

*Note: February pictures--The Erickson children --Front row: Lincoln, Nellie holding Constance, and John. Standing behind: Einar, Hilda, Elsie, and Albert.*

*The picture of Einar holding the white steer was taken while he was raising the steer for showing at the West Michigan Stock Show in Grand Rapids.*

*The third picture is Lars Erickson with three of his sons: John, Lincoln, and Einar. The oldest son was probably away working in a sawmill at that time, and the missing part of the photo was probably the two youngest boys.*

My father's birthday was in the middle of February. It always seemed to me quite fitting that Einar was born during the winter, a season he enjoyed more than most people. I am glad that this is a quality I have "inherited" from him. I remember him saying that when they were boys, they would throw their coats open to challenge the north wind of winter. Even in his latest years, when his health was not the best, I never heard him complain about the cold, snow, and icy blasts of the winter season.

My father had a lot of fun in his life. He liked practical jokes, and if one of us caught him in that kind of spoof, he liked that, too. But, none of us had the gift of quite such an inventive sense of humor.

I remember one story that tickled us. Dad and some of his brothers or cousins, as well as a young nephew, were fishing in one of the small streams in our area. It was not fishing season, and in those days, game wardens spent more time tramping through the country than driving through it. The other fellows had gone over the hill to a good stretch of creek, leaving Einar and Rex to fish at the point they separated. They had all been talking about the possibility of meeting up with a game warden. After Einar and Rex had fished a little, Dad told the young boy that he was going to play a trick on the others. He said that he was going to turn his coat inside out and come over the hill and make them think he was a game warden. But, first, they had to do some fishing. Einar left Rex at a good hole and moved farther along the creek.

After some time had passed, Rex ambled down the stream to where the other men were fishing. And, soon, a figure appeared in the distance, a person in an unknown garment. The men all took to the

brush, sure it was a game warden. Rex forgot all about Einar's plan, and he ran away, too, not wanting to be caught fishing out of season. After a while, Einar reappeared, and they told him about their "almost encounter" with a game warden.

Einar and at least two of his brothers were very good baseball players in an era when baseball was truly the American sport at all levels. There were games every weekend, and the brothers were in demand by several area teams. Lincoln and Rowland were exceptionally good pitchers. Einar was a catcher, but his main attribute was his speed. He was known for stealing bases, and for having fun while he accomplished this feat. Later, when my brother and other boys in the neighborhood were in their teens, Dad was instrumental in starting a Bristol baseball team. For several years, weekends were devoted to baseball games at a diamond they had worked on themselves.

Einar was in his middle forties when I was born, so many of the stories I heard took place long before my time. And, he was a good story teller for young children, too. I remember sitting on his lap in the evening and listening to his tales of The Trip to the Peach Country, or about the snug haymow where a cold and wet tramp took refuge from the weather.

Einar was particularly good with livestock, and I suppose in a later time, if he'd had the chance for more education, that he might have become a veterinarian. He castrated calves and lambs--for neighbors as well as for us, and he dehorned a lot of cattle. But, his talents in that field were not just concerned with those tasks. Cattle, sheep, and horses liked him, and he was never harsh or cruel to them. If a cow kicked while he was milking, I might learn a new word or two if she'd caught him in the knee or spilled the milk, but nothing more.

Dad was a fast milker, and I understood later that he never really liked to milk cows, but he had this task morning and night for decades. This was in the hand milking era (one which is still in force here on our farm, but with only two milk cows) and while Dad milked, some of the neighborhood kids would often appear. When we finished our chores, we and our cousins would sit on spare milk stools and talk to Dad. He

would start a game of "Twenty Questions" or some such thing, or tell a story. I suppose the time went by more quickly for him with a barn full of kids.

Dad loved to read. His eyes had been damaged during the years they ran a grain threshing machine, and he had diminished sight in one eye and even less in the other. Yet, he read everything that was available. The newspaper provided some of his material, but there were books at home, too, and he read every one of my history books from school and later, from the university. In fact, I have often thought that he was as well versed in American history as my professors at the University of Michigan.

All through my childhood, I'd rather be with my father than anyplace else. So, I remember riding to the sawmill on the wagon behind Dick and Dan, our last team of work horses. I remember "helping" turn the handle of the cream separator while Dad said we were "Holcomb and Kent," two neighbors from an earlier era that were always together. I think about how comfortable he was in high places--on the barn roof or climbing the fire tower in the national forest. But, most of all, I am thankful for a father for whom money and position meant nothing. He lived the life he chose, and that example has allowed us to do the same.