us from the true path and is contrary to scripture. (Children still play, often with toys made by their parents who took a more beneficent view of childhood.) We grew up with the Book and mightily strive to be worthy of its judgment.

As May blends into June, fieldwork proceeds apace. The men spend all day in the fields to get the crop in and weeded. I'd do my animal chores and help the men when possible. Many days I fulfill my task by making sure the men and horses have plenty of drinking water. Grandma makes sandwiches that I run out to the men so they could have a quick lunch. They don't have to come all the way back to the house to eat. They are able to stay in the field longer, and get more accomplished. It is a team effort between the men, the women, and me. Once in a while Uncle Wil will let me drive the horses as they tug the harrow over a field while he and Grandpa worked in another field.

We heard of some battles back east. The Union army marched on Richmond, got within half a dozen miles of capturing the enemy capital, but somehow got beat back all the way into the Atlantic Ocean. It was distressing news, all the more so since we weren't sure if Uncle Johan was involved, and if so, if he was well. It could take weeks for word to be delivered to us out here in the plains and half way across the continent. It was a concern, but the farm had to be worked and we couldn't dwell on his fate too much.

June dragged by and July arrived. By the end of the month we'll begin making hay. July also brings a time for celebration. The country's Independence Day is the greatest holiday of the year. It is the most important occasion we celebrate, bigger than anything else that we can imagine. No matter what day of the week it fell on, we take that day off, put our Sunday best clothing on and drive to town fifteen miles away. We're always giddy with excitement and anticipation.

Independence Day is usually hot and humid. This year is no exception. The horses worked up a sweat swatting at horseflies, and we worked up a sweat watching them. It didn't matter because we are going to celebrate and have a good time.

First, there is a parade led by the local militia. The marchers demonstrate tactics, and show off fancy military uniforms and freshly cleaned muskets. Claus Boreman is this year's the flag bearer, a most important position. He is a celebrity hereabout. He lost his left arm at the Battle of Gaines Mill in Virginia a few weeks back and still managed to return home in time for this celebration. Grandma caught her breath when she saw him—she was reminded of Uncle Johan and the danger he faces. There has been no report of any injury or death of Uncle Johan. We can only continue to pray for his safe keeping and return.

Other folks fell in line to join the parade. A farmer proudly rode a prize horse, mostly to show off and impress his neighbors. Some folks put bunting on a wagon and drove their family in the

parade. Thirty-eight star flags flew in honor of the brave souls who had fought so hard for America's freedom from the evil British so many years ago. There wasn't a soul in town who had any kin involved in the Revolution—all our ancestors were still in the old country when it happened—but we were second to none in button-busting pride in our country. The parade marched from one end of town to the other and stopped in front of the town's new flagpole. A huge, new flag was raised for the first time. The militia colonel ordered a salute. The twelve men of the militia raised their muskets determinedly and waited for the command to fire. When the colonel was ready, he gave the charge and a volley was fired into the air to honor and remember the patriots who fought and died giving us our liberty. A total of three volleys were called forth. Each one elicited cheers of patriotism. I knew that some day I would be in the militia and participate in the firing of a salute to my country.

Every year some local politician would mount the bed of a wagon and hold forth. It would be the first of several speeches by different men, each striving to outdo the others in flowery oratory and patriotism. Judge Blender went first. I recall some of his words as he twisted the tail of the Redcoats: “We here assembled call forth the spirit of God to again instill in us the courage that Your right commands to slay the oppressive spawn of the foreign heathen...We bow before no King but Jesus.... those who would take from us our Liberty do so at their own peril, for we have Right, Resolve, and the Cause of God in our favor...We challenge all who would do us harm to stand and receive their just reward...if you behave as a foul skunk, prepare to die as a foul skunk...eighty-six years ago we threw off your tyranny and for eighty-six years we repulsed your evil and will prevail against you for another eighty times eighty years...destiny commands our victory, we will not falter, we will not retreat, we will not fail...others may try to replicate your evil intentions, they too will feel the cold steel of justice and right...those of our countrymen who take up arms against our glorious, inviolate country will soon rue their misguided folly...those who live by the sword shall perish by the sword...we assemble here to proclaim the truth that this nation shall not waver in this bloody struggle to right the wrongs that some would impose on all God-fearing, God-loving, obedient citizens of the greatest nation on Earth, this United States of America!”

The crowd cheered and the militia fired off a salute. Of course, the militia would salute anything just to hear the sound of their muskets and the sulfurous odor of burning powder. Part of the celebration of American freedom was the freedom to act stupid. Some of the folks let loose in a wild way.

It had been a hard winter and tough spring. Shivering and hungering until planting time, the

farmers and laborers waited in boredom and hope for the bounty of the year yet to come. Mucking through the mud and mire of a wet spring drained their spirits, but they persevered because they knew they had to. Pushing and pulling their oxen or horses (no one was foolish enough to try mules on this heavy soil) the men tilled the land and planted their crops.

With the build up of sweaty grime, along with the welts the mosquitoes and black flies raised, the men were ready...ready to let loose. The preacher turned his back as men sampled too much hard cider, exercised too much by dancing and hugging women in a random, chaotic step that led to mostly stumbling and falling down, and spoke words that brought shame to the family of Jesus. Their wives were equally embarrassed, but understanding, of the stress that hard work and uncertain rewards drove their men. These men earned their foolishness. As long as no one hurt themselves, all would return to sanity on the morrow.

Children, especially the boys, and a few Indians that had straggled into town, closely observed their antics.

Women would gather and compare new dresses and bonnets that had been sewn over the winter. An informal contest ensued as each eyed the other's creation and made comments of praise. Some became either envious or proud depending on whether their own creation was adjudged to be superior or inferior by the consensus of the group. Outwardly, of course, nothing but praise and adoration was spoken. They had gathered for a celebration—nit picking would wait for private conversations at a later time.

There would be no celebration at all if food weren't a primary motivation. The women made sure that each Independence Day picnic surpassed all others that had gone before. Even though most of the townspeople and farmers had arrived within the last decade, all had adopted the holiday and claimed as their own. The ladies adapted the foodways of the old country into an American smorgasbord. On this Independence Day we had a feast: fried chicken, cold boiled ham, hard boiled eggs, biscuits, fresh picked greens, pickles, and several types of pies. The repast was greasy, but so flavorful one could only hope to eat enough to fill two stomachs. Old Man Cooper brought some ice (he had a large, deep pond on his property and always harvested more ice over winter than anyone in the county) to share. We had cold iced tea or cider with our dripping hot chicken: one could not ask for a better meal. Coffee was served for the rest.

The rowdies and other like-minded men who needed liquor would have to wait until the civilized folks and children were fed. They were generally good-natured about this and sometimes

just lay down in the shade of a tree or building and took a nap. After the big meal, several of the older men joined them in this well-deserved repast. The women and girls took to cleaning up and gossiping.

We boys had better plans. We had an entire afternoon to enjoy. It wasn't the Sabbath; it was Independence Day and we had permission to celebrate. It was too good an opportunity to waste. Some of the younger men would join with us. They liked to show us how the games were supposed to be played and outdo us in skill and strength.

Some of us gathered in a field to play 'rounders'. Otto and the Swede brought a leather ball and a rounded stick. Some of us would be on Otto's team, the rest on the Swede's. The out-party team would fan out around the field to protect the bases from runners. There were four bases, the last one called home. One of our team would be the feeder and toss the ball at one of their team, the in-party, who was standing with the rounded stick. The object was to fling the ball past their batter before he could hit it. If, perchance, the batter hit the ball with the stick one of our team would try and catch it before it touched the ground. If that failed, the batter would attempt to run to the first base. If we couldn't catch the ball fairly, we'd trap it somehow and then have a chance to throw it at the runner. If we hit the runner before he found the base, the runner was "out". If the runner touched the base before being touched by the ball, he was "safe". This process repeated itself with the next batter. If he hit the ball and was safe, both he and the first batter advanced. When the first batter advanced all the way 'home', a tally was made. In the process, if the in-party acquired three "outs", their team was retired and the out-party became the in-party and hoped to acquire more tallies than their opponent.

We'd play this for as long as we enjoyed. Sometimes the tags on the runners became rather hard and painful, other times the runners would encounter physical obstacles that necessitated a collision. As long as it was still in fun, we continued. Otto and the Swede were rivals in games, hunting and fishing. "Rounders" was just one of their activities: when they decided to cease, the game was over.

We created other diversions such as "Whoops", "Hide and Go Seek", and tug-of-war. It was all to have fun. Some boys would have competitions to see who was the fastest runner, or who could throw the ball the farthest or most accurately. Being tally-keeper or judge would satisfy some. I liked to shoot marbles. I had some smooth, round stones I found along a creek that were just the right size. Some boys were jealous of my perfect marbles—they had to make do with clay marbles or lead

bullets—because they were so pretty and so smooth. I was pretty good at it and usually collected many souvenirs from the others, which I gave back.

We tossed horseshoes. Uncle Wil was especially good at this; he landed a ringer eight or nine times out of ten tosses. I was fortunate to hit four. (I felt he used shoes from the draft horses and made me use pony shoes. Unfair.) Leath would bring a few wheel-hub rings and we'd 'walk the dog' by pushing one along the lane using a fireplace poker. We would have races of two or three boys running behind the rolling ring and switching each other with the poker.

All in all, Independence Day was the most important day of celebration in the year—more than Easter or Statehood Day. We paid attention to the patriotic speaker's oration and the preacher's blessing, we made sure to honor the women for their fairness and beauty (and the good food they brought), and enjoyed a good exercise with friends. Grandpa, Grandma and Uncle Wil equally enjoyed the event. It was a full day of excitement and joy and well worth waiting a year to experience. I can hardly wait until the next Independence Day.

July is always hot, humid and sweaty. The only creatures that relish July are the mosquitoes, biting black flies, and locusts. Locusts are bad. They can strip any and all plants to the ground. They don't come every year, thank God, but they came this year. A swarm came out of the west and ate much of our corn and oats, but not all. We were lucky. Grandpa and Uncle Wil built backfires at the edge of the fields that deterred some of the infestation. They sacrificed firewood that had been stockpiled for winter and will require a strenuous effort from all of us to replace, but it had to be done. The oilpaper kept most of the locusts out of the soddy; Grandma took care of those that made it inside. Some of our neighbors suffered more. All were relieved when this attack ended. It wasn't as bad as it could have been. It was considered an annoyance rather than an infestation. Farming is a chancy life anyway; we sure didn't need this additional grief. Our harvest will suffer, but we should salvage enough to keep most of the animals alive until next year: next year always holds the promise of bounty.

The locusts didn't take all the brome, rye and alfalfa. We had some left standing to make hay. We make hay in July. I think it's because there's nothing else to do in the fields, and the hay dries faster in the dry heat. Grandpa and Uncle Wil were part of the group of neighboring farmers who would make a hay party to clear a field. The group travels from farm to farm with their scythes and can mow down a field in a day. On the first days of haying my job was to run water and sandwiches to the men so they can keep working from morning milking until evening milking. While the fallen hay

was left to dry the group would go to the next farm and mow that field, and on the next day attack another field. After three days the hay should be dry enough to gather into haystacks. That's where we boys came into play. A group of ten or twelve, me included, would drag out rakes and make windrows of the dried hay. Then we would gather the dried hay into sheaves with our hayforks. The sheaves would be combined into a haystack as high as we could throw. Oft times, farmers would hire day laborers from towns to help with the haying. The haystacks would sometimes ascend to as much as eight feet tall. We tracked along the route the men made, always three days behind (except when the Sabbath interfered) and made a party of the work. The haystacks would be allowed to stand until the men were finished with all the mowing and came back to the beginning field with teams of oxen and wagons called hayracks. They filled the hayracks to overflowing with hay and drove them to the barn at the homestead. There they would fill the haymow to the rafters. The hope was that they could harvest enough hay to keep the cattle alive over winter. It was always a close call—sometimes a farmer would have to butcher a few head so that the others could have enough to survive. Haying is hard work, but necessary for the farmer's existence. Depending upon how many farms were involved, this task would take most of July and into August.

When the weather was drizzly and damp we couldn't make hay. Then we would entertain ourselves with chores around the farm, or maybe go fishing. When we couldn't work in the fields, there wasn't much to keep us occupied around the farm. The wheat would begin to show color, maybe, and the corn would only start to tassel. It was a quiet time, a lazy time, of the year. Grandpa and Uncle Wil would walk the fields almost every day, watching the grain grow and mature. They'd take notice if some vermin seemed to be damaging any of the crops, and take measures to deter or kill the creature. Otherwise, the crops and the farm were waiting for the beginning of harvest in September. I'd do my daily chores: help with the milking, feed the hogs, tote water from the well, catch chickens in the yard, play with the dog, or whatever else needed to be done. Grandma would have me run water and sandwiches out to the men in the field, partly because that was the right thing to do and partly to get me away from the homestead and trouble.

Once in a while I'd think ahead to winter and school. Becky Jorgenson would be there. She'd be fourteen now. She was so smart she could almost teach the class for Miss Gersen. The fact I was even thinking about this was bothersome—it never mattered before. On Sundays and holidays I always stayed with the boys my age. We agreed that none of us would ever mess with girls. But, there was something about Miss Becky that made me reconsider. I couldn't put my finger on it, but

she was different than other girls—she even smiled at me one time. It made a funny feeling run up my spine. This was a consternation that I would have to think about. I once asked Uncle Wil about this. In his wise way he told me to relax, my feelings will work themselves out in due time.

November, when the corn is harvested and school is set to begin again, will be the time to face Becky and see if she still smiles.

As the August sun bore down on the fields and the crops slowly inched their way to maturity, I watched Grandpa and Uncle Wil take measure of their hopes for the harvest. It should be a good one; maybe they'll be able to sell enough of the surplus to buy glass windows for the cabin they plan on building over the next year for Uncle Wil and Aunt Julia. It was good to see them look relieved, all their hard work this year seems to be productive. Uncle Wil has a little chipper step in his walk these days.

In the third week of August, on another hot day, Grandpa and Uncle Wil went to the fields as usual. I duly accomplished my morning chores and went to Grandma to see if I should run water and sandwiches to the men. Once she was satisfied that my chores were, indeed, done she concurred that it would be a satisfactory idea. "Take care that you don't spill any water. The men will be thirsty." she cautioned. Grandpa and Uncle Wil said they were headed to the cornfields beyond the stream on the far side of the forest. It wasn't a true forest, but it was about twenty-five acres of hilly, wooded trees that made for good hunting in the winter.

I gathered up the water jugs and sack of sandwiches and set out. It was mid-morning and the day was far from blistering hot. I walked the path around the near fields to the stream. It was spring fed and always cool in the summer, and flowing in the winter. At a narrowing some stepping stones had been placed so one could cross the stream without soaking his shoes—but what's the fun in that? I took my shoes off and stepped directly into the refreshing water. It wasn't too deep, maybe sixteen inches, and it wasn't too broad, maybe twenty yards. It made for a nice stroll through the flowing cool balm on a hot day.

By noon I was well into the forest. There were many paths I could take to transverse the woods, each one holding its own special charm. Since I was on a mission to meet the men and bring them their lunch, I didn't dally on this day. I took the quickest path. I always become giddy on these treks: I will be able to spend several hours with Grandpa and Uncle Wil talking about the farm, the neighbors, the war, and about life. They were patient and understanding with me and let me ask just about anything. There was a copse of trees off to the side of the field where we would lay and

consider the fate of the world and enjoy all of God's creatures and creation. Their acceptance of me made me believe that I was growing up and soon would be an adult.

When I broke free of the forest and into the cornfield the sun was well beyond high noon. The corn was tall—several feet taller than I am—so I had to shout to get their attention. They knew I would be coming: just not when. If they didn't answer that usually meant they were near the copse where they could catch some shade. I could either take the long way and walk the edge of the field or take a short cut directly through the rows. Both took about the same time. I took the short cut.

It was quiet as I approached the small grove. Usually I can hear them talking and laughing as I approach. I thought that they were still among the cornrows or had moved to the next field. It wouldn't be the first time. There was an eerie stillness, however. The birds were silent. That was unusual. There was no wind, nothing was moving.

I went toward the copse to see where they might be resting. As I cleared the end of the cornrow I could see them. They were lying under a tree in a funny way. They were on their backs and their bodies were contorted in a weird, unnatural manner. I hailed them, but they didn't budge. I kept moving up the shallow slope to where they were. I yelled louder to wake them. Still no response.

When I got to them I fainted. My legs gave way and I crumbled to the ground. Their bodies were riddled with bloody holes. Someone who wanted them dead shot them over and over. I didn't see anyone around. I couldn't determine when the awful crime had been committed, only that it was on this day in August that my Grandpa and Uncle Wil were slain by some despicable bastard. I screamed to God, "Why did you let this happen?", but only the clouds could hear my anguish. (I didn't think that the people responsible were still be nearby and would come after me. I didn't care.) I dropped the water jugs and sandwiches and ran back into the cornfield. I had to get back home to let Grandma and Aunt Julia know. We had to come and bury the men in a Christian way. I needed to let the neighbors know that desperados were on the loose.

I ran through the cornstalks wildly. Serrated-edged leaves slashed at my arms and face as I dashed wantonly through the rows. My eyes welled with tears and grief and fear. I could hardly see where I was going. My mind filled with a blank pressure. My brain felt like it was going to explode. I ran on through the field. I fled the field and fell into the forest. I knew the paths and could run blindly in and around the trees. Still no sign or sound of birds. Where had they gone? I ran on. I hurtled fallen limbs and jutting rocks; I ran faster than ever before. I was gasping for air. My heart

was pounding, but that only pushed me to run faster. Coming to the stream I stumbled and fell in. The cool, invigorating liquid brought new focus and energy to my task. I let some in to my mouth and felt refreshing water descend through my throat and into my stomach. I found increased strength and determination in the languid water. Within seconds I scrambled to my feet and splashed my way across the stream and up on the far bank. I came to the oat field nearest the homestead. I scanned the horizon for any sign of Indians. Across the golden grain I could see the barn and corncrib and the top of the soddy. All appeared normal.

When I get there I will yell to Grandma and Aunt Julia to hitch the horses to a wagon. We'll drive the wagon around the fields on the narrow lanes that Grandpa and Uncle Wil (were they really dead?) had built so many years ago. I'll take out a section of the fence near the copse and we'll drive the wagon into the field to the men. We'll load the bodies and bring them home. Then I'll ride to town and notify the people to watch out for strangers—only a stranger would do such a horrendous deed. Someone will send for Preacher Jacobson to come and comfort the women. In a few days we'll have the burying. Grandma will know where to put them.

Death on the plains and prairies is not uncommon. Many a man has died in the course of farming accidents or sickness—it's sad, but not unknown. But cold-blooded murder of healthy men (outside of war) is wrong. The district sheriff will be summoned. A posse will gather and search for the bad men—I will surely go with them. When they are caught they will face Judge Blender and receive their just reward.

So much raced through my mind as I neared the homestead. I didn't see Grandma or Aunt Julia in the yard; they must be inside. The chickens acted jumpy, but that was probably because of me and how I was acting. I didn't see or hear the horses, they must have moved to a shade somewhere in the pasture. It would take a bit of effort to chase them down, but I was in a hurry and on a mission. I saw that the door to the soddy was open wide. Grandma usually likes to keep the door somewhat shut to keep insects away, but maybe they're planning on moving something big from the soddy to outside. When I get there, they'll drop what they're doing and rush to help me retrieve the bodies, that's for sure.

I noticed something that hit me hard in my gut. I fell to my knees. When I recovered and neared the soddy I could see an arrow in the dirt wall. Indians! Where's Grandma and Aunt Julia? They didn't seem to be outside or inside the soddy. Maybe they're hiding in the barn or out back in the scrub brush. I looked around. I yelled for them to come out. There was no sign of them anywhere.

The inside of the soddy was a mess—the table was toppled over, the two chairs broken, shards of broken china dishes splayed haphazardly across the floor, the window oilpaper shredded, clothing and bedding ripped and strewn about, and the pie safe was empty. Feathers from the bed were tossed around and had settled like a late autumn snowfall atop the chaotic scene. Uncle Wil's rifle was missing. I went to the pasture to look for the horses, but they were gone. Indians raided the farm. Probably the same vermin that slew Grandpa and Uncle Wil. What will they do with the women? What will I do?

Why would Indians want to hurt us? We were always friendly with them. Sometimes Grandma gave them food and shelter in the winter. Their boys and I would play together. It must be a rogue bunch of braves that is trying to prove something to their elders. For whatever reason, they did it and now I am the only one left. Oh, how I want to have Uncle Wil to talk to—he'd know what to do. But he's still lying under the trees in the cornfield, waiting—waiting for me to revenge his murder. The only weapon I have is a pocketknife. I wouldn't stand a chance against bloodthirsty, crazy and armed Indians.

I decided to travel to the neighboring Williamson farm. They're nice folks and have helped with the haying and other things. It is the first place east of our farm and on the way to New Ulm. New Ulm is the largest town in the vicinity—maybe 900 people—and offers the best chance of standing up to an attack. I didn't know if the Indians had been there, are going there, or are lying in wait for me on the way. I hoped that by riding with the Williamson's I could find protection on the road to sanctuary.

I went as stealthily as I could while keeping to the edge of a treeline and hunkering down along streams where possible. I looked for tall grass to avoid notice. I cut through one small cornfield, but avoided the shorter grain fields like wheat and oats. I stayed off of roads. When I encountered a lane I would try to quickly cross and vanish into the adjacent field. All the time I was concentrating on concealment I still thought of Grandma and Aunt Julia—where could they be, will the savages abuse them, are they dead?

Somewhere along the journey I regretted tossing the sandwiches away. It was deep into afternoon and I hadn't eaten since breakfast. In my panic and anxiety I hadn't noticed my hunger until now. I was able to quench my thirst from a stream I crossed, but a nice sandwich would really help. I hoped the Williamson's would have some food I could eat—assuming that there was anyone left on the farm.

I hesitated as I crested the ridge that overlooks the farm. I knelt down and searched the fields and pastures for anything that might be out of place. Everything looked normal; cattle and sheep were grazing, the stable door was closed and chickens were in the yard. In a few minutes, after I caught my breath and relaxed a bit, I got up and walked down to the farmstead. It was quiet. Maybe the men were in the fields and the women were visiting. I couldn't tell. There wasn't any evidence of a struggle near the buildings; the doors were still shut. I was afraid to yell out so I walked as quietly as I could to the cabin. I looked in through a window but didn't see anyone. The furniture wasn't broken or scattered like Grandma's. I went around to the door and knocked. No one answered. Everyone was gone, but I didn't know if it was because they wanted to or because they had to. I opened the door and looked around. Everything was in place as near as I could tell. The pie safe doors were still shut, a few jars of canned preservatives still sat on a shelf, and a bucket was half-filled with water.

Boldly, and with self-justification, I took a jar of pickles and ate some. I washed the briny treat down with a big gulp of water. I checked the pie safe and found it empty except for a few chunks of bread. These I also ate.

The atmosphere was eerie; it was quiet—too quiet. Their chickens were to roost in the coop, even though there was still several hours of sunlight left. It was as if they were seeking protection from some ravenous predator—fox or raccoon, or maybe Indians. I didn't think it would be wise to wait for someone to return. It could be friend or foe. Sitting on a solid chair at their table I began to consider the scene in the cornfield and how small and quiet Grandpa and Uncle Wil appeared. Grief began to envelop me like a heavy blanket wrapped tight, so tight it was hard to breathe. I knew I had to leave and head for safety.

I didn't want to be seen by any Indians—I didn't know if they all were murderers or if some of the families we helped are still friendly. I couldn't take any chances. I tried to stay away from open spaces—pastures, grain fields, roads—and use the protection of the forests and streams to hide. I had a general knowledge of the neighborhood and felt that if I could keep hopping from woods to woods, and make my own paths, I would be safe. New Ulm was maybe twenty miles away. It would be a full day on a road in a wagon to make the trip. On foot, alone, and cross-country it will take longer. How much longer I didn't know and didn't bother to think about. I would be dark in a few hours. I knew I would need to seek some kind of shelter for the night. I knew of some crevices in nearby valleys that might provide security and headed for them.

I hoped to reach the Rollins' farm before then. They weren't the friendliest of neighbors—

Uncle Wil embarrassed George Rollins in a wrestling match almost ten years ago and Mr. Rollins held a grudge—but this was an emergency. I hoped they were home, if not, I hope they left some food when they left. At dusk I was able to see the outline of their buildings. No lights were on. It appeared to be abandoned. I could hear their milk cow's anguished cries for relief from over-stretched udders. It reminded me that I wasn't home to do the evening milking. Our cows were probably bellowing the same lament. I hesitated. Maybe I need to return home and take care of the chores. Then I remembered. Grandpa was dead. Uncle Wil was dead. Grandma and Aunt Julia were missing. It would be dangerous to return. My best hope of surviving and rescuing Grandma and Aunt Julia was to find help—and that was New Ulm.

The Rollins were gone. Whether evacuated, captured, or killed didn't matter—they were gone. In the house I found a lamp and matches. I lit the lamp; careful to make sure the doors and windows were closed so that the light didn't escape the little house. I found a few jars of vegetables and ate them. I didn't wait around, but headed back out to find shelter. I knew there were some craggy ravines close to the river, not far away. I stumbled, tripped and other wise scrambled through the rocky pastureland in the moonless darkness.

When night covers the land, when only the owl talks and the coyote replies, time becomes elastic. It stretches dimensions—what in daylight is a five hundred-yard trip of half-an-hour becomes a five-mile trek that takes three hours in the darkness. The evenly spaced trunks of virgin forest close in together—it becomes impossible to pass between two trees without barging in to one or both. The small, insignificant twigs on the ground grow into sly, animated logs that spring up to trip feet and scratch legs. The sound made by a branch breaking in the night is as loud as a cannon. Sound travels unimpeded. Wind shuffles through the fallen leaves, speaking a foreign tongue that only Indians can interpret.

It is imperative I find shelter, a safe harbor to survive the night. The river valley crevices should be nearby, but I cannot fathom the direction or distance I am travelling. I need to stop, find a comfortable spot, and let the darkness draw sleep from my exhausted body and refresh my strength. The morning will bring a new dawn, a new day, a new hope.

I was beyond exhausted: every bit of me was tired and sore and frightened. Despite the torment of the horrors I saw and the attacking swarms of mosquitoes covering me, I drifted off to a restless sleep in a mixture of terror, grief and confusion.

I woke to a calm, quiet still morning. The sun had burned off any haze that may have settled

over the valley. The sky was clear and beckoned a fine day. I was hungry, but not thirsty. My whole being was twisted into knots. I tried to make sense of yesterday, but nothing made sense. The optimism of Uncle Wil had been silenced; the calm presence of Grandpa was gone. Who knows what became of Grandma and Aunt Julia?

I sat up and rubbed the sleep out of my eyes and pondered the plan for the day. New Ulm was two or three days away by foot; could I keep evading the marauding scourge for that long? Will the next farm have a horse I can borrow? Where will I find food along the way? If some Indians capture me, what will they do to me? Have the militia already killed all the bad ones? Have the Indians killed the militia? Life will never return to normal, of that I am sure, but it will return. I have to keep faith and stay alive.

I was beginning to get into territory that I wasn't comfortable or familiar with. I was in country that I'd only traveled through a few times. I was somewhere centered between the river and the military road that ran west to east. There were a few farm lanes crossing the prairie irregularly. I decided that I had to risk using one of the dirt lanes if I was going to walk to safety. I would pass by farms and cross-bridged creeks. If I needed, I could spend the next night in someone's barn. I began walking east.

Before too long I encountered one of the farm lanes. I walked toward the risen sun to make sure I was heading east. I was nervous: a bird's call would send me jumping off the lane and into the adjoining shrubs and weeds. A rabbit's scamper would send the chill of death up my spine. I was fearful: every movement or sound might indicate a murderous Indian lying in wait. I would silently wait in concealment until the sound or movement ceased or I saw the cause of the alert. Traveling in such a way is slow and tedious, but how else could I keep safe?

It was almost noon. The sun was just short of being directly over top when I heard a rumbling racket behind me. I jumped to the side of the road and tried to vanish into the thorny shrubs. I secreted myself behind a small fallen log and prayed for deliverance. Through a small clearing I could see dust billowing up on the road. Only a group of horsemen or wagons could produce such disturbance. I only hope that they are white people—people who are trustworthy. If they are Indians, I only hope my shrubbery camouflage keeps me hidden from their piercing eyes.

As they approached I heard a distinctive clanging that could only come from cooking pans hanging haphazardly on the side of a settler's wagon. The horses were snorting as if over-ridden, without rest and about to fail. This can mean only one thing: I am out of immediate danger. Perhaps

they will find a place for me and take me with them. The dust cloud continued to move closer and I could make out the shape of the lead horses. It appears that eight or ten men on horseback were escorting three wagons. As they were headed east like me, I hoped they were bound for New Ulm and safety.

I gingerly removed myself from my hiding place and made it to the side of the road. One of the lead riders noticed me and slowed his gasping horse. I didn't recognize him, but he was no doubt a farmer. He didn't have a proper saddle and was almost riding bareback. He slowed to a trot to better examine me—I'm sure he is as wary of Indians as I am and wanted to be very sure that the dusty, dirty sunburnt teenager standing at the edge of the road was not dangerous.

He pulled over and introduced himself as Mr. Goebels from Gentry Township. He was a smallish man with a round face and craggy features. His skin was leathery, his clothing threadbare, and his countenance severe. He heard of the outburst of renegade Indian mayhem and was leading his family and relatives to the safety of New Ulm.

"Hold there young man. What are you about?" Mr. Goebels queried.

"My name is Erik. My Grandpa and uncle were murdered yesterday. Indians. I plan on seeking shelter in New Ulm."

"Any women folk?"

"Gone. I have no idea where they might be. I looked for them, but they are not at the home. I need to find safety."

"Fine. We are of the same intent. Climb on a wagon. You can help drive."

They had been on the road since yesterday morning and planned to ride through the rest of the day. They planned to make it to New Ulm by nightfall or soon after. I told him of my tragedies and intention. I was welcome to hitch a ride if I wanted, but they wouldn't tarry long for me to decide. I eagerly jumped into the back of one of the wagons, relieved that God had sent help to me in my time of need. I'd be in the comforting cocoon of New Ulm and sanctuary before the night had fallen. I will be safe from the terror.

We proceeded down the road, stopping only for a few minutes to rest and have a small meal in the early afternoon. The horses need the rest more than we did. Soon we were back on the trail. If we were to reach New Ulm before nightfall we would have to hurry. As the afternoon dragged on the horses slowed. They had been driven beyond their capacity and were about broken. Another rest break was ordered, this one lasting almost half an hour. It was soon evident that dusk would settle

long before could hope to arrive in New Ulm. The men had to make a decision: push on in the darkness or find a secure site to over-night and risk the additional exposure to danger. Since the horses were worn out it was decided to find a secretive place to set up a cold camp—there would be no fire that would signal our position—of cold coffee and beans and hard bread.

Mr. Goebels found a small gap in the forest wall that would allow one wagon at a time to pass. He led our small party several hundred yards into the woods where there was a large enough clearing for the wagons to set side by side. The horses were tethered on a grassy knoll some ways distant. One man volunteered to do guard duty for the camp, and another for the horses, just in case. No one spoke above a soft whisper as we settled down in the blackness of night—even the horses knew to keep quiet.

In the black silence my mind raced again with the memories of the previous day—the image of Grandpa and Uncle Wil remained vivid and tormented me. At least I wasn't alone this night; I had some security and comfort in being part of a group—even if every one of us was terrified. My exhaustion overwhelmed my anxiety and I slept fitfully.

Waking in the morning was a relief. There had been no troubles or concerns through the night. The men silently gathered the horses and quietly walked them back to the wagons and hitched them up. The horses were rejuvenated—they had a several hours of rest and ate their fill of grass. With a few gallons of water to sip, the herd was ready to fulfill its mission to transport our group the short distance to safety. We left our little campground while the sun was still edging itself over the horizon. With the help of God's grace we would be in New Ulm by mid-morning.

The tense trip to New Ulm was uneventful. One of the ladies remarked that the farms we passed all seemed to be abandoned. The weather was clement and birds were sighted in the air. A serene sense of calmness settled on the weary travelers like a feather quilt. We let our eyes rest, our Eden awaited and all would be well. We breathed deeply the brisk air of freedom and safe harbor. The troubles of the past few days were over, we prayed they would not return.

We soon came within sight of the town. New Ulm was the largest town in the area and usually was bustling. Today, however, nothing seemed to be moving. As we neared we noticed that the streets were filled with defensive barricades. We could only hope they were installed as a precaution against attack. Mr. Goebels rode ahead to announce our coming.

Our small train drew forward to the town's edge. Mr. Goebels emerged from behind a barricade to signal us to proceed. The barricades were opened enough for us to pass through and

enter our goal—save haven in New Ulm.

Once inside we disembarked from our transports and gathered around with groups of anxious citizens. They wanted to know what we knew about the Indian raids on the Fort north of the River. This came as a surprise to us. We always assumed the terror was the result of a small band of renegades. It would take a coordinated plan of attack to challenge a fort. This meant that many tribes joined together and that they intended to kill or drive away all of us. The situation had turned dire, direr than anyone could believe.

The townsfolk welcomed us as reinforcements. Hundreds of other local farmers and settlers had evacuated to New Ulm and we joined quite a garrison. The barricades were built the day before in response to a short exchange of gunfire between the town and some Indians in the bluffs above the town. About six brave men died in defense of the town and their families. No one knows how many Indians there were or how many were slain, but their shooting ceased during an afternoon thundershower. We all pray they will not return.

The arrival of Col. Flandrau and his troop of armed volunteer militiamen provided more relief. Col. Flandrau was a tall, well-built man with a military demeanor. He was a lawyer and was chosen to lead the militia by the volunteers. The townsfolk and others welcomed reinforcements from areas around the county. There were about 300 men in arms prepared to repel any attack.

Despite the euphoria felt upon reaching New Ulm safely, I remained despondent. I recalled the reason I had arrived at this place. Grief returned to overwhelm my thoughts. I thought of the picture of Grandpa and Uncle Wil forever lying under the trees, of Grandma and Aunt Julia somewhere out there in danger and distress at the hands of their captors (if not worse), and, for the first time, of myself. I have been orphaned again. I am alone and will have to find a way to survive without the support of Grandpa and Uncle Wil or the compassion of Grandma and Aunt Julia. This time, alas, I have no close family to take me in. My uncles, Johan and Adolph, are far off and unaware of my predicament, and as for Grandma and Aunt Julia...

I found shelter in the generosity of Mr. Peavey and his wife. He hailed me as I passed his house.

“Come here, lad. You look like you could use a place to rest.”

“I don’t want to be a burden. I’ll be fine.”

“Nonsense, my boy. We could use the diversion.”

“If you are sure.”

“Come, meet Mrs. Peavey.”

He owns the dry goods shop in New Ulm. It was closed because of the excitement. They let me sit on their porch and served me the first real meal I’ve had in two days. I almost relaxed. As the day expired I was able to lay down and sleep contentedly for several hours. I could feel strength return and reinvigorate my being. When I awoke in the evening, I imagined that this terror would soon end and I would return to the farm and take over as the man of the family. In my mind I platted out which fields needed attention first, which crops would have to be harvested soon, how to get the wheat to the grist mill for grinding, how much to ask when selling the crop, and more. For a moment, the current crisis drifted away and I was strolling through the golden fields on a pleasant afternoon. All will work out; I will survive.

The dawn brought a fantastic color show to the eastern sky. Before, I hadn’t really noticed how wonderfully the early streaks of oranges and reds lifted the gentle pastel pinkish blues to the horizon. The tint filled the blank slate of the graying night sky. I felt confident that my life would find a semblance of normality before harvest’s conclusion. This color show was a harbinger of peace and serenity. I don’t know if anyone else noticed this; God may have painted this wonderful picture for my sole benefit. A sense of calm refreshed my soul.

I ate a healthy breakfast and prepared to face the day and think about the future. When the sun was halfway to high noon, about 9:30 or so, war broke out. Indians surrounded New Ulm and were shooting at us from every hill and tree! Some thought it was Little Crow’s group, others guessed it was Mankato’s band. Regardless, they were shooting at us.

Col. Flandrau called out “To the barricades, men. The heathen is upon us!”

Along with the Peaveys, I rushed to the barricades. The Peavey house was on the edge of the small town, beyond the protection of the defensive wall. We ran without taking time to gather valuables, only our persons.

The battle raged for hours. Several soldiers were hit and a few were killed. The doctors who accompanied the military kept busy in the two temporary hospitals set up in houses. Those not involved in the actual shooting tried to keep safe inside buildings, but the Indian bullets sometimes found the way through the wall and hit someone.

There was general confusion through the day. There would be sporadic lulls in the shooting, followed by a smattering of individual shots, another lull, then a horrendous shrieking charge by the Indians. The militia and citizens who had weapons beat back every charge—at a cost. The casualty

list mounted through the day; the doctors and volunteer nurses lost count of the wounded and dead and frantically worked to save those who could be saved. Desperate civilians who were now fighting for their homes and family would replace the fallen men. The August day was hot; the battle and killing intensified the sulphurous stench of the steamy, breezeless choking air. It gave us a vivid sense of the eternal condemnation that awaits all unbelievers, a fate no one desired. Fatalism settled among some of the group, a sense that if the world is to end in this manner, so be it. The horror of witnessing so much pain and carnage and death overwhelmed the sensitive souls of some women, and steeled the courage of others.

Defenders firing from the barricades found their shooting lanes limited by the houses and stores beyond their perimeter. Some Indians occupied the vacant buildings. Col. Flandrau gave the order to burn the buildings to create an open space and deny cover to the Indians. Hundreds of fine houses and shops fell to the fiery flames of war. One of the houses was Mr. Peavey's--the place I found succor the day before; it was engulfed in a yellow-red inferno of flaming timbers and forfeited memories. I caught a glance of Mr. Peavey as he witnessed his home of ten years, a monument to tiresome toil and bold investment, vanish in the course of an hour. He was standing at one of the barricades, holding a musket retrieved from a fallen militiaman, unflinching. (Later, he related that although the loss of his home brought him sorrow, he supported Col. Flandrau's decision. "Better to sacrifice a finger than lose a hand" was how he rationalized the decision. Mrs. Peavey was less understanding.)

By nightfall, as the burning buildings were falling into themselves in eruptions of embers, the shooting slowed. The Indians killed many of our proud defenders—including Mr. Goebels--but had not won the day. We stood in possession of the town, we had food and water, and we were determined to defeat them the next day. Several men volunteered to stand as sentries for the night, the rest retired to receive some well-earned meals and rest.

Col. Flandrau convened a meeting with his commanders to plan the action for the next day. I wasn't invited to participate, but came to understand that we had enough ammunition to last one day more. Tomorrow they would either have to drive the Indians off or try and get word to Genl. Sibley, wherever he was. A lanky farm boy, Royall, volunteered to be the runner and get the message to Mankato in the morning. Then it was time for rest; tomorrow would be decisive.

The morning was deceptively calm and beautiful. Danger still thrived in the bluffs and hills around the town. Men warily gathered for a cold breakfast and straggled to the barricades. They

were tired, but determined and ready to repel the enemy, and take the battle to them when the opportunity allowed. A nervous tenseness held everyone in its grasp; what will the day bring?

A shot from the bluff answered the question. Indians were still there. The militia waited for more firing so they could ascertain the location of the enemy. Over the course of half an hour a few more shots rang out, but they were from different locations and didn't seem to be aimed very well—they were high and hit a few buildings on the second floor. A quivering quiet settled on the defenders. We waited, and waited. An hour passed since the last shot from the Indians. We waited some more. It seemed that their will to fight had vanished, and maybe they, too, vanished. A young volunteer slid out of the barricades and stealthily worked his way into the trees at the base of the bluff. His mission was to see if any of the enemies remained. He was gone more than an hour. He returned to report that he saw signs of where they were yesterday, but it appeared they had left.

Col. Flandrau called for a town meeting. He was of the opinion that the Indians left to get reinforcements. He suggested that everyone evacuate down the river to Mankato, a larger town with more soldiers available. Seeing the destruction already accomplished in New Ulm, and the possibility of more to come, the town people and refugees agreed to leave. Cautious prudence compelled Col. Flandrau to plan for the caravan to leave early the next morning. It would take time to load the wagons and gather the animals. There could be an Indian ambush set up along the way.

There was no further shooting from the bluffs or hills around the town. The rest of the day was spent in preparation for the evacuation to Mankato, about 30 miles to the east.

I thought it odd that we would seek safety in a village named for our great nemesis, Chief Mankato. I didn't say anything, but I wondered if anyone else had the same uneasy sense about this.

It was hard to concentrate on gathering and stowing goods into wagons. I didn't have anything so I helped others where I could. Everyone was quiet, nervous, and twitchy. The sound of someone breaking a twig or a branch was sufficient to cause panic. The horses sensed our anxiety and resisted the saddle or yoke. They were unsettled by the gunfire of the day before and hadn't found a reason to relax. Men and women silently packed their worldly goods into wagons, full well knowing that there may not be a house to return to once they leave. Some already had been burned out. Mrs. Peavey sat quietly most of the day while I helped Mr. Peavey load their wagon. She was a tiny, petite woman who was better suited to state capital society than this frontier mayhem. She had no color to her skin; it was as if all life had drained from her, all hope gone. Others were sad and frightened at the same time, but possessed a sense of determined anger that drove them to believe

that this injustice will be rectified, and that the devil Indians will be dealt with harshly by the Heavenly Judge.

The next morning a group of six militia soldiers headed out. They were to be the vanguard of the train. There were about two hundred armed mounted militia and civilians to escort the hundred and forty wagons. Close to two thousand soldiers, drovers, farmers, merchants, wives, mothers, children, smiths, and stragglers began the trek to the east. I walked alongside the Peavey wagon. Once, while taking a short rest, Mr. Peavey let me drive the wagon—the training the Uncle Wil gave me was useful. We tried to keep quiet, but the neighing of the horses, the squeaking of the wagon wheels, and clanging of pots and pans telegraphed our movement for miles. The soldiers kept an edgy eye on the wooded hills, searching for any movement, motion or sign of danger. A fluttering bird would bring men to attention. It would take them a few minutes to catch their breath and prepare to move on. The entire trip was a series of panics and relief as the train steadily plodded on. Col. Flandrau occasionally rode down the train to check on things and to reassure folks. No Indians have been seen and we should be in Mankato by nightfall. The reassurance was welcome, but the anxiety and fear remained.

Crossing open fields were the most fearful parts of the trip...the road was smoother, but we were exposed. An enemy hundreds of yards away could see us and call for help before the whole caravan had past. The soldiers were constantly alert and in an itchy sweat from the stress. Horses would step gingerly as if aware that any miss step could be calamitous. Afternoon in the hot, muggy air seemed to last an eternity. We were getting closer to Mankato, but what would we find? What if Mankato had been attacked like New Ulm? Onward we marched; there was no going back.

I had never been to Mankato before. I had never been to New Ulm before, either. The numbing cadence of the march led my mind to wander. The last three days were an awful whirl of confusion, fear, sorrow, grief, anger, sadness, terror, all coming together at once. Bewilderment and the overwhelming sensation of a heavy load pushed down on my shoulders, crushing, constricting, choking. My eyes would well up with tears that would not flow, my nose fill with gravel and grit that would not leave, my became throat a raw, ragged soreness that would not allow water to assuage. My feet hurt, my back ached, and my stomach burned. The brightness of the cloudless sky forced my eyes shut, the stillness of the dusty air made it hard to breathe, pale scales of despondency clogged my throat. I would walk, one heavy step forward, unthinking, uncaring, one heavy step at a time. I would think. I thought about the poor cows I left in Grandpa's pasture that would be in agony

because I wasn't there to milk them. I thought about Grandma—today should be bath day and I should be there to tote the bath water for her and the men, but there aren't any men to bathe, and I'm not there. I thought about Becky Jorgenson. Her father's farm was closer to the Indian villages than Grandpa's. Had they been raided? Is she frightened—like me? I thought about friends on other farms: what has become of them? What about those Indian boys I was playing with? Were they in the mob that killed Uncle Wil and Grandpa? Can I ever trust them again?

With Col. Flandrau as our Moses, our motley mob made haste. We tarried only to let the animals rest and eat. We were too driven to stop for lunch...some folks nibbled on jerky or bread as the wagons creaked down the rough road. It was more important that we reach Mankato today than it was that we eat a leisurely, comfortable meal at mid-day. The women were quiet on this tense day, only the very young infants found cause to speak or make noise—they were too young to understand the seriousness of the situation.

When we crested the final hill and saw the steeples of Mankato I felt a sense of relief, like being rescued from a giant's suffocating bear hug. I could breathe easier. The burning sun tempered its flame and a cooling sensation like falling into a spring overtook my anxiety. Mankato was standing, proud. I imagined it like Camelot with King Arthur and his Knights sitting at the Round Table. Strong men were there to protect us. It seemed secure and strong. Our caravan continued silently. A visible aura of relief hovered above the wagons. The militia and soldiers sat back in their saddles, weary, but thankful that this episode was over. Tomorrow they will be at war again, but this evening they can relax.

The residents of Mankato were expecting us. The farm boy, Royall, whom had volunteered to run to Mankato for help, made it successfully. He was waiting on the main street as we passed through. There was grazing land available on a nearby farm. A farmer had generously forfeited his new growth hay fields to us, forlorn evacuees. Other Makatoans opened their houses and shops to help us. The spirit of community pervaded the souls of the common people. They eagerly shared what they had with those of us who had lost much.

Mr. Peavey introduced me to a friend of his, Mr. Jonson. Mr. Jonson was one of the blacksmiths in Mankato. A huge man, his face looked like it was permanently colored with lampblack. His leather apron showed scars from burning iron. His grip was strong.

"Come in, lad. Mr. Peavey speaks highly of you."

"Thank you, Mr. Jonson. I think highly of Mr. Peavey, as well."

“Well, then. I think we will get along together just fine. Come in.”

He had a busy shop and could use an avid, willing worker like me. I did chores to help, such as keeping the coal bin full, the quenching vat sated, and brought in iron rods to keep the supply at easy hand for Mr. Jonson. Between the coal dust and the iron rust, I found myself dirtier than an Indian all the time.

I was allowed to stay in the shed attached to the shop. It had one room, made of planking and raw timbers. There was more room than I was used to in the soddy, and I was content. Mr. Jonson found a cot for me to sleep on, a small table to hold a lamp, and a chair. I had access to the well for drinking water and for washing.

Mr. Peavey had several friends and business associates in Mankato who were generous and helpful. I received some clothes; two shirts, two pair of stockings, one pair of pants and a hat to replace the one I lost running through the trees three days past. I was regularly fed. Someone offered to contact Ft. Snelling and see if a clerk there could contact my Uncle Johan. (The army of General Sibley based at Ft. Snelling were in pursuit of the devil Indians.) I was beginning to feel safe and comforted for the first time in several days.

In early September we heard of a set back when some soldiers from the fort were caught off guard and trapped at a place called Birch Coulee. Several died. This was distressing because we assumed that the army of Genl. Sibley would be able to run the Indians off pretty quick. There were upwards of 1500 troops, some veterans from the war down south. We were confident that the army would prevail. It may be safe in Mankato, but it isn't safe back where Grandpa's farm sits.

It is time to harvest oats, sorghum and wheat and the evacuee farmers were desperate to get into their fields and salvage what they could. Daily they talked among themselves trying to decide whether to chance returning to their farms now, before the Indian scourge was driven off, or stay until the threat evaporated.

I listened and wondered about my fate. Would it be better to stay with Mr. Jonson in Mankato, go back to New Ulm and find work and a home, or return to Grandpa's place and farm it myself? What if Grandma and Aunt Julia were already there and waiting for me?

This discussion went on for several weeks. We heard occasional reports of fighting against the Indians. It seems the battles are taking place farther and farther up river, so I guess that means the enemy is being driven back. One day it was reported that a pitched battle took place at Wood Lake and the Indians were badly beaten. The great Chief Mankato was killed there. No one in the town of

Mankato wept at his demise. It seems that our army and militia are winning the war.

Upon hearing the news of the death of Chief Mankato and the victory at Wood Lake, many of the evacuee farmers decided it was time to return to their farms. It was the middle of September and they couldn't wait any longer to harvest crops. I had to make a decision. My dilemma remained: stay in Mankato, move to New Ulm, or return to the farm.

For as long as I could remember I lived on the farm. The endless blue sky framed by majestic forests provided the canopy of the land where I belonged. I knew I would become stagnated and frustrated if I tried to live in a village. I was meant to be outdoors—my ancestors lived and died on farms and seas for many generations. We were not meant to work indoors. I decided to return to the farm—at least for harvest.

The evacuees decided that they would combine and cooperate in the harvest of their farms so that all would reap something this season. I would help them: they would help me. Together the community would survive, endure the winter, and begin anew next Spring.

I gathered my belongings (I now had some clothes and accessories), and threw them in Mr. Peavey's wagon. Mrs. Peavey crawled on board and Mr. Peavey climbed up to the driver's seat. He gave the reins a snap and the horses began the return trip to New Ulm. The mood was much lighter, but still somber enough to discourage celebration. We were relieved to be able to return and recover something of what was lost, but aware that there would be a delay in attaining complete restoration of our prior life.

Some things will never recover. Friends and relatives have died. Buildings burned. Trust has been shattered. Some children have seen and endured sights and agonies that they will never forget nor forgive. I, myself, will never forget the last time I saw Grandpa or Uncle Wil. Some men, men like Mr. Goebels, acquitted themselves well in the terror. Others proved to be timid, frightened souls who quivered while others fought. The community will reconstitute and rebuild itself. In the near future memory will soften the pain we suffer and allow us to proceed and progress. The land endures; men are temporary transients passing through.

The trip to New Ulm was far different than the scramble to Mankato. The draft animals sensed the reduced stress; we weren't in crisis. The pace was determined. The horses, mules and oxen trod steadily and continually westward. It seemed they knew they were returning to their home, the familiar pastures and fields of the spring plantings. The men and their families followed in step, joyful and fearful, anxious to get back to work on the homestead and afraid the terror might

return. Onward to home.

Seeing New Ulm again brought back the searing images of death and flame and panic from the events not yet past one month. At the near edge of the village stood the remains of the burned, blackened buildings that were martyred. The sacrifice of those homes enabled the rest of the town to survive.

Mr. Peavey pulled up to the site of his former house. Mrs. Peavey sat still, tears welling, and stared at her yard and garden gone to weed and rot. Mr. Peavey did his best to console her, promising to build a better house with a larger garden. He looked at me.

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay here and make a life? It is safer and less riskier than farming, especially at your age.”

I hesitated a moment, but declined. My future, my life, is in following the footsteps of my Grandpa Anders.

“I understand, young Erik. I would make the same choice myself, were I you.”

I spent the night under Mr. Peavey’s wagon, under the stars. The next morning some of the evacuees were heading out to their homes. I could travel with them to Grandpa’s farm.

I spent the night thinking about the past month, how the world had become upset and fragmented, how my life will never be the same, how I am on my own again. I thought of Grandma and Aunt Julia—were they alive, were they captured and still with some Indians, had they been abused while in captivity, or were they in hiding until the raiding party left and now they’re back on the farm worried about me?

I discovered that I’ve been thinking a lot these past weeks. Big thoughts, not the kind I used to have such as what cloth should I ask Aunt Julia use for a new shirt, but deep thoughts about life, mortality, destiny. I wish Uncle Wil was here to help me sort through my feelings. His death is part of these thoughts. Perhaps I’ve outgrown the childish impulses and pranks and games of July and entered a new phase of maturation. I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to play a game of horseshoes without thinking of Uncle Wil. Games I played on Independence Day now seem juvenile. I’m growing up.

I doubt I’ll ever play with my Indian friends again. What their tribe did is unforgivable, no matter what the reason. The slaying of Grandpa and Uncle Wil is something I’ll never forget nor ever forgive as long as I live.

The Peavey’s gathered a large sack of foodstuffs for me. I will have enough to eat for a month,

if I'm judicious in portions and insects and vermin leave it alone. With my bag of clothes and food I set off for home in the company of Mr. Bleufeld and his family. Mrs. Goebels and her son rode along with us as well. Mr. Bleufeld, a handsome and deeply religious man, farmed six or seven miles up the river from Grandpa's claim. He knew of him and Uncle Wil from church services. Mr. Bleufeld offered me accommodations on his farm if I wanted—in case working Grandpa's place was too much for me. I thanked him for his offer and promised to keep in touch when things settled down. Mrs. Bleufeld promised to look in on me if I was alone to make sure I was well

The trip could be done in two bustling days, but Mr. Bleufeld kept a slower pace. He wanted his horses to be fresh and ready to go to the harvest fields on the first day back. He didn't want to tire them by over-stressing on the trail. We passed several farms where men were back in the fields harvesting oats and sorghum. It was a more pleasant image than we encountered on our rush to Mankato as evacuees. We could hear birds singing to each other, and the fragrant aroma of newly cut straw lifted our spirits. Matters are beginning to return to normal.

We camped a few miles short of Grandpa's farm that night. The men kept a cold camp again. Although the word was that the Indians had been driven out of Minnesota by Genl. Sibley's army, we thought it prudent to be cautious. The few children on the train of wagons sensed our concern and kept as still as their nervous anxiety would allow. The horses, mules and oxen were staked in the woods, and gently grazed quietly. I think they knew they were going home and looked forward to working and living in familiar surroundings. The animals were placid, calm and content, enjoying the evening grasses while the night-dew descended in a refreshing mist of cool breeze.

The next morning I awoke early. I was too excited to relax or be calm my nerves. The train should pass by Grandpa's farm by mid-day. In my mind I planned the entire afternoon: first I will check the house to see if Grandma and Aunt Julia were there, then I will fill the cupboards with the bounty Mr. Peavey sent with me. After settling in, I will check the animals. Hopefully they survived on their own this past month. I felt a pang of guilt when I considered the milk cows. How did they manage through this crisis? I'll soon find out.

Before nightfall I will make a pilgrimage through the far cornfield to the stand of trees where the terror began. I pray that some one passing by took the time to bury Grandpa and Uncle Wil. If not, I will have a shovel with me and make sure their remains are properly interred.

Tonight I will sleep in the soddy.

Mr. Bleufeld marshaled our little group early in the morning. He, too, was anxious to get back

to his home. The evacuees busied themselves in preparations for the final push home. Ignoring caution, men were heard whistling as they hitched up their animals, wives haphazardly stacked their kitchens into the wagon with a wanton clanging and banging of pots hitting kettles, and children felt secure enough to laugh once again. We could almost breathe the fragrant perfume of our own homes—the giddiness was palpable: our hearts beat faster, our legs felt stronger, we could imagine ourselves laying once again on our own down mattresses and resting our weary heads on pillows we personally stuffed with the feathers of wild geese. We were so close to home and the return of normality that we imagined ourselves in the fields and pastures and everything was as it should be. The terror was almost forgotten. We were preparing for a grand homecoming and celebrate our deliverance from evil. The Lord really is my Shepherd.

In our festive mood no one took notice of the sky. The welcome sun peered over the eastern horizon with promise of warmth and comfort. However, the southwest horizon filled with bundles of black clouds, filling the heavens with colliding dreadnoughts of pillowy thunder and flashing lightning. Hints of green and bluish-orange grew from the grinding edges of the clouds; an eerily calming vision that we knew was a false image of quiet serenity. No one noticed the wind shift that would soon pull the storm over us.

Rain and thunderstorms are a welcome and expected blessing on the prairie. Without water the land would be a desert. This growing season had been one ample and refreshing rain showers. If not for the terror, the summer would be one of bounty and a great harvest. Tornadic windstorms were different, viscous demons of destruction, debauchery, and death.

This time, the sky foretold a story of bluster and frightful nightmares. The animals were the first to notice and give us warning, they became nervous and jumpy. Horses balked and strained at their harness, anxious to run away from the impending storm.

The women noticed the gloomy sky first. Those who had lived on the prairie for more than a few years knew the impact such a sky can deliver. The women called to their children to come back to the wagons. We weren't going to start moving until the storm has past. The women gathered their flock and wrapped them in blankets or clothing, praying that this will be enough to save them from harm. Some families hunkered down in the bed of a wagon, others preferred to cuddle together underneath the wagons. Men unhitched animals as quickly as they could and released them. The animals knew how to take care of themselves in such inclement conditions; we only hoped they would not scatter too far distant.

A low rumble rolled along the prairie ground. In the distance flashes of lightning relit the darkened sky, a warning to all. Gusts of wind tore through the trees, shredding leaves from branches and bending solid trunks into arches that ran from the rooted trunks of the trees and to the ends of top branches that touched the earth. Tiny whorls of dust spun into miniature funnels and spit out stinging pebble-bullets that pelted us. Twigs and tiny branches were lifted from the ground and shot like arrows randomly. Anyone who had not secured shelter was a target, and the bellows of the wind god made sure that there was an unlimited supply of the wooden missiles. Immediately there was a cannonade of thunder that shook the ground and made the trees tremble and bow down. A bolt of lightning found a tempting target in a helpless maple and blew the top fifteen feet of the tree into a multitude of flying barbs. Thor was angry this morning. He pounded his anvil mercilessly with the hammer of thunder and lightning. Thunderbolts of rage rained down upon us. Children cried as wagons rocked in the rocketing wind. Mothers held them closely and the men swore at the heavens and prayed for an end to this frightful storm.

One wagon was turned on its side by a cyclonic burst of wind. Some brave men ran over to right it, but I stayed where I was. I was frightened and knew that there was little I could do to help. It was too windy for an attempt to right the wagon and the men seemed preoccupied with something or someone on the far side of the wagon. The wind was howling so loud that I could not hear what the men were saying, but a couple had a very concerned look on their face. A close volley of thunder scattered the men. It jolted me and I lost interest in the wagon. Gripping fear and panic suffocated my curiosity.

First a few drops of rain fell. It quickly grew into a downpour, then a torrent, and finally a deluge. Goods that were left exposed on the campsite ground were flung about. I lay helplessly under a wagon and watched a campstool as it was lifted by the wind driven rain and smashed into a tree, breaking into unrepairable pieces. Small pebbles of ice soon began to assault our camp. We were attacked by increasingly larger calibers of ice, some as large as walnuts. When hit by one, the stinging blow felt like buckshot. The hailstones sped through the rain like artillery ordinance and, when one hit you, a welt would soon rise up like a ghost rising from a grave. Many canvas covers of wagons not damaged by the wind soon fell victim to this latest attack of nature's fury.

This torment lasted until mid-morning. Slowly, the fury subsided into a waning downpour, and was followed by steady rain before ebbing to general, then gentle, showers. It was after high noon before the storm calmed down enough for our small group to venture out from shelter.

A group of men gathered around the overturned wagon. Looks of concern covered their faces. Six of them went to the covered side and bent down. They must have gotten hold of the supports and lifted, for the wagon appeared to stand up. With a heavy grunt in unison, the men pushed the wagon upright. It bounced when the wheels slammed onto the muddy earth.

Just then an animalistic scream emanated from beyond the wagon. It was Mrs. Goebels. This was her wagon, and her only son, nine-year old Gerhard, had been trapped under the wagon during the storm. The boy's back was broken when the wagon overturned on top of him. Gerhard, last carrier of the Goebels surname, was dead. Mrs. Goebels ran to the lifeless body and picked it up, squeezed it hard in a mother's bear hug, and looked to the men as if to seek a reason. Mrs. Goebels was a stocky, German lady of about forty-five. She was physically strong, but now seemed as small and weak as a newborn rabbit. Her flush complexion had evaporated to a pale, yellowish-white hue with tracks of tears making stripes through the dirt and dust on her face. She stood stoically for a minute, holding her son close, then collapsed.

By this time the entire camp had come to see what help could be offered. The women were sympathetically aghast at the scene. I stood as far away as I could and still be able to see and hear what was happening. This morning had opened with such optimism that everyone knew would end with celebration. Now...

Some boys my age and myself were sent into the near woods to search for the animals. The oxen and mules hadn't gone far and were contentedly feasting on the wet grass. While the other boys went in search of the horses I drove the oxen and mules back to the camp. I watched, and helped where I could, the men separate out their own animals and begin to re-hitch them to the wagons. Fifteen or twenty minutes elapsed before the rest of the boys could be heard leading the horses.

It was close to mid-afternoon. It had been a harrowing day. Mr. Bleufeld watched the activity as the men half-heartedly worked their animals into harnesses. The men were sullen and worked listlessly. The urge to get underway was evident, but there was a sense that many were overwrought and needed to rest and regain their composure. Mr. Bleufeld called some of the men together to get a sense of their feelings. After a brief convocation it was agreed to wait another night. Mrs. Goebels needed consolation and nursing. Her grief was about to derange her.

Albert Halvers, a gangly young man in his early twenties, was assigned to drive the Goebels wagon. His sister, Catherine, would accompany Mrs. Goebels on the trip. I would sit alongside Albert

to help if needed, or just to keep him company, until we reached Grandpa's property. The rest of the day was spent in repairing wagons, patching canvases, drying soaked clothes and foodstuffs, and other minor diversions. The women kept busy all afternoon. Men mostly sat and talked. This terrible storm didn't alter their hopes and plans. This was a minor delay. Tomorrow we will be on our home farms and ready to begin harvest.

The next morning arrived. Tentative eyes scanned the horizon for any sign of a storm. The sky was clear, the moon still visible in the low quadrant. The sun's glow was inching above the eastern horizon and promised a perfect day. The heat of the past few days was broken by the storm and a brisk, bracing calm greeted our little company. The wagons were reloaded, the camping area policed to make certain nothing was forgotten, and we were, finally, off on the last day of our evacuation from our homes.

Although the road was muddy and filled with little lakes from the intense storm, we made good time. The animals strained to pull the wagons through the mucky mire. They found strength from the urgency of the wagon drivers, and their own feeling that they were closing on familiar ground and will soon find rest in comfortable pastures. Onward we proceeded.

By midmorning I was able to recognize some of the hills and forests. I would soon be home. Many of the farms we passed were still motionless, but at some I could see farmers in the field. It was reassuring that some folks already returned to their land, and took up life as it used to be. We forded a small stream that I know to be less than an hour from the turn-off from the road to Grandpa's place.

As I neared the farm the memories of the past month began to replay in my mind. The visage of Uncle Wil and Grandpa laying still under the tree, the broken table in Grandma's house, the flight to New Ulm and Mr. Peavey's house in flames, all these memories, and more, gnawed at my psyche and happiness. I was excited to be so close to home, but this feeling was tempered by the sure knowledge that my life had taken a turn and that the future I once had has been altered. I don't know what, exactly, will become of my life, but I do know that it will be different now that Grandpa and Uncle Wil are not here to teach and guide me.

Shortly before high noon I saw the marker. The marker was a cairn of stones that Grandpa built so that strangers or travelers would know that this was his land. It served as a warning to outsiders that this farm was taken and to keep moving, and as a welcome to friends and relatives where Grandma was happy to have visitors at any time. Grandpa once told Grandma that the marker had magic powers that would keep the farm, and everyone living there, safe forever. Grandpa was

proud of his marker. My heart leapt at the greeting by which the marker beckoned me. I was home.

Albert slowed the wagon and brought it to a gentle stop at the marker. I scrambled into the wagon to retrieve my clothing and food and exited through the back of the wagon bed. I had to crawl over Catherine who was holding Mrs. Goebels and trying to bring comfort to one who had lost everything.

Once I touched down on the ground I felt a shiver run up my back. After a month of terror and running, I was back where I started.

I looked up at Albert and said, "I appreciate your help in returning me to my home. May God keep you safe on your return home."

Albert nodded stoically and started the team. The wagon rolled down the road, followed by other wagons in the train. Mr. Bleufeld hailed me and wished me good fortune, as did others. Some of these men and women were with Mr. Goebels when I was rescued after my first night alone; others helped me in New Ulm and the trip to Mankato. My debt to them is considerable.

Then they were gone. I was alone to face whatever was left of my family and my fate.

As I walked through the pasture I looked for evidence that any of our cattle or sheep remained. I saw nothing. I continued toward the homestead, hoping that Grandma and Aunt Julia were waiting with a big pot of stew and coffee. I kept walking and was relieved to find cattle droppings. A cow, someone's cow, is in the pasture. After a bit I saw movement in some shrubs near a small rill. I quietly headed in that direction. Although assured that the Indian menace was finished, I felt a prudent cautiousness was necessary. I slowed my pace and sneaked into a break in the shrubs where I could hide if needed. I heard the contented sounds of a cow lying down and chewing its cud. At least it seemed at peace and wasn't fearful. I crawled toward the bovine carefully, trying to be as silent as my heart would allow. When I was within ten or fifteen yards I could see it had the coloration and markings of one of our milk cows. She was alive! The fear that the cow had wandered off, been driven off by Indian, or had been killed, vanished. I considered this a good omen. Maybe I will be able to reconstruct a portion of my former situation.

Since it was too early in the day for milking, and I wasn't sure she had any milk, and I knew where to find her, I let her lay in her comfortable bed of matted grass and shrubs. I was anxious to see the homestead, the fences, the soddy. I slipped out of the shrubs and found the familiar path that led to the buildings. I soon was able to see the rooflines of Grandpa's barn. It was still standing. Nearing the buildings I was able to see that everything remained as I remembered. The fences were

in good shape except for the hog pens. No doubt the hogs became hungry and tore down their fence and have scattered to the woods. I'll look for them tomorrow. I saw chickens in the yard. It looks like they have taken to roosting in some trees, probably to avoid fox and raccoon. The Indians probably took the horses and cattle.

I walked into the homestead yard, constantly on alert for savages. I went to the soddy to see if anyone was around. The door was ajar. When I looked in I was met with the scene of my nightmare. The table and chairs were still broken, the cupboard bare and the oilpaper covering the windows shredded. It was exactly as it was the last time. That meant that Grandma and Aunt Julia were not in hiding during the Indian raid, but that they were captured. The weight of sorrow overwhelmed my joy of homecoming. Tomorrow I will look for them.

I put my food on the shelves and took the water jug to the well. The well still exuded its refreshing, thirst-quenching water. It was cool, bracing and glorious. I drank two jug-fulls. Near the well I saw cattle tracks. Our milk cow must still return for milking, even though no one was here to take care of her. There were also turkey tracks, deer tracks and dog tracks. If I could find someone to loan me a musket I might be able to shoot some game to begin stocking up for winter. Tomorrow.

I went to the other buildings. They all seem to be in fine condition. Grandpa knew how to build a structure that could withstand being abandoned for a month without falling down. There are some spider webs in windows, but that is evidence of life. I didn't see many signs of mice or rats in the empty grain bins. The hay barn was solid, no leaks from the recent storm. If I were a stranger I would say that the homestead had not changed one bit since Spring.

I went back to the soddy. I cleared a space on the floor and put some chair pieces together to make one functional chair. I ate some bread and dried pork and drank heartily of the cool well water. I was too busy, excited and exhausted to contemplate what my return really meant. I had chores to do, animals to retrieve, relatives to rescue. I had to return to the cornfield and the site of the beginning of the terror.

There were several hours of sun left in the day. I would have plenty of time to see the site of Grandpa's and Uncle Wil's last breath. I found the spade in the tool shed, packed a full jug of water and a sandwich.

Then it hit me: water and sandwiches...the last time I saw Grandma was when she gave me the sack of sandwiches and jug of water to deliver to the men. I felt like a large stone had fallen on me and crushed my body. I fell to my knees, my chest was squeezed so hard I could not breathe, my

heart started beating in a strange cadence, my head felt like it was cleaved by an axe, and my eyes fogged up: I could not see. Grandpa and Uncle Wil are gone, really gone. Gone forever. I will never see them again, never hear their voices, never hear their laughter, their teasing, their wisdom.

It seemed like forever before I settled down. I would have time to grieve when I had accomplished my tasks and saw to it that the farm was functioning again. I had to be brave, be strong, be a man. Grandma and Aunt Julia will return and depend on me to be the master of the farm.

I allowed myself a period of self-pity before I stood up. I had a job to do and I had to do it at once. I picked up the sack of food and the jug of water and the spade and set out for the cornfield. I reacquainted myself with familiar landmarks as I trod along. The empty pasture, the ford at the stream, the path through the woods, all these brought back memories of happier times. I wanted to focus on positive recollections. I had to accept reality and grow into my new role. When I cleared the forest I stopped. Ahead was the cornfield; in the distance was the hill with the copse of death. I stood and stared at the trees. They still towered into the skyline as before, promising a cooling shade on a sunny day and a soft, gentle grass mat to recline upon. From this distance, they offered a harmless, welcoming place to rest.

I boldly stepped out from the tree line and into the cornrows. I had to accomplish my work. I followed the row that I knew would guide me directly to the copse. It didn't take long to traverse the field.

When I emerged from the cornfield and was able to see the grounds of the copse I felt a sense of dread and shame. I should have done something for them that first day. But I didn't. Now I have come to right my mistake. Gazing upon the picnic spot where I last saw Grandpa and Uncle Wil I searched for any remnant of their existence. I was able to spot a couple of mounds that looked out of place. I closed in on the area and a great sense of relief and thankfulness enveloped my body. Some kind soul, in the midst of the terror and confusion, had come across the death scene and took the time to give the men a decent burial. This kind angel even took the time to stake a wooden cross on the graves to make sure any passerby would know this is hallowed ground. Their bodies were safe from mutilation and desecration, and their souls are at peace in heaven. Later in the fall, after harvest, I will see to it that proper words are spoken over them.

With that heavy weight lifted from my shoulders I made my way back to the homestead. I walked with a lighter step—finally something occurred that wasn't terrible. I veered off to the

pasture where I expected to find the milk cow and bring her home with me. The sun was beginning its final descent into the west when I found her. She was willing to walk with me as we both traveled to the homestead. As we were walking I wondered how she handled not being milked daily, what agony did she endure, has the ordeal crippled her? She didn't seem to act funny or anxious, she stepped like it was an ordinary day in May and this was an everyday occurrence.

We got to the corral and I checked her over. Physically she seemed fit. When I checked her udder I found that she had dried up—she stopped producing milk. I didn't know enough about cows to know if this was a permanent condition or if she will regain production. When I get a chance I will visit a neighboring farmer and ask about this.

The sun put on a dazzling display of color and pattern as it set. Its collage of blended colors painted a picturesque landscape of beauty. Over the past month there had been many glorious dawns and sunsets, but these had been mostly ignored. This evening I chose to sit outside and enjoy the performance in peace and quiet. For several minutes I sat and wondered at the handiwork of nature and thought of nothing else. A warm feeling, the first since before the terror, filled my senses and chased away all the concerns and tenseness I carried with me. I sat and allowed the sunset to entertain and amuse me.

As the dark blanket of night covered the land I grew weary. My day had been eventful and fulfilling. I was ready to retire, to sleep in the soddy, to recover my fate. I went in and lit a candle. The quivering light pulled shadows and memories from the walls. I looked around and realized that I was alone. Where Grandma should be sitting and sewing was nothing, the table where Grandpa and Uncle Wil talked and dreamed of the farm was gone, where Aunt Julia would sit and read or write was emptiness.

Without family a person is little better than a solitary figure, defenseless and abandoned and hopeless. I searched for reason and found that I had to make my own family--to continue the namesake, to start anew. I was alone, but I didn't have to be lonely. I determined I would create bonds with neighbors and people in the villages. There was always the chance that Grandma and Aunt Julia would walk through the door any day, that Uncle Johan would return, or that Uncle Adolph would come to my rescue. I had support from Mr. Bleufeld, Mr. Peavey, Mr. Jonson and others I had encountered on my journeys. I would survive and make Grandpa's farm into the showcase he dreamed of building.

It was dark and quiet in the tiny room of the soddy. I found some sheets and dry goods to lay

on the bed frame and lay down. I was asleep immediately and dreamt of the future, not the past. I slept well.

The sun's early rays, bright and intense, startled me. I woke up refreshed and reenergized. Today I would look for animals in the hope I might find some cattle still roving on the land. The hogs had a month to go feral so I held little hope to recover any of them. I ate a cold piece of dried meat and made some hot coffee. I would first head to the river bottom to see what sign of cattle there might be, then swing to the west. I was determined that if any livestock were on the farms, I would find them and bring them back.

It was cool in the late September morning and I walked at a steady rate. I would be walking a great distance this day and I needed to pace myself. I started north to the river valley. I passed over pastureland, oat fields, through strips of woody land, over small streams, always on the lookout for cattle tracks. Climbing a clear rise to an open glade I found a magnificent view of rolling hills, rolling rivers, and the military road. I took a moment to appreciate the gift.

My interest was piqued by some movement way off to the west; a group of mounted men were headed toward me. They were too far off to determine if they were Indians or whites so I squatted down a bit. As they neared I could see one of the lead horsemen holding a flag. Since only soldiers used flags I was elated. They were a group of twenty to thirty mounted men escorting several wagons. I watched them as they marched nearer to my position. I saw them turn off the road and head toward Grandpa's farm.

I quickly reversed course and headed back to the homestead. I had to protect Grandpa's farm from interlopers. Once the soldiers saw that I was living there, and knew where the papers of ownership were, they would leave me alone and move on to the next abandoned farm. My pace was brisker returning to the homestead. By taking short cuts I was able to get back to the soddy before the mounted troop and its baggage appeared. I tried to assume a pose of confidence when they finally reached the buildings. The leader, an officer of some rank, broke from the group and rode ahead to meet me.

"Son, is this the Henriksen place?"

"Yes it is" I replied with as much energy as I could muster. "My name is Erik and I'm watching the house until my Grandpa comes back."

"You're grandfather is still alive? We had heard he was missing. When do you expect him back?"

Just then I heard a loud scream from one of the wagons. It was Aunt Julia's voice!

"Erik! Is that you?"

"Yes, yes. Aunt Julia? Are you well?"

"Yes, and your Grandma is with me. We're here. Have you seen Wil?"

The soldier leader turned back toward his troop. "Looks like this is the right place, men. Help the ladies unload."

While the soldiers unloaded the wagon Aunt Julia came running to me. Grandma was off the wagon and moved toward me, although much slower. Aunt Julia looked like she had aged fifteen years since I last saw her a month ago. I wanted to know what happened to her and Grandma, but was afraid to ask. If she wanted to tell me, I would listen; otherwise I would keep my curiosity to myself.

Grandma walked stiffly, a slow gait of tiny, shuffling steps. She would take ten steps to move a few feet. Her expression was vacant. She, too, had aged an inordinate amount of time. Before she looked aged, now she is ancient. As she came closer she looked at me quizzically. A subtle blush came to her face as she seemed to recognize me. A hint of a smile appeared. Some of her wrinkles filled in as happiness returned to her. "Where is Anders? Is he in the fields?"

When the soldiers had finished unpacking the wagon they turned to leave. I secretly hoped they would leave a horse, but they didn't.

It was left to me to tell Grandma and Aunt Julia about Grandpa and Uncle Wil. I waited until they had a chance to settle down. I first made them tell of their own experience, what happened, where did they go, why did the army bring them back?

Aunt Julia told the tale. On the day I found Grandpa and Uncle Wil near the cornfield, Indians came to the soddy and broke in. Aunt Julia and Grandma were terrified, unable to fight back. The Indians dragged them to the yard and made them stand while they ransacked the house. The Indians took all the food they could find, Uncle Wil's musket, and some chickens. Aunt Julia and Grandma were thrown on the back of some horses and lead off to the Indian camp.

Aunt Julia talked of life in the Indian camp. She said they weren't abused or assaulted, the chiefs made sure of that, but she never wants to think about that time again. The camp moved from time to time, presumably as the war went back and forth. She didn't recall seeing any villages, only fields and forests. Eventually, the camp moved up river. Then one day a few soldiers rode into camp. The Indians didn't try to shoot them, so the army was nearby and ready to make peace. Aunt Julia

didn't know who had won the war at this time, but was heartened by the sight of white men. The soldiers talked with some chiefs for a long time and then left. The next day the Indians took all the captives to the army camp. It took a few days for the army people to make a plan to take the freed captives to their homes. Aunt Julia and Grandma left the army camp three days ago along with dozens of others and were delivered today.

They wanted to know about my experiences. I wasn't sure how to tell them about Grandpa and Uncle Wil, but they needed to know. I told how I found them in the field, but not in what condition, and how they've been properly buried. Grandma was stoic upon hearing of her husband but Aunt Julia was distraught. Both sobbed, but Aunt Julia cried uncontrollably for several minutes. They had heard that hundreds of settlers had died in the terror, but couldn't bring themselves to think that their husbands were included.

After they regained some composure I told them a little about what happened to me: the kind people who took me in, the chaos of New Ulm, the sanctuary of Mankato, the storm. I tried to explain what I thought would become of the farm, that I would have to take over much of the labor and make sure the harvest was completed. I was unsure about restocking the animals—horses, cattle, sheep and hogs--because that would require cash. I didn't know if there was any left in the house; neither did Grandma or Aunt Julia—they always left that to the men.

We talked most of the afternoon. I completely forgot about looking for animals. This was more important. The army left a good quantity of food with the women, along with clothing recovered from the Indian camp. We would be fine for a few days. That would give me time to search the neighborhood for the animals and to see if I could get some help with the harvest, most likely by helping someone else. Grandma and Aunt Julia busied themselves by cleaning the soddy, repairing the table and chairs as well as they could, cooking and laundry. By keeping busy they didn't have as much time to dwell on their loss, but at night I could hear whimpering as they forced themselves to fall asleep.

For the next few days I wandered around neighboring farms. On some I found everyone safe and relatively unaffected, others were still abandoned. I sought help with my harvest, and made a few bargains to trade labor. As the harvest was already in progress on most farms I soon began to work. I tried to work as fast as I could so that I could free myself, and the farmer whose harvest I helped, as quickly as possible. I spent about ten days on Mr. Norrison's farm, then he and his son came to Grandpa's fields and help me put up the oats. I agreed to help with his corn harvest in a few

weeks, and he agreed to return the labor on our farm.

I was confident that I could harvest Grandpa's crops this fall and sell enough to get through the winter. Since I didn't have any animals to feed, the grain should be available to sell—or trade for livestock. I was making adult decisions. Grandma didn't understand the economics of farming, but Aunt Julia helped me work through some of the problems. We both agreed that, even if Aunt Julia tried to help in the field at planting time, the farm needed another grown man. Who that man might be, and why he would want to help, were decisions that could wait until winter to decide.

Sometime early in October a stranger rode on to the place. He had a fine horse and heavy blue cloak. He had a military bearing, broad shoulders, thick neck, and full beard. As he pulled to a stop Grandma took to staring at him with a deep, penetrating eye. He looked to favor his right arm as he dismounted.

He shocked me by shouting out in a gravelly, garbled yelp:

"Is that you, young Erik?"

Uncle Johan is home from the war. He saw Grandma come to the door:

"Hello, mama. I am so happy to see you."

Aunt Julia peeked through a window:

"And you, sister. Are you well?"

Grandma moved quicker than I had seen her move in years. She sidled up to Uncle Johan, grabbed him tightly, and began to cry. Aunt Julia was in tears as she ran from the soddy to join in. As a group they inched themselves to a bench and sat down.

Uncle Johan was involved in fighting out East. He survived his first battles, including the one where Mr. Boreman lost his arm. In his last battle at a place called Bull Run, he was defending his position when his musket misfired. Instead of shooting a bullet down the barrel, the explosion of gunpowder backfired into his face and hand. His jaw was broken, the tip of his thumb was blown off and his forefinger was broken and healed at an awkward angle, all of which rendered him unfit for the military. He was in a military hospital for several weeks as his jaw healed, then released to return to Minnesota. But he is alive! And home!

While recuperating he had heard of the terror we had and wanted to hurry back to help. I don't think he was too disappointed to find the fighting finished by the time he arrived. When I told him of Grandpa and Uncle Wil he went silent. He had seen many men, some were friends, die in war. He had taken lives himself, but he couldn't grasp how innocent farmers could die at the hand of

violence. He was proud of the maturity and judgement I showed during the terror and the bravery of Aunt Julia and Grandma during their time of turmoil.

Most of all, Uncle Johan was here, on land he held a claim, and ready to resume the life of farming. He is home in time for corn harvest. We'll be able to rebuild the herds, break more ground, and make Grandpa's dream come true.

Days later, in one of her lucid moments, Grandma turned to me:

"I almost forgot. How did your birthday find you?"

On the day of my thirteenth birthday Mr. Goebels died and part of New Ulm burned. I didn't feel like celebrating at the time.

I'm grown up now.