

Biography and Family Memories

by Vernon Sommerer

I have been asked by my younger siblings to put in writing some of the things that happened to me or to the family when I was young. I'll start off with a few of my very earliest memories (the events that forever remain in the mind of a child).

One day Mom sent me out with a deposit in the pot that Beatrice had just made and told me to give it to Daddy for his lunch. He and another man were out in the well house working on the well. Another earliest memory was a project of getting hair and mop thread out of the rollers on the baby bed we all used. The custom was to go outside for a pee before going to bed. There was large sandstone outcropping near the toilet, and I always wanted to beat on it with a hammer to make sparks.

At our sale, Pearl Ehrhardt collected bottle caps from where they were selling soda pot and removed the inside cork and attached them to her skirt completely around it and when she would twirl around, the skirt would flair out. It's interesting the events of youth that stick in your mind. The auctioneer at the sale was named Dawson. I didn't remember much about the sale, but in 1944 or 1945 we took some cows up to Norfleet's barn and had a sale. When Dawson started the sale, he said that it was the second sale that he had for Mr. Sommerer. Nearly everything we had was sold at the sale, so we didn't have much to move to the 2nd Ivan place. The Ivan place was large. It had two houses on it. The one we moved into is the one Bud purchased in 1949. Ehrhardt's owned both farms. They lived in the house (brick) on the lower farm. Grandpa Sommerer helped Uncle Herbert Sommerer purchase the Ivan farm. When the depression hit, he was about to lose it, so Aunt Dora and Uncle Theodore moved from their Honey Creek farm down to the Ivan place to try to help Uncle Herbert Sommerer save the farm. In the process, they lost both Ivan places and the Honey Creek farm also. Aunt Tillie and Uncle Hans Eckert purchased the Honey Creek farm and later sold it back to them when they could afford to buy it back.

I suppose it was while we lived on the Ivan place that I remember being with Mom at Aunt Nora's (I think she lived with her folks and took care of them). Grandma or Grandpa Ehrhardt was dying and Aunt Bianka, Tillie, Nora and Mom and I were there. They passed away within 18 months of each other. I remember going to the funeral. We didn't have a car, so Daddy rented one. I remember Mom changing Beatrice's diapers in the car on the way home. I remember family gatherings at Heymeyer's when the snowball bush was in full bloom. We would have snowball fights. I suppose that group would have been made up of Sommerers, Ehrhardts and Heymeyers.

The first seven children were born at the first place where Daddy was born and raised. He purchased it from his dad and then lost it when the depression hit. Uncle Bill Meyer and Aunt Yetta took it over when Daddy lost it. Mom's first child was born in August of 1917 and her last child was born in May of 1943....that's 26-years of child bearing. The condition of the sale from Grandpa to Daddy was that he, grandpa, had a room in the house for as long as he lived. As the family grew, Daddy and Mom needed more room, so an additional room was added. While times

were good, Mom and Daddy also had electricity put into the place (gas driven generator). Grandpa Sommerer stayed in the house with the Meyer family, but later he came to live with us at Schubert. Later he moved to Aunt Margaret's house where he died.

Since uncle Herbert Sommerer was crippled, grandpa Sommerer gave him a college education and he had a good job after graduating, but he had farming in his blood, so grandpa Sommerer again helped him buy the Ivan place which he walked away from when the depression hit and got lost from the family until about some time in the early forties the Jefferson City Sommerer's got word that he was in a hospital in St. Louis. So he was bought to Aunt Dora's who took care of him except for a short time when he lived with us on the seventh place.

No children were born on the second place (Ivan) or the 3rd place (Aunt Dora and Uncle Theodore's Honey Creek farm). While at the second place, we had no team of horses to farm with, so Daddy worked for Uncle Theodore. When Mom's folks passed away, Uncle Henry and Aunt Nora purchased the farm so the folks had a little inheritance to spend, so they got a team of mules (Bert and Tuck) and I don't know what else except that Bud and Felix each got a coat which I wore both when they fit me and also Mahlon. I don't know if they lasted for Lloyd or not. We were able to do a little farming then after we got the team of mules. We didn't have a car. Uncle Henry Heymeyer took care of that problem for us. I started school while at the third place. I was four years old and we had to walk across the Honey Creek to get to Pleasant Valley School, so Daddy built a foot bridge across the Honey Creek so we could get to and from school when the Honey Creek was up. Both houses on the Ivan place had slave quarters. Where we lived, it was the concrete kitchen and on the lower house where Ehrhardt's lived there was a lean to on the lower side of the house that they used for a chicken house. Ehrhardt's had a battery powered radio and sometime at night we would walk down to their house to listen to the radio. There was a large circle of people around the radio. But the volume was so low that no one could hear much of anything. I don't remember about the move from the Ivan place to Ehrhardt's Honey Creek farm. I don't know if the mules were purchased while on the Ivan place or when we got to Honey Creek. Daddy was able to do a little farming there with the team of mules. When Ehrhardt's lost the two Ivan places, they moved back to their Honey Creek farm where we lived and we moved to the Relius Beck farm. While at the Beck farm, Daddy purchased a model T-Ford truck of \$25.00. It was while there, that Elizabeth was confirmed and graduated from grade school and went to Jefferson City to go to high school. She lived with August and Frieda Beck who a very good job at the printing plant that did the state of Missouri's printing. Also, while there Mahlon Lee Otto Hink Gladys Sommerer was born. He was born and baptized in the Beck log cabin. We were butchering and Pastor Bultman came and did it while we stopped for lunch. Otto Tichelkamp and Hink Beck were there. I got to stay home from school to help butcher. The Beck house (or cabin) was two log bins joined with sheds on one side. The lower bin had a cellar under it and the upper bin had a crawl space where a skunk took up residence. That was quite smelly and exciting, so when Mahlon was born, I said that Daddy bought Mom a little skunk...ha!

Relius Beck got or had some kind of political job in Jefferson City and when he lost it, he came back to his farm so we moved to Schubert, Missouri. We moved on March 15, 1933. I remember that day very well. Hink Beck, Pete Sommerer and Daddy each took a truck load of stuff.

The Schubert house was like living in a high-rent district. We were on a road for the first time in our life; had electricity; lived near a store, church and school. We had electricity in the barn, a 2-car garage with electricity, a windmill, etc. The contract on the first five years was that of a share cropper. The owner got one third of all crops. After that we paid \$120 per year cash for rent for the 9-room house, barn, garage, smoke house, chicken house, outhouse, and windmill.

We rented two apartments out, one for \$4.00 per month and one for \$5.00, I think. One of our tenants later became the bus driver for our school. Later his father rented the same room. After that, he moved into one of Charlie Wiflort's chicken houses.

I finished second grade at St. John's Schubert school, then the third grade. The pastor, K.F. Schrader, was such a poor teacher that they sent us to Forest Hill School, and I was started in the third grade over again. Here are some of the things we did then to make a living: pick and sell gooseberries, blackberries, mulberries, walnuts and hickory nuts. We'd dig and sell sassafras roots in the spring (February and March). We raised and sold potatoes, corn, peas, sweet potatoes, carrots, radishes, turnips, cabbage, lima beans (shelled), tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce and rhubarb. Mom would make cottage cheese, cooked cheese, butter, butter milk and cream. We raised 1100 chickens that we sold door to door in Jefferson City. They had to be dressed on Friday night to take to Jefferson City on Saturday in the morning. We also sold eggs. Mom would bake bread, cookies and coffee cake. One time we purchased one-half ton of flour (10 100lb sacks) for the bread-making. We purchased skimmed or separated milk from three or four neighbors to make cooked cheese out of it.

When the new dormitories were built at Algoa farm, Daddy worked on the project, WPA. Bud and Felix were paper boys on Sunday at Schubert. They sold the *St. Louis Post*, the *Globe Democrat* and the *Jefferson City News Tribune* newspapers.

Sis, Bud, Felix and I were confirmed at St. John's Schubert. Sis and Bud never did get to go to high school. Sis worked for Wilford's and Schuberts' our next door neighbors. In order to make some kind of contribution to St. John's, I was a janitor of sorts. I had to go up and build a fire in the church furnace. My first paid job was for Charlie Wilford. I helped him candle eggs, then he gave me a putty knife and I went inside the incubators and scraped chicken poop off of the bottom of the incubators... Ha! For that I got 35 cents per day.

Felix went to high school for about two and a half years. Later when he went to the CCC camp, they gave him a night watchman's job and he finished high school at Mexico, Mo.

Margie started high school while at Schubert and also took confirmation instructions from Rev. Schmaltz in Jefferson City. I attended high school one year while we lived at Selma's place.

After Felix left for the CCC camp, I took over the newspaper route. Bud and Felix were paid \$30.00 per month while in the CCC camps. \$25 of it was sent to Mom and Daddy and they got to keep \$5.00 per month. I think the rule was that only one family member could be in the CCC's and you were limited to two years.

When Bud got out, Felix went in, but Bud seemed to have worked himself into some kind of a position that they couldn't do without him. He was the mess sergeant. So they were both in the CCC's for a while.

Cleopha and Lolly were born at Schubert. One summer the folks were in town. I was herding cows across the road and Lolly or Cleopha (I don't remember which one), came out on the road in diapers and had traffic stopped until Margie came out and got her off the road... Ha!

A year or so after we moved to Schubert, Otto Tichelkamp lost their farm and rented a farm near where we lived. We had lived next to them while we lived on Uncle Theodore's Honey Creek farm. We went to Forest Hill School with Harriet Tichelkamp one year. The barn on the farm was very well made. It had the same kind of floors in it that most houses have, plus electricity. One year we cleaned it up good and had a barn dance. Daddy got the Herbrant boys to play the music. I don't think I was to a barn dance before or after that.

Mom was always a 4-H club leader. She had girls from Schubert, Taos, and all around in her club. The land on the farm was very poor and not much of it, so we rented land anywhere we could find it. One year we rented land over in the Callaway Bottoms. That was a long way to go with a team of mules. One time Bud was crossing the Missouri River Bridge in Jefferson City and a train went through under the bridge and blew its whistle and Bud nearly lost control of the mules.

They planted pumpkins in the corn over in the Callaway Bottom land and that fall on election eve in 1946, when Roosevelt ran against Landon and Knox, we were out at the barn carrying that load of pumpkins into the barn. We cut them up with a corn knife and fed them to the cows. We were spoiled living with an electric washer, radio, brooder and iron at Schubert, because on our next move back to Honey Creek, we were again without electricity for a long time.

When we moved from Schubert to Honey Creek, we hired a truck for \$2.00 a load to move us. I don't remember how many loads there were, probably three or four, but the last thing was the wagon, a small load of equipment and me to drive it to Honey Creek. I was 13 then. When I was going through Wardsville, dogs from Schrimpf's farm came out barking at the mules and they were really spooked. We moved on March 15, 1940. The days were pretty long, so I got to Honey Creek before it got dark. While at Schubert, Daddy purchased the '32 Buick from Heisinger's that was quite a step up for a family that had used a model T-Ford. While at Schubert there were many Roosevelt projects designed to help poor people. One was the Farm Credit Administration. They made loans to help people that lost everything and poor to get started again. We got \$500 and from that we got a bull, a cow, 3 heifers, 10 ewes and a buck, a sow, a pressure choker and lots of canning jars. When Lolly was born, she had trouble with milk and Dr. Hill said to get a goat and give her goat milk. We would keep the goat on a long chain in the yard or the chicken yard and when Lolly got hungry, there was always some nice warm milk nearby.

I think the most pleasant memories of Schubert's was when Elizabeth and Justin were dating. They would come out in the evening and we would play games, cards, etc., and eat popcorn. They always bought a sack of candy, too. Sometime after they would leave, I would look out the

window and their car was still in the barn lot. I was sure Justin had car trouble, but Mom would never let me go out to help them...ha! We had a contract to provide firewood for the Forest Hill School. The school owned 40 acres of land around it, so we cut the wood off the school property. The furnace in the school took 3-foot length wood, so we cut it all by hand with a cross cut saw. We could see the MO. PAC Railroad tracks from Forest Hill School and when the first streamline train (The Colorado Eagle) went by, we saw it. One time a Forest Hill School, a while after the last recess of the day, a funeral procession went by.

Now the Forest Hill School at one time was a church and on top of the hill nearby was a cemetery. It was so grown up with brush that you couldn't hardly walk in it. But across the road in Diedler's wood pasture the brush wasn't so thick, so they took the fence down, dug a grave and buried the man in the pasture. I suppose it would have been illegal anyway to bury him in the cemetery because he was an African American. Well, the kids from Osage City convinced the teacher that he was a good friend of theirs, and so she dismissed school so they could attend. I guess that was my first and last time to do such.

While rebuilding the road to Osage City, they had to re-route the school bus through the Algoa farm. I had been there several times before they used to have picnics there and invite the public.

Elizabeth and Justin married while we lived at Schubert. They moved into a completely furnished 5-room home: a new kitchen, dining room, living room and two bedrooms. Justin had a good job. I suppose he must have saved his money. He was in his late twenties when they married.

I'm not sure how this happened, but I believe that one of the families that Sis worked for in Jefferson City moved to St. Louis and they took her along with them. Later, she met and married Ted Kuegele. Their wedding took place at Honey Creek. Ted's dad officiated at the wedding. We had the shivery at our house (Selma's). We were very poor at Selma's. The farm was smaller yet than the one at Schubert with no electricity.

I rented ground from Uncle Henry and also Uncle George Miller. I did go to Eugene high school one year while at Selma's place. Naomi was born on Selma's place in 1941. Margie started taking confirmation instructions from pastor Bultman then, along with Gilbert Stressnor. She was confirmed in a separate adult class and not with the regular 8th grade kids.

We were very poor while at Selma's. If it hadn't been for Elizabeth and Justin bringing groceries out for us, we would have been in bad shape. Bud sent money for Margie and I to buy school clothes. I wore Daddy's wedding pants to Walther League meetings at Honey Creek. Ha! I was always a big boy with big feet, so Bud and Felix always kept me in good shoes (army shoes) they got from the CCC camps.

The Ford truck that we used for about five years didn't have much power when we went from Schubert to visit the Honey Creek folks. We put two farm wagon seats in the back of the truck and we would ride back there. When we got to the Honey Creek hill, the truck could not make it up, so we all had to get out and push...when it would stop or stall, we had to block the wheel so it wouldn't roll back down the hill. I finished up the 8th grade at Honey Creek.

Dorothy Hemeyer and Clarence Propst were married while we lived at Selma's. They had a chiverie for them at Hemyers's place. For the ones that didn't live at Selma's place I can tell you that it was quite a humbling experience going from a 9-room house with electricity to a house that had a hole to crawl through to get to bed. The girls had to go through the boy's room to get to the girls room and it didn't even have a door on it. To get the furniture into the upstairs bedroom, we had to take the window frame out of the window and pull the furniture up through the window.

We lived at Selma's from March 15, 1940 until August, 15, 1941. Mom and Daddy met Omar Bates at a funeral at Honey Creek church sometime in the summer of 1941 and engaged him to move us on August 15, 1941. That day we had everything packed: the stove dismantled and Omar didn't show up. Daddy was so mad he wanted to cuss Omar out, but Mom saved the day. She sweet talked him into moving us anyway and she also called in friends of his. I think there were 2 or 3 trucks involved. And again I did lots of hauling with the mules from Selma's to the Stressnor place.

Before we left Selma's place electricity was installed in the house, but when we got to the next place (Stressnor – the 7th place) we were again without electricity until after WWII, about the spring of 1948. In the summer of 1941, Daddy and I cut logs on the Hemeyer place. The idea was that we cut enough logs (lumber) to make two silos, one for us and one for uncle Henry. We built Uncle Henry's silo, but didn't have enough lumber left to build another one, so we were without a silo for several years. We built a silo at Schubert also and tore it down and took the lumber along to Selma's place, but never got around to reassembling it.

The silo we later built on the Stroessnor place was much larger, 28 ft tall. Beatrice and I both helped build that one. I had corn out on Selma's place, Uncle Henry's place, and also on the Uncle George Miller place, plus 17 acres on the Stressnor place that we took care of. That marked the end of my formal education. I was 15 that fall and they had a birthday party for me.

Margie was more fortunate than I. she got to finish high school at Eugene. The war with Europe and Japan started that fall. It became hard to get gas to market products in Jefferson City like we did at Schubert, so we sold our milk in the bulk to the Kraft cheese factory in Eldon.

Daddy read some article about genetic engineering done in Germany for the purpose of producing female offspring and I on occasion had to go to the drug store in Jefferson City to purchase this product. One time they asked me what it was being used for and of course I couldn't tell them. The purpose was to produce heifer calves instead of bull calves. Normally they are more male calves than female calves, so I think it may have worked.

After Margie graduated from high school, she went to Jefferson City and worked at the Jefferson City News Tribune. The younger children all went to Oak Grove School except when they went to Honey Creek for confirmation instruction. In addition to farming the Stressnor place, we rented lots of land from John Hale. One time John Hale's wife was sick and I had to get a doctor back there and spend the night upstairs. She screamed most of the night.

One time I planned to plow corn on the ridge field, but I had other things to do and I didn't get ready to leave until 11:00 am and I debated if it was worthwhile going up there at 11:00 am, but I went anyway. When I got over the hill, and could see John Hale in the field, he had three horses hitched to a disc. He planned to head home for lunch and he turned the team toward home. He miss-stepped and got his leg under the disc. There was no way he could get out by himself. He called me over and I got a fence post and pried the disc up high enough that he could get leg out.

That summer when I cut his wheat, one of his wife's nieces who was 14 was helping her and at the table at the noon meal, John's wife asked me to marry her niece. I suppose that wasn't too far-fetched, because Franklin Long told me one time while I was hauling wood for him that his mother, wife and daughter all married at age 14.

During those days it was the custom that we dug the graves for each other, but in our case Daddy always gave me that job. When Bill Ott passed away, I was the one that was from our house to set up all night. When Dave Graham died, I was the one to help dig the grave. It rained all day when we dug Dave's grave. We had a problem keeping the water out of the grave, so one would dig and the other one bail out water. They had planned to bury Dave in a wooden box, but the grave was so full of water, it would have floated, so the undertaker went back to Jefferson City for a concrete vault. They didn't have a regular size on hand so they had to take an extra large one and we had to go back in and make the grave larger. We put 2 x 4's on the bottom so the undertaker could get the straps out that lowered the casket. Well, the 2 x 4's floated out of place and the casket didn't set level, so there was a lots of gurgling as water got in anyway.

On December 18, 1944 I was sent to Jefferson Barracks for a pre-induction physical exam. In January of 1945 I was notified that I failed and was given a classification of 4-F that meant that I failed. In August of 1945 I was sent to Fort Levenworth, KA, for another examination which I passed, but the war was over then so they gave me an agricultural deferment. Then in the spring of 1946 I was given a 1A classification and was sent to Jefferson Barracks for induction into the Army on April 29, 1946. They didn't have any uniforms at Jefferson Barracks, so we were sent to Levenworth, KA, for our uniforms, then back through Missouri and St. Louis on our way to Louisville, Kentucky to Fort Knox where I took Armored Basic Training. We drove tanks, trucks, etc. After completing basic training, I got a delayed in-route furlough and then to Fort Laughton at Seattle, WA, and sent to Japan where I was assigned to the military police detachment that provided security at the war crimes trials in Tokyo known as the International Military Tribunal Far East. The far east part was to distinguish us from the war crimes trials that took place in Nuremburg, Germany after the war.

First Bud went into the service, then later Felix, after the war ended I was drafted on April 19, 1946 and I was a military policeman in Tokyo, Japan at the war crimes trials at the International Military Tribunal Far East. I was discharged on October 4, 1947 from California. [Since] the war [was already] over, my time in the Army was more like a vacation compared to my life on the farm. The day after I got home I was 21 years old.

In January of 1948 I went to St. Louis to work. While home that was the time that REA was building the electric lines in the area and the right of way had to be cleared. Uncle Henry Heymeyer was in charge for the REA and he couldn't get anyone to take the contract to clear the

right of way, so Oscar Goetz took it with the provision that each family that got electricity would help and that when we worked on one farm we ate lunch on that farm. I think we started clearing on the Ted Englebrecht farm and went past the Bob Bruley creek a way. Oscar Goetz did not keep any money. He was the time keeper. The pay was divided up according to how many hours one worked on the project.

Daddy and I helped Oscar Goetz build a tobacco barn one year. I happened to be home one year from St. Louis when the new silo was built. That was quite an experience. I stayed with Bud and Alma in St. Louis until April 15, 1949 when Bud and Alma purchased the Ivan place that we lived at around 1930. I then went into a boarding house where I lived until I got married on February 2, 1952. We then lived on Tower Grove across the street from Shaw's Garden in south St. Louis.

I failed to mention the birth of our youngest brother Lloyd Justin Theodore Sommerer. Dr. Hill hadn't delivered any babies for Mom at the present location so I went up to the road with a lantern to open the gates and get Dr. Hill down to the farm and again to open the gates to let him back out when he left.

While in basic training I was taken into the company commander's office and read a telegram from Marjorie about Lloyd's accident with his foot. He was a very sick boy for a while, but all the younger siblings remember that so I won't expound on that further except to say that one time when I was kind of down, Mom tried to cheer me up by telling me how blessed we were. That she had 12 children and each of them had 10 fingers and 10 toes in other words all were normal people. But of course several years later Lloyd lost some of his toes.

"Vernon's Sewing Up A Wound Story"

Mahlon and I were walking past to Bob Brule Creek and up to Elmer Englebrech's and Mr. Crede was plowing corn there. There was a malfunction of Mr. Crede's machine and he was making adjustments. I helped him and caught my finger in the machine. It popped my thumb open with flesh back over the fingernail. I went home, and Mom wanted to sew it up but I said to go to town to Doctor Hill. His nurse was a Sommerer girl worked there. She held and blocked the nerve.... no pain killer was used...just a long pointed scissors. I was 18 years old. I guess that's why I got by with insisting going to the doctor.