As I Remember It

M B “Pete” Amoth

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Transcribed from his typescript and edited by Carl Christian Amoth. Spelling and grammar corrected; the sentences are his.

amoth.us

He said on the recording that he was writing it, and he was. Eighteen typewritten pages, begun some time after 2007. His own outline called the first part **Formative Years**, *ages one to sixteen, and the second* **Growth**, *seventeen to twenty. This is the first of those, whole, and the opening of the second.*

Spelling and grammar have been corrected. He was still editing when he stopped—three of his own pencil corrections are in the margins—and an editor is what he expected to get. Every change is recorded in the companion list of corrections. Nothing has been reworded, cut or added: the sentences are his.

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I was born on June 7th, 1933 to Chris and Clara Amoth of Wales, ND. By Mother's recollection, it was a day of record heat —106° F. She called the Doctor and a neighbor, Dad's aunt, Mrs. Tom Amoth (Helga). Helga came and aided my delivery. The Doctor came the next day or two but didn't sign a Birth Certificate until months later, with the date recorded as June 6, 1934. Each of the first four of us children was born on the farm where Dad's parents had homesteaded (July, 1896) and where Dad was born (May 8, 1903).

Mother really wanted a girl because her first two were boys. She had no name for me, so when my Dad's sister, Marie, learned of that, she asked to name me. Mom said okay. As a result I was recorded as Maureen Bernell Amoth, a name that gives me pause nearly every day of my life. I really wanted to change my name but thought it would be disrespectful, so I didn't. In Mother's later years I asked her about it, and why she permitted

it to stick. Her reply was, "I was so disgusted that I didn't care, and had to place a memo on the telephone so when someone inquired, I would get it right."

Carmen and Kenneth were each born eighteen months apart, Kenneth Duane second born. Eighteen months later Mother gave birth to me. Eighteen months later, Mother would give birth to Ruth. Later there was Gerald (died as an infant August 4, 1945, at one month of age), Joyce, and Judy.

When Ruth was born, Dad's brother Guy and his wife Dora cared for me during Mother's recovery. I lived with them for a short time. They were unable to have children and so were very happy to care for me. Actually I spent a good deal of my preschool years with them, and they wanted to adopt me, which upset Dad. Eventually they adopted three children—Alvin, Rose, and Fern—who were brother and sisters. It seemed that I was rather favored over Fern, youngest of the three, and slightly older than me. I remember one altercation where Fern was sent to time out in the stairway, while I remained with Dora. More about my early years later, but I would like to give information on my heritage as it had an enormous effect on my early development.

My father's parents, Carl and Mina Pederson Amoth, were of Norwegian heritage. Carl (Aamodt) came from Trøgstad, Norway at the age of twenty-one. He met and married Mina Pederson at Fairfax, Renville County, Minnesota. Carl and his brother Tom went first to Calgary, Canada to homestead, but found the land unsuitable for crops, so came to Wales, ND and filed a claim on 160 acres. Martin, a second brother, stayed in Minnesota with his new family while Carl and Tom went to

Canada. Martin homesteaded first, then Carl and Tom. Their homesteads were within two miles of each other.

Our home had eleven rooms. The four rooms on the East end were occupied by Grandma Mina (Carl had died in 1924). This section of the house originally held the parlor and a screened-in porch, which was later enclosed by windows and became her kitchen. She divided her time between the homestead and her daughters.

Mina's living room was originally a formal parlor, separated from the main house by sliding pocket doors. It was very large, with a window composed of beveled glass cut and framed in irregular patterns. She had another room that held the stair, and later a fashioned shower and bathroom. Her upstairs consisted of a large double bedroom. Heat was provided by an independent coal heater located in the parlor. Her lighting, as well as ours, was provided by kerosene lamps and gas lanterns. There was no indoor running water or bathroom. Outdoor toilets with a Sears catalog for paper, and a chamber pot in winter—for ladies only. It was the guys who had the daily chore of emptying it.

The heat in the main house was provided by the traditional cook stove and a large furnace in the basement. The furnace was fueled by lignite coal, which was plentiful in parts of the state west of our home.

Kitchen stoves were, in general, the center of family life. These cooked the meals, heated the water, and warmed the family center. As there were no trees on the prairie, men would go by team and bobsleigh to the Pembina Hills about thirty miles away. There they would cut and trim logs, load them on the

sleigh and return home to cut and split the wood for use in the cook stove. As this was done in the winter, they had to face many hardships in the blowing snow and cold. They didn't tackle this task alone, but rather several teams and sleighs would go together.

The main house had a cistern which we filled by hauling water from Tom Amoth's. Our well had good water, but it was quite salty and was used for cattle, drinking, and cooking. It would be carried by hand summer and winter from the well near the barn. We had a large windmill to pump water for the cattle, and a regular pump for pumping a bucket for the house. There was also a one-cylinder gasoline engine for pumping water to the barn when there was no wind. Needless to say, we didn't need to use it often. Dad would often want some fresh water late in the evening, so one of us would go to the well and pump a fresh bucket of very cold water.

Rural Electricity didn't arrive in our community until the early 1950s—about the time I left home. The first electricity on our farm was provided for the barn. Dad took a damaged airplane propeller, attached it to a 6-volt automobile generator. He then set that on an eight-foot steel tower which was set atop the barn. Two wires transferred the electricity to a car battery. That in turn provided the lighting, which reduced the danger of a barn fire being caused by gasoline lanterns.

Just after Pearl Harbor, Dad had the house wired and installed a 32-volt AC Delco power plant. That power center was located in a small building between the barn and the house. Later, the thirty-two-volt system was replaced by a 110-volt system. We

were now able to use a refrigerator and an electric washing machine. The home still did not have indoor plumbing.

We did have telephone service. Some of the farmers in the Wales community joined together and established a telephone system. It was rudimentary but very efficient. They purchased a switchboard and installed it in the bedroom of a lady's home in Wales. She was referred to as central operator. To place a call outside of the community required one to crank out one long ring. She answered and then plugged you into the operator in the town or community you wished to reach. That operator then connected you to the residence or business you wanted to speak to. The system required one wire to be strung from insulators mounted on telephone poles throughout the community. Only those who were members could have phones. The men in the community did all of the repair work. Boys were instructed to not shoot the glass insulators, and I don't remember a single incident of that happening.

If you called someone in the system, you simply picked up the receiver and cranked out the call signal. Our signal was two long rings. Another would be a long and a short, and so on. Now if you had a community message, four long rings caused everyone to pick up and listen for the message. Understand, when Mom called her friend, everyone on the system heard the signal and could pick up and listen in. This person was known as a rubberneck. There were many funny stories about rubbernecks.

Mina and Mother really didn't like each other. I believe that originated with Mother, in that she thought that Dad's family felt that they were a bit better than hers. In character they were

equals, and of the same Norwegian Lutheran Faith. But in other aspects Dad's family had a large farm which was mechanized and quite modern. His sisters were college grads and teachers. His cousin Mable, daughter of Tom and Helga Amoth, was a teacher and taught Mother in Numedahl. She also "boarded" in Mother's home. It was Mable who brought Mother to the prairie on a visit home. It was the first time Mom and Dad met. Dad had attended the State Agricultural College in Fargo, ND. Socially, Carl was apparently a great leader of people, sometimes referred to as "King Carl." Mina was also a strong leader among the pioneer women in the community. She usually spent summers with us, which afforded me the opportunity to spend time with her.

One thing may have resulted in exacerbating this issue. Mother had been Baptized and Confirmed in the Church in Numedahl. Upon marrying Dad, she wished to join Dad's home church. She was instructed that she needed a letter of transfer from her home church. Mother refused, on the grounds that the membership at Our Savior's Lutheran Church was well acquainted with her history and home church. Therefore, it was not essential. Well, she was not permitted to take communion (that wouldn't happen today), and her position impacted us when it came to parts in Christmas plays at the church. She was active in all the women's organizations, and participated in all but voting and taking communion.

The time I spent with Grandmother Mina was limited to my early years, mostly preschool. What I remember most was sitting on her leather sofa carding wool into "slubs" which would coil into a woven basket. Grandma would be sitting at her spinning wheel converting the slubs into yarn. This yarn would then

be converted into woolen socks for us to wear in our lace-up boots, which reached above our calves. They were very colorful and warm. She also knit liners for our leather mittens and wool caps. The wool was purchased raw from a neighbor who raised sheep. She washed and dyed the wool in batches, and it was those batches that I "carded" (combed) into straightened fibers.

She would speak of their early settlement and her fears of prairie fires and Indians. Fires were a given on those windswept prairies, a result of lightning and the burning of grasslands by Indians to locate buffalo bones, which could bring a good price on the market. Because fires prevented the establishment of native trees, the plains were treeless. The settlers planted cottonwood and elm to shelter the homestead from the northwestern winds, which seemed to never cease. When I was growing up, we had some volunteer willows starting in wetlands that we couldn't farm. Consequently, we didn't have the large wild game such as deer. Today, three-quarters of a century later, those lands have a lot of volunteer trees and plentiful large wildlife and smaller animals.

During the drought years, there was nothing to temper the winds causing the drifting topsoil; consequently, a lot of topsoil was removed from the fertile fields, ending up in fence rows to a depth of four or more feet. As a teenager I was hired one fall to work for the Federal Government planting trees in rows to act as windbreaks, to stop drifting snow and soil. As this was after harvest, I must say this was a very cold job. We would have to drain the tractor at night to keep from cracking the engine block, because the temperatures would dip very low. In the morning, we would carry water to the field to fill the tractor.

As for her fear of Indians, it was the result of tribal migration between the Pembina Hills (Walhalla, ND) and the Turtle Mountains (Rugby and International Peace Gardens). Indians didn't have a word for private property and therefore lacked any respect for the settlers' property. In the spring, they would move their tribe from their winter home in the Turtle Mountains to Pembina. It seems that they found our homestead an ideal place to stop. We had our granaries two to three hundred yards south of the house. They would open the granaries and feed their livestock and their families, and replenish stores for the remainder of the trip. Usually they spent two to three days on the farm before moving on. This process would be repeated in the fall as they moved to their wintering place in the Turtle Mountains.

Their winter homes were pits dug into the ground. The floors were covered with colorful blankets except for their cooking fire. I suspect they stayed quite warm in the very cramped setting. They also had set up tepees covered with skins. As I was very young during my visit, I don't know all the details of their life in the winter, but it seemed proper that in the coldest weather they would shelter in the pits, but not every day is so cold that a tepee couldn't suffice.

As I remember, Grandmother's fears didn't extend to the menfolk, who carried on their daily work as if the Indians weren't camped out there. Grandmother would keep the children in the house for the duration. She was afraid they would take her children.

As a child, I remember older Indians from the reservation sitting on the sidewalks in the town of Devils Lake. The old men,

wrapped in colorful blankets, would sit observing the hustle and bustle of the white man. Temperatures were those experienced at Christmastime in North Dakota. I remember especially the blank stare and emotionless faces. I don't remember being afraid of them, but didn't attempt to be social either. I never saw them engaged in conversation.

One fall, I remember going with Dad to a cattle show in Devils Lake. The tastiest morsel of all was the barbecued buffalo meat that had been prepared by the Indians. It seems that there was an agreement between the sponsors and the tribes to do this each year. I suspect that the Indians were the only people that could harvest buffalo from the reservation. They prepared it by digging large pits which were layered with stone, fired by wood. When hot and the ash cooling, they layered cornstalks and prairie grasses. The carcass was placed and covered with more cornstalks. The pit was then closed for two or three days and opened on the day of the show. I confess that I was very young when I heard of this, so there may be some inaccuracies in the process. I also confess that never have I eaten a sweeter meat. One of the last times I was in my hometown, Langdon, my sister Judy and her husband prepared a special supper (dinner) for me; the main course was ground buffalo meat.

Mina was very modern and thoroughly self-educated. I found it curious that the Norwegians wished to become Americans of Norwegian origin, and not Norwegians in America. Some of the neighboring German community (German Lutherans) lived as Germans in America. They spoke German at home, leaving the teaching of English to the schools. My siblings and I were not taught Norwegian. In Numedahl, it was different. Though they had a good command of the English language, they spoke

Norwegian in the community. As a child, I would write to my cousins in Norway and they would reply in beautiful English. I thought their grammar was superior to mine. I believe my grandparents knew English when they arrived. In discussing this issue with my Dad's uncle Ludwig, he said that they did this because if they didn't fully adapt to their new country, they would have little impact in the body politic. Those of Norwegian heritage quickly became leaders in the community and state governments.

One recollection was that in 1940 she purchased a new Ford coupe. It had a V8 engine, was black, and was always kept in her garage. Dad's car was a 1936 Ford, which he purchased in 1937. During WWII the factories were turning out airplanes and other vehicles for the war effort. Therefore, we couldn't buy a new car. It was 1946 before Dad could buy a new Ford. Amalene and I visited Mina in the late 1950s in her home at uncle Guy's farm. She was so gracious, and made an indelible impression on Amalene.

Mother's parents, Tollef and Bergit Knutson Kjemhus, were also of Norwegian heritage. Tollef came to America with his parents from Numedahl, Norway in 1881. His father died in Minnesota before they could come to ND. So his mother brought him and his brothers and sisters to the Numedahl, ND (Fremont Township) homestead. He and Bergit later homesteaded two miles from the Kjemhus homestead. Bergit came to America in 1905 with her father, who settled in Minnesota. She moved to Numedahl a few months later, after their marriage.

School Days

I attended Moscow #1 rural school. Moscow Township was six miles square. It was divided into four equal parts, each having a school, Moscow #1 through #4. These schools were staffed by one teacher responsible for teaching eight elementary grades. Teachers were paid a salary and were boarded by a family in that school district. She would rely on transportation to and from school provided by the family caring for her. The school year was eight months in duration to accommodate the rural lifestyle of farmers. Crops had to be planted and harvested within four months, as the growing season averages only 90 days.

These schools contained one classroom, two inside bathrooms and coat closets. The entry split the coat closets into girls and boys. It also contained a counter on which there was a basin and hand pump for water. A basement contained the furnace room, coal storage, two septic tanks, and a playroom with a hardwood floor.

We had no electricity or running water. Light was provided by large windows on the north and west sides of the classroom. Heat was provided by a coal furnace in the basement, which was tended during the day by students and "banked" in the evening by a nearby farmer. This person also "stoked" the furnace in the morning to warm the building for the coming school day. There was one register in the classroom that brought heat

into the room. We would sit on this to dry out if someone fell through the ice on a nearby pond.

On some schedule, the students spread oil-impregnated sawdust on the floors to help capture dust when the floor was swept by the same students. In the summer, parents gathered to do regular maintenance.

Furnishings consisted of desks designed for children of six to eighteen years of age, with the smaller desks nearest the heat and the larger nearest the windows. The front of the classroom contained a blackboard, teacher's desk, grouped small chairs for students receiving instruction, and a piano used primarily for warm-up exercises. The library consisted of one enclosed bookcase approximately three by eight feet. There were not many books other than texts.

The school grounds contained a horse barn, with a hayloft, to serve horses used by students riding to school. It wasn't used very much during my later years. When weather and roads permitted, we would usually come to school by car, or occasionally walk. When winter arrived and the snows didn't permit travel by car, we would arrive covered with "buffalo robes" by a sleigh called a "jumper" and pulled by a team of horses.

In my case, we lived in the very NW corner of the district, three miles from the school. Dad would hitch his matched team of horses and drive us to school, arriving in time for a 9 A.M. class. He would return at 4 P.M. for our return trip home. These trips were made in deep snow and cold temperatures.

I remember temperatures as low as 42° below zero. Many of the January through March mornings would be -20° F to -32° F.

May I remind the reader that water freezes at +32° F. The record lows and highs are –60 °F and +121 °F. We did not consider wind chill factors when calculating the temperature. Weather events included rain, snow, hail, blizzards, polar fronts, tornadoes, thunderstorms, and high-velocity straight-line winds. Snowdrifts would at times be twelve feet deep, and the trail would be snow two to four feet deep, which the horses and sleigh packed hard. Daylight comes late and darkness early.

As children, the weather conditions were normal to us. We often connected our sleds to the back of the "jumper" and bounced part of our way to school, arriving with frozen trousers and cold hands, face, and feet, but we were excited and happy. Mostly going to, and coming from, school was fun. We rarely used the basement to play; rather we went outside to sled, play hide-and-go-seek, or softball when weather permitted. One of our favorite sports was drowning gophers out of their den. In the spring, we would build snow forts and have major snowball battles.

My first and second grade teacher, Faith Conelly, lived in our home and accompanied us to and from school. To describe her, I would start with the fact that she was very beautiful and very popular with the young men of Langdon. Opportunities for dating during the winter were few and far between. But there were opportunities for three little boys to create mischief with her suitors when they could visit.

During the deepest part of winter, we would have to park our automobile just off the roadway and walk the last four hundred yards to the house. When a suitor would approach the house it would be on the south side, where the snow was six to eight feet

deep and into which we would dig a snow cave. The side of the snowbank nearest the house was nearly vertical, making it very easy to tunnel in and make small rooms. One night after supper, my older brothers, Carmen and Kenneth, were in the snow cave when a suitor came to pay Faith a visit. Just outside the kitchen window, he broke through the roof of the snow house. Not wanting to miss any opportunity for mischief, my brothers grabbed and held onto his leg. In the dark, this fellow started yelling for help. I remember Dad saying **"what the hell"** and going to the window, where the lamplight dimly illuminated the snow. He saw what was happening and found it to be extremely entertaining. Needless to say, my brothers released their grip and the suitor got his leg back. Faith apparently thought it humorous too, as I don't remember any retaliation on my brothers.

The following spring, the same suitor, driving a new Dodge coupe, came to court Faith and take her to a movie. The three of us knew a good deal about mechanics and engines, and had the idea to take a small chunk of coal we found in the yard and stuff it up the new car's tailpipe. Faith and her suitor came out, started the car and proceeded down the road. In about half a mile, the new automobile stalled. After a few minutes, the driver was able to start again, only to stall half a mile later. We saw it stop one more time, after which the coal became dislodged and the car ran normally. We never told on ourselves or heard anything about the incident.

Another time, a Medical Doctor with a pilot's license landed his plane on the school grounds at lunchtime. He was flying a Piper Cub with skis instead of landing wheels. He was to take Faith for a short plane ride. Well, we always were looking for some-

thing to tow our sleds. Two or three of us held on to the tail of the plane as he was taking off. Let me tell you, that was a bad idea. The prop wash blew snow crystals in our faces; we promptly let go and waited for their return.

Faith was given the master bedroom just off the formal living room and nearest the heat source. I remember being fascinated by her use of a hair curler. She would use the kerosene lamp to heat the curler, then wipe the soot off and use it to curl her hair. Occasionally one would smell scorched hair. I was also fascinated by the painting of her nails. I was disappointed to see her leave in the spring, and to later learn the next school year she would live at a neighbor's home.

I suspect Mom wasn't too happy about the arrangement. I remember one evening when we were doing chores and Faith came to the barn to tell my Dad goodbye. She said, "I asked Clara if I could come to tell you goodbye." My Dad was the president of the school board and was responsible for recruiting teachers. She had already been contracted for the next year—my second—to teach at our school.

As a teacher, she was outstanding. As I remember it, her credentials were that she was a high school graduate with a summer session at Valley City Teachers College. I would guess that she was no more than twenty years old, as this was her first teaching position. My parents often credited her with my success as a student because she taught phonetics. I became a very good reader.

She married a local man and they moved to California. I was told that she became an actress. Forty years later, I boarded a plane in Grand Forks to return to Columbia after celebrating

Mother's birthday. My seatmate introduced himself and asked my name and where I was from. Hearing my answer, he asked if I knew Chris Amoth. When I told him that he was my father, he began to tell me what a wonderful man my father was, explaining that Faith, his sister, was hired by my father and family. He was a successful bachelor farmer who had turned his farm over to a young couple so he could become a missionary in Japan and help that young couple get started in life. He taught English in a Japanese school.

There were consolidated schools, 1st through 12th grades, but they were in the local towns. With few towns and harsh winters, it was necessary to have the rural schools that could be reached by sleigh or walking when necessary.

Rural students learned in a very effective way. First the class was small: during my first five years there were only three in my class—Marilyn, Gary and me. Marilyn moved to Loma, leaving only Gary and me to finish. Classes would be held in front of all of the student body. We heard every lesson eight times. We also were allowed to help the younger students with their lessons. Explaining something new to another student really reinforces one's knowledge of the subject.

Teachers needed to play elementary piano, lead us in singing, discipline us, and encourage us to study our lessons. She operated under the leadership of the County Superintendent and the President of the School Board. The County Superintendent would maybe visit each school twice a year. We would always be on our best behavior when a visitor appeared. In fact, we would post a lookout to let the teacher know when the super's car was two miles away. We really liked our teachers.

One other hurdle for these young teachers was to prepare 7th and 8th graders for State of ND exams. Agriculture, Health, History, Literature, and Civics were included on the exam. Each school received the requisite number of exams on the designated day and time. The President of the School Board delivered sealed envelopes containing the exams.

In the spring of the year of my 10th birthday, Carmen was sitting for the eighth grade exam and Kenneth was sitting for the seventh grade exams. Because passing these exams was so important in our community, I was taken out of school early to help with the fieldwork of preparing and planting the crop. North Dakota didn't require a high school diploma. Many considered completing elementary school to be all of the formal education needed.

That spring, Dad and I prepared and planted the crops on seven to nine hundred acres. I was not big and strong enough to turn the flywheel on my John Deere tractor, Model AR. So after refilling the radiators with water, fueling the tractors, and greasing the equipment, Dad would start my tractor. We had to drain the water from our tractors each night to prevent damaging the engine, because the temperatures would drop well below freezing.

Dad drove the tractor pulling the grain drill and I pulled a thirty-seven-foot tooth harrow. If a rock became stuck in a harrow section, it would have to be removed. I wasn't strong enough to lift a section and get the rock out, so I would slow my tractor, jump off and race around the front and end of the moving harrow. I would then lift the moving section to allow the rock to release. When the rock was free, I would drop the section, race

around to the front of the harrow and jump on the tractor. One can only imagine what society and OSHA would think today.

I probably attended school for seven months that year, but I was a very good student and had no concerns about passing my grade. Both brothers passed their exams and Carmen graduated.

I was most often selected by my teachers to represent our school at county-wide declamation contests held at Langdon high school. Those experiences helped me to become comfortable performing under intimidating situations. For me to compete with the big school and city kids was somewhat exciting and intimidating. I was also selected to represent the school in Spelling Bees. I didn't win a spelling bee, but was one of the last few standing. I was fortunate to have had this experience, and regret that others in my school didn't have the same opportunity.

When the time came for me to attend high school, I bought a Model A Ford coupe from Kenneth. I traded two steers for it. Obviously he got the best deal, but I had a car to drive. In the fall and spring, I would drive as long as the weather and roads permitted. When I was no longer able to drive, I would rent a bedroom from a family in Langdon.

It certainly was not my intention to go to high school, because I wanted to farm with my Dad and take other jobs as my brothers did. Mother was not going to allow that, so to high school I went.

The spring I completed the eighth grade, Dad offered me three acres of virgin land to farm for one year in return for my labor.

The offer was that Dad would provide the seed and equipment for me to plant a crop. Also, the amount of money I earned from that crop would have to be used for my clothes, books, and all costs of high school. I planted it in flax and had a very good crop. Flax prices in the fall were as high as I had seen. I sold the crop for $1,495.00. To put it in perspective, that was equivalent to over $39,000 in 2007 dollars. That marked the beginning of my financial independence. I was fourteen years old. The one exception was when Dad gave me fifty dollars when I was in dire straits while attending college. Kenneth, Carmen, Ruth and Lee contributed like amounts.

I didn't have to study, as I learned my lessons in class and did my homework in the Home Room during the school day. I was not a motivated student and really had no teacher—maybe my English teacher—to encourage me. Of course such a student doesn't earn the respect of teachers. And in my case, the Principal, Mr. Moland, especially didn't like me because in all my mischief he never caught me, so couldn't discipline me. Ironically, seven years later when I was attending UND, I encountered him still working toward his Master's Degree. I must say, I still thought he was a geek.

To stay busy, I bought a shoe shine stand in Green's Barber Shop. I had a really good business. I worked in the pool hall before I got the shoe shine stand. At noon and after the shop closed, I worked at the Green Mill Café as the town's only soda jerk. After restaurant hours, I would sometimes set pins in a bowling alley located in a Bar next door. My brothers and I grew up working, and therefore I was surprised when someone reported to my parents that I was working in a Pool Hall. I guess they thought it wasn't nice to work in a pool hall.

I was invited to parties at the homes of "the city kids" and enjoyed more dating opportunities than I was prepared for. I had a car, money, and came from a respected family. What more would a high school girl want? Oh, I also had a new portable record player, which was mentioned with the invitation. I am still puzzled that in the two years I was in school, I had a major role in the annual play. I certainly didn't take Drama. The only reason I ever figured was that I could learn anything. I could learn it quickly and forget it just as quickly. There was a volatile section of my brain that would absorb certain knowledge and then quickly wring it out if it had no lasting importance. That has been true all my life. Amalene was in charge of all things social. She would tell me, and I would go on about my business knowing she had charge of those facts.

The city guys played sports, music, and were part of a choral group—all things most of us from the farm had not experienced. Some also thought it sport to take on a farm boy. I met many a challenge with logic; when that failed I had to fight. To help in that area, I took boxing in my spare time.

That reminds me. My brothers seemed to take turns on alternate days of beating me up. My Dad was getting tired of this. One day he told me about a man in Norway whose mother died while giving birth. As they didn't have a cow, the only milk was that of a mare. The father fed that horse's milk to his infant son. This baby grew to be Norway's strong man. Well, you might know we had a mare in the barn with a colt. I stared at those two teats on occasion, but didn't go for it. Dad also warned the boys that one day I would beat them both.

Well, the opportunity came one winter evening in 1949. The three of us were milking and feeding the cattle. I had gone into the feed alley to feed "spuds," potatoes, to the milk cows. Coming out of the alley, I tripped over a cord providing power to Carmen's radio. I really could not have known it was there, but Carmen took great offense. He leapt up from his milking stool and came out fighting. Now a barn floor in wintertime is wet and slippery with manure and urine. He swung at me; I threw a block and he went down in all that mess. Seeing Carmen go down, Kenneth left his milking station and came to show this kid who was boss. He took a swing; I ducked and came up swinging. I hit him hard on the nose and down he went into that mess. His nose bleeding, he retreated to the stock water tank, scooping water on his nose to stop the bleeding. We finished our chores and proceeded to the house. Apparently Dad wondered what took us so long in the entry. My brothers had to get out of their messy coveralls, and Kenneth's nose was a bit bloody. We entered the house, I in my clean coveralls, they in their jeans. Dad knew, and said, "I told you guys this was going to happen." Carmen said, "I slipped." Kenneth said, "Teep had a lucky punch." Both told the truth, but they never challenged me again.

Abrupt Change of Direction

Saturday morning, February/March 1951.

I was still in bed at the top of the stairs when I heard new voices in the living room below. They belonged to the Nelson brothers, and they were talking rapidly to Grandma and Grandpa in Norwegian. Soon Grandma's head appeared above the last stair. She stopped there to tell me that Carmen had been drafted into the Army, and that the Nelsons had come to take me to Walhalla where my Dad would meet us. He was to take me home to see Carmen before he left for the service. She continued in an agitated voice to declare that "Carmen would be killed if he was the one to go, that you should go, you are too smart to be killed."

I was living with my maternal grandparents, caring for them during the second harsh winter in a row. We had not been to town in weeks due to impassable roads. The Nelsons had converted a Model A Ford to go over the snow by putting skis on the front wheels and a half track on the driving wheels (like the tracks on a crawler tractor, except lighter and smaller). They had been in Walhalla the day before, and had perhaps talked to Dad by phone (there were no phones in the small Norwegian community sixteen miles away).

The Nelsons left to go home for breakfast and to prepare for the journey. I packed a few things and had breakfast before they returned. It was a clear cold day and the Model A Ford had no heater, so by the time we arrived in Walhalla, we were really

cold. We went to the Bar and they ordered a hot Tom & Jerry for each of us. About the time I was sipping on mine, Dad walked in. Of course, I was embarrassed that my Dad saw me with an alcoholic beverage in my hand. He said nothing about it, and we walked to the car.

As we drove home, Dad appeared to be upset about Carmen's situation. He explained why Carmen was chosen by the Draft Board. Kenneth was married, Carmen was single, and I was too young. A member of the Board had asked Dad to name the one to go; of course he felt that he couldn't do that. So they drafted the oldest one.

I proceeded to tell him what had happened that morning and what Grandmother had said. That angered him because, deep down, I believe he felt the Board had made the right decision. Carmen had been farming with Dad and this left him in a quandary. I had been farming with my grandparents as a mostly unpaid hired hand. He would need me on the farm with him, and I thought this was my chance to live at home and farm with him. We talked about this over the next few weeks until one evening, Mother angrily said that she would not allow me to farm. She wanted one white-collar worker in her family.

I wasn't used to Dad & Mom being disagreeable, so I used their car to go up to our neighbors, the Marshalls. Elden was Kenneth's age and was going to be drafted. He asked if I could take him to Grand Forks to enlist in the Merchant Marine. I asked Dad if I could use his car to take Elden to enlist. It was fine with him. A few days later, he asked if he and Mom could go with us.

The four of us drove to Grand Forks and Dad dropped the two of us off at the Navy Recruiting Office. We agreed to meet for lunch at a favorite restaurant.

Elden told the recruiter that he wanted to enlist and was given a test. I explained to the recruiter that I didn't have to go, as my brother had enlisted in the Army Reserves and was in training. Eventually I was convinced to take the test without revealing my name. The recruiter said he would grade it, and in the event this war went on as WWII did, I would be prepared to enlist if that became necessary. At that time, many college students were trying to beat the draft as well, and the Navy brought people in based on their test performance. I finished the test and he graded it during the time my friend was completing his. I must have done quite well, because the recruiter asked me what I would want to do if I were to enlist. I told him that I would want to be in the Navy Air program. He answered that he would guarantee that I would go in as an Airman if I enlisted. My friend's score was not encouraging, but he had not been rejected. We thanked the recruiter and met my parents for lunch.

Elden sat next to Dad and I next to Mother. Just as our meals were being placed, I said, "Well, I enlisted in the Navy today." Dad's immediate response was, "The hell you did! You cannot enlist without my signature, because you are underage." He said he had called the recruiter before we left home. Mother then said that she would sign for me, and pushed me out of the booth, and we marched to the recruiter's office. She signed, and much against my will, my planned life as a farmer ended and a new life was launched. I'm thinking that with all of the college recruits applying, and I being a high school dropout, not much would become of it. It didn't work out that way.

Within days a letter arrived stating that my birth certificate indicated that I was born in 1934, therefore too young to enlist. Because no doctor attended my birth, a birth certificate was not signed until a year later. Well, Mother would have none of that. She made an appointment with a Court and argued that she was there when I was born, and it was June 7, 1933. The Judge said, "So ordered." Mom notified the recruiter and submitted my new Birth Certificate.

In a matter of days, I received orders and a bus ticket to appear at Fort Abraham Lincoln near Mandan, North Dakota for my physical and recruitment if I passed. Neighbors and friends mobilized to see that I had a proper sendoff, all the while not knowing that I would pass the physical. I thought of the embarrassment of failing and coming back home. Elden's father, Adolph Marshall, came to ask my Dad if he could accompany him when he took me to the bus. Dad said he could.

April 21, 1951, my Dad and Adolph drove me to the bus station in Langdon to see me off. As the door closed, I watched my Dad and his friend standing there on the sidewalk, looking as sad and old as I had ever seen them. Two "old" men, thinking this may be the last they would see of me. Dad was only forty-seven. To this day, that sight can bring tears to my eyes.

A New Direction

> *Editor's note. [Two paragraphs on the history of the fort stood here, taken almost word for word from a Wikipedia article and evidently pasted in as raw material to be worked up later—the passage even begins mid-sentence. He never came back to it. What he wanted from it he gives in one line elsewhere: Fort Abraham Lincoln was Custer's headquarters, and the post the Seventh Cavalry rode out from in 1876. He took his oath there seventy-five years later.]*

It was at this Fort that I received my physical and took my oath as a U.S. Navy recruit. I was sworn in as Airman Maureen B. Amoth.

That night, we recruits boarded a bus to be taken to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Illinois. The next evening, we arrived at the gates to the training center, disembarked and placed in formation to be marched into the training center. We assembled in a building that looked like a large classroom. Told to remove any material from our person that might be considered to be risqué, told to square our hats (whatever that meant), and were quizzed as to our experience in military matters, searching for leaders of the squad of eighty young men. Five of us were recruited as Recruit Petty Officers. I was awarded the rank of Airman 3rd Class, Recruit Petty Officer, probably because I could type and my name began with an A. Oh, by the way, square your hats didn't mean to make their round shape into a square, but to set them squarely on our heads. That wasn't made clear to the group, but barked to individuals. We

were then "marched" to evening chow, where the rumor was that our food contained saltpeter (also known as softpeter). It was only a rumor. The military believes their strenuous exercise is more than enough to keep new recruits' libidos from running wild, leaving no need for saltpeter.

Our first day was for getting our bedding, clothing, and toiletries. We were given aluminum boxes to pack all personal belongings for shipment home. Contrary to some stories, the Quartermasters did a masterful job of getting clothing that would fit well. The outing was first of many. When we got paid, we would be marched over to buy specified items of clothing.

Our quarters were two-story buildings in the form of an H. Each leg would hold 40 double bunks in one large room. But this first night was one of some mild fear, as there was one black recruit from Chicago in my quarters. His bunk was some distance from mine, but I was still a bit anxious. His name was Darks, but come morning, he was gone. I guess he was scared too, but certainly not of me. It seems so foolish now, but the only black people that I saw would be those with a circus. There was an exception. Dad knew a black man in Grand Forks that he liked very much. Naturally, since my Dad liked him, so did I.

As Company Clerk, I had a desk and typewriter. I would prepare the paperwork for those who came to believe the Navy wasn't for them. They would be transferred from our unit to an evaluation center and, if warranted, be discharged without cause. The Navy notified the person's local recruiting office to let them know they were available for the draft. Infantry, here I come.

In the midsection of our buildings were the showers, commodes, urinals, mirrors, and benches to wash our clothes. No washing machines and no dryers. Each article of clothing would have to be tied to a clothesline to dry. We used cotton cords, about ten inches in length, that you would tie, using a square knot, to each sock and in turn to the clothesline again with a square knot. When dry, we rolled each item and tied each with one or more cords using a square knot. All items, including blanket and pillow, were to be put into a duffel bag hanging on a pipe running down the center of the barracks. I confess, I did not know what a square knot was, but I quickly learned. You earned a demerit point for each granny knot. As Clerk, I kept a record of each recruit's demerits.

For someone who had difficulty urinating in front of others, imagine how difficult it was to sit on a commode in a row of 10 or more side by side. There were no stalls or partitions. When you looked up you saw the mirrors where others were shaving.

Using old Springfield rifles, called pieces, we learned the manual of arms. Present arms, right shoulder arms, arms at rest, etc. We always marched with a piece. If you dropped a piece, you may have to sleep with it. During a graduation with the Admiral on deck, I thought that if the drill team could spin their piece on one finger, so could I. I was in the back rank of the formation, at parade rest. No one would see me. Well, I did not know the drill team had mock pieces. Mine was too heavy to spin on one finger. I had no idea how many times that piece could rattle to the tarmac, but rattle it did. I also had almost no ability to march in a parade. Left, right, left, right. When we got back to the barracks, the CO ordered me to never march with my unit again. He also ordered me to have my piece with me at all times

for a few days and to sleep with it, keeping it warm. Instead, I was to carry my clipboard and reach the classrooms ahead of the unit to check them into the class. We spent most of our days marching to and from classes.

We learned the proper nomenclature of ships, what ladder to use going up a deck, or down a deck, whether port or starboard, fore and aft. We learned ship identification by silhouette, aircraft identification, firefighting and the Bluejacket's Manual.

A partial ship hull was flooded with water and ship's oil and set on fire. A squad of us went into that hull to extinguish the fire as we proceeded through the hatches to each compartment. I was to lead this squad, which meant I was walking into the burning oil first. What I did not know going in was that two men would be holding wands with a fine spray over my head to keep the flames and heat from me. Actually, I was not afraid once I got into the first compartment. I can say it was dark and smelly.

Another demonstration was the volatility of gasoline as compared to gasoline vapors. The instructor emptied a gallon can of gasoline. He rigged the can with a spark plug to ignite the fumes. We were far away from the can when the ignition took place. I had no idea how powerful just the fumes could be. I remembered Dad was working on a tractor when the gas tank ignited. The tank was quite full, so Dad put the cap on and we scattered. Without gasoline vapor, there was no explosion.

During weapon training, I was assigned to keep and post each recruit's score, because the range clerk was out that day. I was quite concerned, because every ship had a landing party of sailors that hit the beach with the marines. I would be trained

on board the ship. Seeing that I was not very comforted, the CO assigned me to another squad for a day when they received their training.

I managed to graduate Basic Training without really learning to march or to swim. My next assignment was to NAS JAX, Jacksonville, Florida for Airman Prep school. There I improved my marching skills and learned to swim. We spent our days in classrooms for the most part. We went to the line to learn our aircraft and what each design was built to do. We started them, saw them belch smoke, and examined the arms carriers, folding wings, and how to place the chocks. We studied those using the reciprocating engines, but almost nothing about the newer jets.

Our classroom work was designed to acquaint us with each aspect of the Navy Air Force. We studied engine mechanics, metalsmithing, air control operations, and received a general knowledge of carrier operations. We had an overview of mathematics and physics. Most of our studies took place in classrooms. It was very much like college. I received my Airman stripe here.

It was here that I finally was able to build friendships. One friend in particular was Pete D'Amico, I believe from Ohio. He was very tall and a great volleyball player. His spike could cripple you if you did not protect yourself. He expected to get a scholarship to college. One day, Pete came to me, introduced himself and invited me to follow him under the barracks to share a large salami his mother had sent him. As we sat under the barracks eating this salami, we became acquainted with each other.

⁂

The typescript ends here, in 1951. He was seventeen.