

Stories Shared Between Generations:

Memoirs of a Sauk County Community



By:

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*Back row, left to right: Timothy Wohlers, Joshua Hess, John Peterson
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What is a memory?...

A memory is not merely words, not merely context. A memory reflects a story - an experience carved into the fabric of time. It reminds us of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch of an earlier era. Through memory, we preserve a former way of life. We acknowledge the past, learn from its lessons, and review its beauty. Here are those lessons, viewed through the lens of a generation past, but not forgotten. These memoirs will retrace the lives and experiences of the residents and staff of the Sauk County Health Care Center. May these stories pave the pathway to a greater sense of community. . .

John “Deere” Peterson: The Fortunate Past and the Promising Future

By Timothy A. Wohlers



Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). John Peterson, Activity Director at Sauk County Health Care Center (circa 2014)

John Peterson is a believer. He believes in God; he believes in goodwill; and he also believes in people. “We’re all unique individuals,” John says. He even believes in suppressed talents, which he discovers on a daily basis among the residents. Do not let his professional demeanor fool you, however. John has many

talents of his own. His parents recognized these talents at an early age.

“I was about four years old and they put me on the tractor - and just had me steer while they were picking up bales of hay,” John recalls. “I couldn’t reach the pedals,” he muses. He did, however, possess the ability to stop the apparatus. “If I got too far ahead, all I had to do was turn the ignition off and the tractor would stop,” he remembers. This approach seemed the most economically-feasible to the farming family. “Instead of one of them staying home to babysit me,” John says, “I went to the hayfield and drove the tractor.” At the unripe age of four, John was a full-functioning farmer. “That was my first experience with driving a tractor,” John recalls. Thereafter, he was uninterested in toy tractors. After all, what youngster would be interested in such child’s play when he

has a real John Deere with which to entertain himself?

John’s parents trusted him with the massive contraption at four, but withheld that same trust in regard to the family’s more treasured possessions, the cattle. “When I first milked a cow, I was probably [...] five or six,” John reveals. At that time though, he was only a part-time milker. “But, you know, I helped,” he claims. It was not until age ten that John became a regular. “From [age] ten, and through [age] eighteen, I was probably at most milkings - assisting,” he recalls. Back then, it was more than a one-person job.

“There were three milking machines that got attached,” John remembers. “Each person would keep up with those machines, so to speak. My dad would keep up with a couple. Sometimes my dad would be going between all three of them,” he recollects. “Then he would help me, you know, take that one off [and] put it on the next cow,” he divulges. “That’s how I learned and that was part of my job,” he states. Who better a teacher than one’s own father?

Later in his adolescence, John became rebellious. He remembers “swinging in a hay barn, with a rope, from a beam [down and back up to another] beam.” He describes the intricate system located inside the barn. “There were different sections of the barn that would get filled. So when you emptied out one of the sections, you needed a ladder to get up to the next section - to start emptying it out. So those ladders were always there. They were connected to the beams,” he explains. “You’d have to carry the rope up with you and then swing down,” he recounts. One cannot help but picture a young Tarzan.

John, however, did not possess Tarzan's expertise of oscillation. "The rope broke and I ended up on my back," he admits. At the time, John did not think he was Tarzan. He envisioned himself as Superman. "I thought I was real brave and knew it all," he confesses. After the fall, though, John no longer felt like Superman.

"I thought I was real brave and knew it all," he confesses.

"I think I hit back and bottom first," he recalls. "That's what really made me feel so numb, or whatever. I think I just landed on my spine, or on my back, and probably knocked my wind out a little bit," he painfully remembers. *Well, I'm not movin' here for a minute,* John thought.

Three years later, when his mind and body had healed from the humiliation of the traumatic rope swing, John moved off the farm because of school. "I mean, I lived at home during the summer of my first job but because of the hours of my job, I wasn't able to help milk in the morning [...]. So I made some arrangements even before I went to college to live with another guy and stay off the farm," he recalls, remembering how anxious the dramatic change made him. "That was the first time I was away from the farm on my own," he divulges. However, John knew there was more to life than just farming. The next step of his path lay in the realm of education.

"My first college experience was at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis," John reveals. "I only went one year there and then transferred to Madison," he tells. "I always liked Madison," he states proudly. But John's mind was not set in the healthcare field at the time. He studied a completely different subject. "It was called Travel and Transportation Management," he explains, "and it had to do

with [...] the logistics of railroads and airlines." Working in Madison, though, John discovered his true calling.

"While I was there, I got a part-time job working in long-term care," he notes, "and that really convinced me that it was my forte." One cannot argue with fate. "I knew [my true purpose], pretty much right away, when I started working in long-term care," he reveals. It was in this field that John met his better half. This is how John and his wife knew they shared the same goals.

"I [acquired] a job with the state, which was working with the developmentally-disabled individuals in a long-term care facility in Madison," he informs. "So when I started working there, that's when I met her," he says. He remembers how every day of work was like going out on a date. "We used to 'play outside with the kids,' as we called it, and have water fights with the kids," he recalls fondly. "We were the mature ones. We were the supposedly 'responsible' people in the facility," John pretends. He remembers one wet afternoon in particular. "We literally had a water fight with each other," he explains. "She came with a new hair dye and the hose got put over the top of her head," he relays. It was love at first hosing.

After a couple years of being married, John decided to return to college. He wanted to finish off his bachelor's degree. He remembers the wonderful education he received, as well as invitations to numerous social gatherings. "I was going to school with a lot of kids that were a lot younger than me," he explains, "and would get invited to [different events]." He recalls the anxiety brought about by his own presence. Not only did he feel like a chaperone but he would think, *I'm older here and if we do*

something we shouldn't be doing, I might be the person who was supposedly responsible [...] the leader. His fears proved to be unwarranted, though, as college was nothing but a pleasant experience.



Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). Reception area of the Sauk County Health Care Center (circa 2014)

Almost ten years later, in 1990, John arrived at the step of the Sauk County Health Care Center. "It was like two or three days after the Fourth of July," he recalls. He remembers how welcoming the staff was compared to his previous experiences in the healthcare industry. "There were some times when I wasn't sure that I was accepted as a male nurse versus female nurses, you know, because of the era and there weren't as many of us," he confesses. "But I can't say there was really much of that here at the healthcare center," he affirms. "I was always, pretty much, appreciated and respected – and liked," he recalls with a fond smile. He had found his home.

Nearly twenty-five years after the birth of John at the facility, he loves his job just as much as day one. When asked about his favorite part of the job, John responds quickly, "It's the residents." He says although there are many wonderful aspects of his job, nothing proves as satisfying as working hand-in-hand with the residents. "I like Kim. She's a good administrator. She doesn't micromanage. I

think she respects the decisions that we, as managers, make. Yet she's straightforward in terms of any concerns she has. So I think that's what a good manager is," he asserts. Still, Kim is no resident.

"I mean, the camaraderie with some of the other coworkers is good, [but I don't get as much fulfillment] as I do with the residents," John admits. He doesn't see duties in his job; he sees privileges. "My job requirement is that I look at you as an individual – in terms of a resident – and provide those kinds of needs for you to make the best of your day. Or to provide, maybe, some stimulation that you would benefit from – or some social activity. I find that very interesting and very intriguing to be able to get to know you as an individual – and to be able to try to meet those needs," he reveals. He believes every person, no matter his or her age, is unique. Thus, every patient presents a different approach.



Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). Residents of the Sauk County Health Care Center (circa 2014)

So when it comes to classifying residents, John argues, "I don't believe that you can categorize." He then opened the floodgates of wisdom. "You know, there's this saying: If you've seen one person with dementia, you've seen one person with dementia. Well it's true for us, as far as I'm concerned, and it's especially true for every one of the residents that live here," he

proclaims. “We’re all unique individuals and we all have different histories,” he insists. We therefore have different idiosyncrasies, as well as different special gifts. John’s gift happens to be an undying compassion. Everything the man does evokes a gentle kindness – from the way he talks, to the way he cares, to the very way he carries himself. He claims it’s the love of his job and the residents that bring out the love in him. Upon closer inspection though, one can clearly see that it is John who brings out the love in others.

John appreciates the simple things in life. Seeing others smile brings him happiness. According to John, there’s nothing like “the satisfaction of seeing people blossom.” At the Sauk County Health Care Center, blossom they do. It is a fertile land where one witness people grow. John even considers planting his own seed here one day.

“There’s a joke [between] those of us that have worked here a long time that we have our room picked out,” John admits. “My room’s on Eagle Path because I like the colors of that particular area,” he divulges. “The room that I have picked out looks out onto the garden, and looks across the valley – or as we call it, the ‘swamp,’ where there’s a lot of wildlife,” he details. “So that’s the room I have picked out,” he states proudly. Clearly, he only believes in

Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). Sign outside of the Sauk County Health Care Center (circa 2014) Sent from Windows Mail



Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). Garden outside one of the neighborhoods in the Sauk County Health Care Center (circa 2014)

separating business and pleasure to a certain extent. Otherwise, what fun would work be?

So it seems John will punch out, but he won’t leave the building. He is too strongly connected to the building and its occupants. He has too many close ties to the residents. Although he physically vacates the establishment every afternoon, his mind never leaves the facility. His thoughts, and his loyalty, will always stay in the heart of Sauk County – here at the Sauk County Health Care Center.



Greased Veins

By Lizbeth Teasdale

Marvin grew up in the car industry and never left. He taught himself how to drive by watching other people. His dad was the first person to let Marvin behind the wheel and Marvin never looked back. “I was driving full time by the time I was thirteen years old, and then when I turned sixteen I got my license,” he chuckled, as he confessed this secret to me. His father started him young when he bought Marvin his first car.

While sitting in his room surrounded by pictures of family and cars, he grins from ear to ear, takes a deep breath, and says, “My dad says to me, ‘Go out front and see what’s out there.’” Falling in love with the remembrances that were streaming from the archives of his past, I watched Marvin’s eyes fluttering with memories. “I go look and there it was - a 1930 Model A Ford two door. Oh. . . . That Model A was a mess when I saw it parked on the street. The back end looked like somebody had backed into a tree with it. The body was all caved in from that, the windows were in their cross-ways, and it was just an old junker. And my dad bought it for thirty dollars.” Marvin looked at me with a half-crooked smile and with a stern voice, “And he says to me, ‘There’s your car out there. I don’t want to see you driving my car. This one is yours.’ I was tickled pink! I had a car!

“I fixed it up in my spare time working at the garage.” Marvin’s father owned his own garage and Marvin worked there while



Circa 1930 Ford like Marvin’s



Platt’s Garage

growing up. PLATT’S GARAGE “There was an older man, in his thirties or forties maybe, and he helped me straighten out the dent in the back end. He did a pretty nice job. I had to take the backseat out of the car, beat it, and hammer it out. I got all the seats put back together and then I took the doors apart to fix the windows so they could roll up and down.” As Marvin was talking about this massive project he took on as a youngster, I could see the pride rise in him. But, he never flaunted it.



“At that time you had a thing called a gear box. It was a little box about that big around and about that high,” Marvin explained. He measures about a two-inch by three-inch box with his hands. “The gear box is what houses the driving gear and the driven gear. These gears are what roll the window up and down. I, being in the business of repairing cars, had extra parts lying around. Being familiar with cars, I was able to put them gears back into place, and the windows back into the channels so the windows would roll up and down. Then I went down to the CO-OP and got me some grain sacks. They were almost like canvas bags and they were white in color. I got four of them for the seats in the car. The front seats were bucket seats while the back seat was a bench seat. The back seat was loose from the back end being dented. So I had to straighten it up and tighten the wooden frame. I took and

put them grain sacks on the seats and they looked brand new! Because the seats had wood frames, I could go in and put carpet tacks to hold the sacks in place. The other guy who was helping me [with that also] helped me with the seats, and he helped me with the carpet that I got for the front. I fixed up the dash and the wires and all that crap. I fixed it up pretty nice. It was a nice reliable car.

“Some G.I.’s from Camp McCoy came along and they wanted to buy a car. My dad paid 30 bucks for it and sold it for 75 bucks. Of course it was after I did all of that work on it, and he made big money! That was a hell of a big price jump! Oh man, I was mad. It was only a couple of days and I went down to the garage [my father] says to me, ‘You got another car. It’s out there in front. You can go and see what you think of it.’ There was a 1927 Model T Ford, four-door

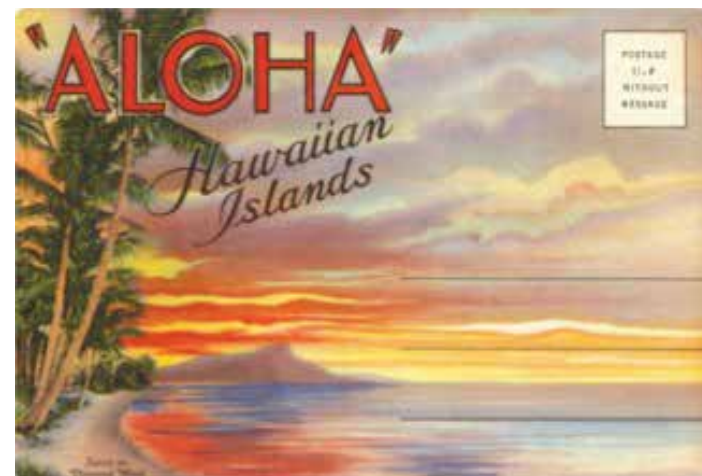


1927 Ford

sedan. The tires and bumpers, oh man, it was all top-of-the-line, deluxe stuff for Model T’s. It had foot feed on the floor instead of having that lever on the steering wheel to run the throttle and a fuel gauge that was mounted on the side wall over there,” Marvin pointed to his left hand side and said, “that was connected to the fuel tank. The tube had marks on it and when you put the gas in the tank, the fuel would run into the tube. You could see the gas in the tube so it would tell you how much gas you had in your tank. You have to remember that was the deluxe stuff back then.

“When the war started, I worked with my dad in the garage. I was still young in 1939, but was just old enough to get into the draft. I was actually one of the last ones in Columbia County to get drafted in WWII, because my birthday was February 24. So you got the 25th, 26th, 27th, and the 28th-four more days left in February. On the 1st of March, they quit the drafting. I went to El Paso, Texas for basic training. When I got through with that, they shipped us to Camp Picatinny in New Jersey. They fixed us up with “over-seas shots,” they called them. Then they loaded us up on an old victory ship and we went to Norfolk, Virginia. I was part of the Hawaiian Artillery Command. We pulled in there and got 2,000 sailors. Then we left there and went down and around Cuba down to the Panama Canal. We went through the Panama Canal over to the Hawaiian Islands. It took 19 days to do that trip.

“Boy, what a ride that was! It was pretty neat going through the Panama Canal. When you got up to the top to the big lake up there, you could go a whole day crossing the canal route. Then when you got to the other side, you’d get to the first lock and let the water out [to] let you down.”



“So we got to the Hawaiian Islands. Then they loaded us up on one of them little trains they had over there. They had such a load on it; they

had put two engines on it to climb the hills to get us where we needed to go. Everybody that I took basic training with had to take extended basic training, and guess where they went - Korea, when they first started battling that place. There were 13 of us that didn’t have to go back. I was one of those 13. The reason I didn’t have to go, I was an auto mechanic. They needed someone in the motor pool there and the captain of the fort where I was made damn sure that I was there. Guess what, I stayed there. I got along good with the captain. He thought I was quite a character so he kept me there.

“The first thing that I had to do was clean up an old, two-and-a-half ton truck that was almost new. But from sitting outside all the time, it looked terrible, it ran terrible, the rims were terrible, and the brakes were terrible. They assigned that truck to me. That was MY truck to take care of. Most of the time when it had to go somewhere, I was the guy that had to drive it. So the Sargent ahead of me says, ‘You get that truck in and fix it up. It needs lots of work. First thing you gotta do is clean it up so you can paint it.’ I went over to the rack to clean it up. There were steam cleaners in the racks - two of them just alike and neither one of them worked. I asked them guys if I could fix one of them up to make it go. They asked,



Two ton army truck

‘how?’ I said, ‘Between the two of them, I could make one that runs.’ So I did, and it worked beautifully. I was cleaning up my vehicles; I had 45 to take care of. When I was in the motor pool, I was head mechanic. I didn’t have no big, major repairs but I had to grease the lines, change the oil, check the air in the tires, clean them, and if they weren’t running right, tune them up.

“I went over to the wash rag to clean up something one day and started looking for that steam cleaner. It was there but it must have been in a dozen pieces or more. Some damn fool put gas in it instead of fuel oil and when he tried to start it, because it had gas in it, when the gas got to the combustion chamber, the gas went, ‘KABOOM!’ Knocked the poor guy silly and he stayed in the hospital for a while. He’s lucky it didn’t kill him. Oh man, that was a mess. We never did have a steam cleaner after that.

“I got the truck all painted up, and the brakes didn’t work right but I knew what was going on. So I just took a wrench and tightened them up. I had to tighten all six of the brake lines, air up the tires, and tune up the motor. I cheated a little bit!” Marvin giggled to himself. “They had governors on them motors so they would shut off at 55 miles per hour. They put seals on them to try and keep you from messing with them, but I studied the seal long enough to figure out how to get to it. I took the carburetor off and there it was. It had a butterfly valve so it could open and close. It had two screws that held the butterfly valve in the motor case. I got them screws out of there and was very careful not to drop them down into the manifold. I had to also be careful that the butterfly valve didn’t fall either. A patch of weeds right out there,” Marvin says as he shakes his hand to the right, “that looks like a good place to store them. I put it back together so it didn’t look disturbed. After that, I could get that thing up to 80 mph.

One day, the guys that I was hauling were in the back end and wanted to know how the hell I learned how to drive a truck. But I never told them about the governor or the other stuff I had done to it. Ha Ha Ha..." Marvin's laugh was infectious and I couldn't help but join in.



GMC ad for the new army ducks

"I loved driving those two-and-a-half-ton trucks. They have the same chassis that are in them Ducks that are running around in the Dells. We did a big thing bringing them Ducks to the Dells. The guy that started them, Mel Flath,

called me up and says to me, 'Be ready to go at midnight or 2 AM, or whenever the first plane leaves out of Madison.'

"I ain't riding no damn air planes!' I told Mel."

"Well,' Mel says, 'get the first train out.' That came in at 2:20 AM. He says to me, 'You be on that train and you'll go to New York.'"

"I says, 'For what?'"

"Mel says, 'Well there's a Consolidated Truck and Bus Equipment Company and they got two Ducks listed in their brochure that they mail out. I want you to go out there and see what kind of shape they're in. When you find out, call me. If they're in good enough shape, why, we'll buy them. You can get right into one of them and drive it back.'

"I says, 'Ok.'

"I was on the train and gone at 2:00 AM. I got to New York, Grand Central Station. Now

that'd be a monster good station. When I got off the train, it was 7 or 8 PM. I was very tired, so I wanted to get me a hotel room and get some sleep. I get up early the next morning and went right up to the 17th floor of the high buildings where the Consolidated Truck and Bus Equipment Company was. There was no one to be found. Just as dead as could be. I'm wondering what the hell to do next.

"A janitor came down the hall. He says to me, 'Can I help you with something?'"

"I says, 'Yeah. What time do these guys open up?'"

"Oh,' he says, 'it's Monday morning and they have weekends off and party pretty good on [those days.] They usually don't make it in too early on Monday.'"

"I says, 'How long should I wait?'"

"Well...' the Janitor starts, 'I don't know but it'll be awhile.'"

"About what time?' I was starting to get impatient."

"Oh... It's seven o'clock in the morning now and it's gonna be 9:30, 10:30, or some time before noon,' the janitor assumed.

"Oh boy...' I thought. So I found something to sit on. Pretty soon a young lady came to work-a bookkeeper, I think. She had a key, opened the door, and went into the office. I followed her in. She looks at me and says, 'Something I can help you with?'"

"When does the boss get here?' I asked.

"She says, 'Well today is Monday and he normally doesn't get here too early.'

"Having already heard this story, I says, 'Yeah, when does he get here?'"

"Sometime after 10:30 AM,' she replied.

"So I waited and waited and waited. Pretty soon the Boss got there. I think it was about 11:00 AM. I told him what I wanted and he says to me, 'Good thing I brought my car to work today.'

"Why?' I asked him.

"Well,' the Boss says, 'the Ducks aren't in New York.'

"Where are they?' I questioned.

"They're up in Connecticut,' he said.

"I looked at him and says, 'How the hell are we going to get up there to see them?'"

"The Boss said, 'I brought my car to work today. Good thing! We can drive up there, take a look at them, and then we will go from there.'

"So he bid his secretary bye-bye and away we went. Down the elevator to street level, we get out front, go down into a hole to the subway, got on a train, and away we went. Well, I thought we went about 30 miles in that thing when he looks at me and says, 'This is our stop.' We got off of the train and up to the stairs to the street. We were still in New York.

"I looked confused and said, 'Where's the parking lot? Where's your car?'"

"Well that's over on the other side of the river.' The Boss says, 'here comes a bus. We have to get on that bus. He's going that way.'

"The bus pulled up, we jumped on, and away we went. We traveled about five miles, the bus stops, and we got off. 'The Hudson River is right down there,' the Boss says to me as I'm looking around, searching for the parking lot.

"Where is the parking lot?' I asked him.

"Oh, that's on the other side of the street. Here you can see it,' the Boss [says. He] points and waits for me to spot it, 'it's down in that low spot.'

"How do we get there?' I asked him.

"We go down these stairs here, go under the bridge, walk to the parking lot, and we can go.' His reply seemed easy enough.

"We went down the stairs, under the bridge, walked to the car, and away we were to Connecticut. We make it to the Connecticut border, keep going until we reach the Atlantic Ocean, and there was the Ducks. Still in the car, I took one look and said, 'Those are complete junk. I don't even want to get out and look at them. Just forget it. Ain't you got something better for me to look at?' I asked. Away we went again.

"We got to an old house with stuff all around it. We drove slowly along the side and behind the house. In the back yard was a wide-open [space] where new army equipment was being stored. This guy, and I think it was his brother, had this black market deal going on.



"Junker" duck like Marvin saw

He was a general in the Army so he could order whatever he wanted. What would you suppose that he had? Two brand new Ducks. I mean these were brand spanking new. One only had four miles on it and the other only had three miles on it. They were so clean, you could drop your dinner on the floor of the hall and not be afraid to lick it up. I was excited about these.

'Boy, how much do you want for these?'

"The Boss from the Consolidated Truck and Bus Equipment Company says, '\$3,500.'

"I thought that was a good price so I called my boss, Mel, back in the Dells. He said, 'That is way too much. Let me talk to the guy.' I could hear them haggling over the price and, all of a sudden, I was handed the phone. 'I got them down to \$2,500,' Mel stated. I again thought that was a really good deal, especially because they were brand new. 'That's a little bit too much for them Ducks. I got two more for you to look at.'

"Where are they?' I asked him.

"Champagne, Illinois. You are going to go out there and see what those are like.' He told me.

"Ok,' I said. So the guy gave me a ride to the bus station up there in Connecticut.

"I get on the Greyhound bus and go to Illinois. When I got to Champagne, what do you think [happened]? It looked like someone air dropped those two Ducks from Connecticut into Illinois. I looked at the man and said, 'Those are junk! I don't even want to get out and see them.'

"I called the boss back in the Dells and he told me to come on home. I get settled at home and he calls me up, 'Be ready at midnight.'

"No!' I told him. I had just gotten home and didn't want to leave right away.

"He says to me, 'We got some more ducks for you to look at. We are going to Springfield, Illinois. They got a bunch of 'em down there.'

"I just got home,' I pleaded to him.

"His reply was, 'We have to go at midnight because the auction's tomorrow and we have to be there.'

"Okay, go without me,' I told him.

"No, no,' he says. 'You gotta go too, okay? Have your little toolbox on the front porch. We'll pick you up at midnight.' Midnight came around and I went out to his car. He looks at me and says, 'Where does the banker live?'

"A couple blocks over,' I replied. What would you know? We went over, woke the banker up, and took him along.

"We went down to Springfield, Illinois and on the west side of town was where the auction was being held. They had an ordinance down there where they had tons and tons of Army stuff. They were having an auction because most of it was used. 'They got a bunch of ducks over here,' the boss says as he points us towards the rows of Ducks.



Brand new army duck

"We went over to look at them to see if they were worth our time. They weren't too bad. There was a man there named Hambone that I started to ask about the ducks. 'Hey Hambone, how much do these ducks go for?'

"Them Linskey guys from the Twin Cities were here last month and bought everyone that we had,' he tells us.

"How much did they buy them for?' I asked Hambone.

"Oh man,' he exclaims, 'they only paid a \$180 a piece for them!'

"How much is it going to cost us if we bid on them?' I asked Hambone again.

"He tells me, 'If you bid \$190- \$195, you're gonna get 'em.'

"The boss wanted a few good ones. So he wanted to bid \$250 across the board for the Ducks that were up for auction. There were a couple of guys that wanted a specific one. One guy bid \$1,000. When you win the bid, you get to pick as many as you want at that price. Once those couple of guys got the ones they wanted, my boss paid \$250 for the rest of them, which ended up being 65 ducks.

"I says to him, 'Jumping Christ Mel! How are you going to get all them Ducks back to the Dells?'

"He looked right straight at me and says, 'Ha ha... That's your job!' Now I'm a whole 19 years old and that was my job - to figure out how I was getting 65 Army Ducks up to the Dells. 'Well,' he adds, 'you pick one Duck out of the bunch that has a good running gear, it's rusted, got holes in the tank, and beat up a little.'

"Okay, what am I going to do with it?' I was confused.

"That's the one we are going to take and drive to the Dells. Then we are going to have Norm build a wrecker on the back of it and cut some of the excess iron off. You're gonna use that to tow the rest of them back.'

"That is what we did from the 1st of July, 1949 'til November of that year. All you could see of me was going back and forth from the Dells to Springfield, Illinois and back,' Mel explained.

"The cops stopped me. The cop looks at me and says, 'Where are the license plates?'

"I ain't got none.' I replied.

"Well you need license plates to do what you're

doing. I've been watching you for a couple of months now,' he says. 'You're going by here quite often with one of them. You gotta have a license plate.'

"I says, 'Well when I get home, I'll tell the boss and he can do what he has to do.'

"If I catch you again down here without a license plate, you're the guy going to jail, not him,' the cop identified.

"Okay,' I said to the trooper.

"So I got home and told the boss, 'You gotta get me a license plate for that truck. The state trooper stopped me and I'm gonna go to jail if there ain't a license plate.'

"Okay,' the boss says, 'we'll have it.'

"So the boss went and bought a brand new '49 Ford. When I was coming back from Springfield to Bloomington one day, I see his Ford way back behind me. When I looked in the rear view mirror, I wondered why that car was following me, because he was behind me quite awhile. I'm just about to Bloomington and that car pulled up alongside of me, blowing his horn. He was waving at me to pull over. So I pulled over and stopped. There was the boss of the Ducks.

"He comes up alongside of the truck and says to me, 'Hey Marv. How fast you driving this thing?'

"Oh, I'm running along 50-55 mph.' I replied.

"The hell you are. I have been following you for 15-20 miles and you haven't been under 72!' Mel laughed.

"Then he takes a post card out of his breast pocket and hands it to me. He told me that he went up to the state capitol and got it signed by the Governor. The card said that I had permission to run that thing that I was driving

until we got all them Ducks out of Springfield to the Dells. I could go anywhere in Illinois and if a state trooper were to stop me, all I had to do was show them that card. They would read what was on it and tell me to go ahead. And that's what happened. I got going along and them damn, old cops stopped me.

"Where's your license plate?" The officer asked me.

"Right here," I replied to him.

"He took the post card, read what was on it, handed it back to me, and says, 'Go on get out of here. We don't want nothing to do with you.' So whatever was on that card, they didn't even look at me anymore.

"I got through hauling all them Ducks by November of '49, right when it was starting to get cold. After I got all of those Ducks, I went to a few surrounding states, checking them out for Mel. I drove Ducks to the Dells from 1949 all the way to 1992.

"One of the last Duck adventures that I went on was [when] my nephew wanted me to go with him to get a couple of Ducks from Branson, Missouri. They needed to haul two Ducks and

only wanted to make one trip. They had 48 feet of Ducks to haul and only a 32-foot trailer. 'Oh, that's no problem,' I told him. So I went along to show them how to do it."

A little while after bringing the Ducks to the Dells, Marvin met his wife, Nancy, while working at his family's garage and tow-truck service. Marvin and Nancy had five girls throughout their marriage. Marvin was an influential community member in Wisconsin Dells, which made his wedding "quite a large one," as Marvin described it. He went on to run his own tow truck and started the Wisconsin Towing Association, which he has been running strong for 48 years now. Marvin was also a very active member of the Delton Fire Department, which he proudly displays his apron with the fire department's symbol on it.

I take a second to look at Marvin, trying to digest the amazing story he just told me. Marvin, was wearing a white t-shirt, with a black zip-up to keep warm, black sweat pants, and comfortable slippers. His hair was like the original off-white paint of an old Ford that has been stored in a weathered barn for years. He sat in his throne like he was king of the world... or at least king of his wing.



Marvin and Liz

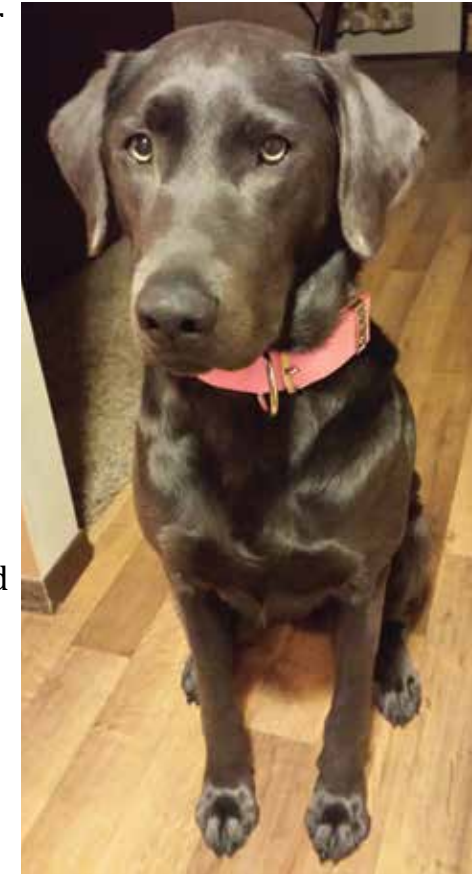
Spotlight on Char

By Abigail Schenker

Sauk County Health Care Center has a very special employee. Char, a 2 year old, charcoal Labrador, works in the therapy department. Char is delighted to greet any person coming through the door, and her beaming personality really lightens up the mood. Going to therapy is an integral part of life for many residents at the health care center and seeing a happy-go-lucky dog makes therapy much more enjoyable. Impressively, Char has mastered the basic obedience, advanced obedience, and Canine Good Citizen training courses.

Char lives with her human mom, Jennifer Eggers, when she's not at work. Jennifer is the Sauk County Health Care Center's Speech-Language Pathologist and Rehab Department Manager. Eggers loves to work with people and always knew she would work in the treatment or care of others. She was trained in Speech-Language Pathology at University of Wisconsin Madison.

When Eggers first started working at the Health Care Center, her boss would bring a dog to work in the therapy room. She knew firsthand just how beneficial animal interaction can be for



residents. Eggers has always wanted a puppy, but she was apprehensive because of her busy schedule. If she got a dog that worked well in the therapy room, then she could just bring her dog to work. The administrator, Kim Gochanour, was completely on board with the plan.

Char has really made an impact in the therapy room at the Health Care Center. She's a good ice breaker between staff, residents and visitors who are interested in animals. People, who would not normally come to therapy, will stop by just to say "Hi" to Char - and of course she loves the company! Char offers motivation and encouragement for those



residents who are less than thrilled with their therapy tasks. Many residents have had to leave behind beloved pets when they move to the Health Care Facility. Char offers a sense of companionship that people often crave.

Most importantly, though, Char makes people smile. As Eggers explains, Char brings "smiles to resident's

faces who often have little left to live for but can still find enjoyment being around her." Char's energy is sure to cheer up anyone!

Meet Paul Asp

By Joshua Hess

Meet Paul Asp. Friendly and open, Paul is welcoming and curious about everyone around him. He acknowledges everyone passing by shouting out “Hey! Hey! Hey!” Paul is unique and eloquent in the way he talks and sees the world. Wearing glasses and sitting in his chair, Paul looks out the window and says “It looks like war outside,” referring to the dark and dreary winter day. On this cold spring day Paul and I shared a laugh about life and carried on a conversation. As we were talking, we discussed my work and how I have three jobs and go to school full time. Paul, smiling, then said that I need to get a job. He then waived over one of the nurses and asked them if they had any work I could do because I’m in need of a job, according to Paul. He clearly has a sense of humor.

Paul sits in his chair, wearing khakis, leather shoes, and polo shirt with his name “Paul” monogrammed across the right side of his chest. Paul’s eyes are blue and full of lightning-like energy, with many tales of his life burning within them. He enjoys sitting in his chair, usually at the table with all of the ladies. When I asked Paul what he enjoyed most about life, he simply said “All of it.” As we looked out the windows, I thought of how each person makes decisions and lives how they think they should. Paul has wisdom in his eyes and he is content in his home, sitting and thinking about it all. He says, “There is much I don’t understand in this crazy world.” A sentiment I share.

As we sat, Paul noticed all the nurses and aides moving around, arranging tables and food for dinner. He commented, “It doesn’t really look

like they’re doing anything.” I couldn’t help but laugh. They were doing things for other people, busy helping others as he had for so long.

“There is much I don’t understand in this crazy world.”

Paul spent many years as a treasurer at Bell Savings and Loan, and Pacific Garden Mission. He grew

up farming and says he is satisfied with his life. Paul is widowed and he and his wife raised one child. He came from a large family though, having ten brothers and two sisters. Only one still lives - one of his sisters. As a tried and true soul, Paul has endured many things in life. At times Paul muses that he would like to be doing something more than sitting at the care center, possibly still working or handling investments for the Pacific Garden Mission. But, he has earned this rest.

Pleased with having meals prepared for him, Paul asked if I could read to him what was on the board for dinner because he couldn’t see what it said. Content with the menu, Paul asked if I’d be joining him for dinner. I said no because I had plans to go out with my mom that night. Besides eating meals and sitting with others, I asked him what he likes to do. He laughed. I then said “What about playing cards? We could play cards together.” He declined. I gathered the sense Paul enjoys sitting and pondering life. He is happy with that.

Paul enjoys it when people stop by and talk with him. He is charming and open for conversation. Every time I crack a joke, his eyes gleam brightly and a grin paints his face from ear to ear, simply satisfied with the connection we share. While we were talking, an aide stopped by with a

snack for Paul. He had a choice of three different pastries; he chose the devil’s food cookies. As he ate them slowly and enjoyed the rich cake flavor, I wondered what else could we talk about or do. So I told him that outside of my studies and work, I’m an artist. I said I simply like making things. I explained what I like to do with my art and how I make it to this former banker and he listened. It struck me that Paul and I have lived two completely different lives. I couldn’t handle being a banker, whereas Paul spent most of his life doing it. Even now Paul’s day is much different than the life I’m accustomed to. I’m always looking for something to do, whereas Paul sits and takes it all in, pleased with what he’s seen and experienced, enjoying his friends. He listens and asks questions. Paul asked why I was interviewing him. I explained the project and I added, “Having a good time with you.” He was pleased to hear it.

When I asked Paul’s son about what he’d like to see in his father’s memoir he said “We think the world of him.” Paul has strong faith. He was a member of Pacific Garden Mission for thirty-one years. As a devout Baptist, Paul goes to weekly services at the Sauk County Health Care Center. He never smoked or drank, relying on his faith to carry him through life. Paul is quite the character, according to his son. I agree; Paul stands out as a model for how great people can be. His honesty and faith say a lot about who he is.

Paul knows life. He has been through all

sorts of experiences, ranging from his time in the service to spending his years attending services and devoting himself to the Lord. At first take, I wasn’t sure what to expect when I met Paul. Though throughout our talks, I found that Paul Asp is truly a character with character. Paul is funny and open, two admirable qualities. His life is full of caring people at the Health Care Center and he has family who love him. His family were happy to hear that I had spoken with Paul and am writing a memoir about him.

Growing up in Thief River Falls, Minnesota, Paul has many stories about his life throughout the years. Paul started out farming and was later actively involved with the banking industry. He has lived a marvelous life, staying close to his faith and his honesty. Those things alone got him as far as he’s come today. Always kind and friendly, Paul is a wonderful person. As I go through my experiences in life, I’m seeing how much every person can truly influence you. In Paul’s case, it’s about putting a smile on someone’s face and showing them that they are important.



Helping Hands

By Lizbeth Teasdale

Kim Gochanour has recognized the importance and need to take care of the elderly through many life experiences. Having been dealt the unfortunate card of losing her father, due to a car accident, two weeks before her second birthday, she knows loss. Kim's mother moved from Wisconsin Dells back to Iowa to move back in with Kim's grandparents in order to get back on her feet. Just when Kim's mother was able to stand alone, Kim's grandfather was disabled from an unfortunate car accident. Kim's mother took on the role of caregiver to her grandfather. The silver lining of this story is that Kim grew up around older people. Kim says she has a natural affinity for the elderly.

When Kim first went to college, she wanted to be a pharmacist. Through many degree changes, Kim discovered that health care administration was the right fit for her. "I have to say that this has been a life passion; to provide quality healthcare to the elderly."

Kim did not start out at the Sauk County Health Care Center; she worked in Madison and a few places in Indiana before moving back to the area. "A friend of mine told me of the opening at Sauk County Health Care Center and knew that I always had a desire to return to this area. After reading about them and talking to area people, I felt that this was the type of place where I would like to work," Kim recalls. She started working for Sauk County Health Care Center when they were still in the old building.

Kim has a lot of good memories working at the health care center. She admits that it is a wonderful place to work because the staff and residents are truly family. "I think my best memory is when we were in the process

of moving to the new building. The overall cooperation and teamwork displayed by the residents, families, staff and community. It was an awesome day! All [of the residents] were moved in to the new facility and settled in their new rooms with cookies baking on each of the neighborhoods by 2pm that day. It was like we had been here for years!" Kim reminisces.

The advice that Kim has is to be open-minded. Many things in health care change daily. Be flexible and realize that your day will never go as planned. You need to be able to have a sense of business, human resources, social work, customer service, mechanical skills, and infection control to succeed in this industry. "This position is truly a Jack-of-all-trades," Kim explains.

One thing that Kim wants people to know is how the county has recognized the importance and need to take care of the elderly. "Some places are not in the long-term care business for the right reasons and only for potential profit, but Sauk County is not one of them!"



Kim talking with one of the front desk ladies, photograph taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy)

The Life of a Farm Wife

By Abigail Schenker

We sat together one sunny morning and looked out the sun room windows. She was warm and friendly and welcomed my curiosity, but she didn't want me to use her name. I had some questions prepared, but I really just wanted to get to know this Farm Wife for who she is. As a modest, hardworking woman, she worried that her story wouldn't be interesting enough. But, the advice of a retired farm wife is exactly what the world needs. If there is anyone's experience we should listen to, it is the experience of the person who knows how to work hard and love their family. Our Farm Wife prides herself on these qualities.

Farm Wife's journey started with a marriage at the tender age of 19. The young couple moved from Delevan to Mauston after the acquisition of a farm, spending the following years tending to dairy cows. They had 29 cows; the breeds varied, but Holsteins were predominant. Farm Husband worked a second job, as a truck driver, and while he was away, Farm Wife cared for the farm. She fed and hand milked the whole herd!



"An Example of a Purebred Holstein" Photo taken at the T. Christensen Ranch



"Milking the Cows" Photo taken 1929 Juda, WI

Farming wasn't her only job, though. She also gave birth to 5 beautiful babies during the early years of the farm. Tending to a herd of cows AND caring for 5 young children sounds utterly exhausting! But to Farm Wife, this was just her everyday life. As proof of her hard working lifestyle, Farm Wife has a prosthetic knee. Her knee just couldn't hold up under all the physical stress and she needed a replacement.

If there is one thing that Farm Wife wanted to teach her children, it was that you must "work for what you have." This shouldn't be a lesson reserved specifically for her children, though. Being able to work hard and having the tenacity to get the things you want in life is important to anyone. In a generation of lazy, technology and junk-food addicted kids, it's easy to see that this ideal has gone by the wayside. The new generations obsess over immediate gratification and, consequently, their work ethic is suffering. We both expressed concern for how this will affect the future. It seems like a huge problem for two Wisconsin women to solve, but we can do our part by teaching children the value of hard work over laziness.

Based on what I know about Farm Wife's children and grandchildren, she most certainly taught them the value of hard work. Her son worked diligently to expand their dairy operation and they currently have 350 cattle at two different locations! Her grandson, in addition to some in-laws, have taken over the farming business. They've made great efforts to ensure their farm continues, despite the ever-changing market. With a significant technology boom, there is a huge shift from farming industries to technological industries. As competition increases, many family farms lose business and corporate farms begin to dominate. Nothing but hard work and perseverance could maintain a successful, family-owned dairy operation in today's world. That's an accomplishment that Farm Wife takes pride in.

Above all else, Farm Wife wants people to remember that their family is most important.

I asked Farm Wife what kind of legacy she would like to leave behind. Instead of a grandiose plan, Farm Wife replied with a simple answer that we can all understand. Above all else, Farm Wife wants people to remember that their family is most important. It's important to unconditionally support and love your family because when everything has fallen apart, they are what you have left. Having this kind of support system has given her children and grandchildren an environment in which they can flourish.

I could feel the love that Farm Wife has for her children and grandchildren because when she talked about them her smile was especially warm and her eyes bright. She's proud of their accomplishments and cherishes the time she can spend with them. When I went back to

the Health Care Center to see Farm Wife for a second time, her daughter was there visiting. She was on her way out when I arrived, but I could tell they have a special relationship.

Creating an environment which revolves around the family unit started back when Farm Wife and Farm Husband were new parents. When their children were still too young to go to school, Farm Husband quit his trucking job.

A herd of cows and a crew of children was too much for one woman. His choice to quit a good job and help his wife at the homestead was a choice that exemplifies the notion of putting family first.

But, there are fears that come with close family bonds. What happens when someone gets hurt? Will my kids be successful? Will they make the right choices?

Farm Wife recounted a few moments of parenting when she was especially frightened. She remembers a time that one of the kids, when they were still young, started a fire in the barn. She doesn't remember how the fire started, but she surely remembers the adrenaline rush of a possible catastrophe! Luckily, Farm Wife quickly extinguished the fire with burlap sacks before things got out of control. There were definitely punishments handed out that day.

She remembers another terrifying incident that happened on a winter vacation at the lake. Farm Wife took her attention away for just a second, and the next thing she knew, her 2 year old toddler was no longer in sight. In fact, she had gotten outside, crossed the street, and was about to walk out on the ice! Farm wife vividly

remembers the panic when she realized her toddler was missing and the terror upon realizing the danger in which her toddler was.

She was determined to carry on for the sake of her remaining family.

into creating a loving and supportive family because after a gut wrenching loss like that, you need someone. You need someone there to love you and support you

and to help you pick up the pieces. Farm Wife was not so lucky when she lost one of her children in an automobile accident. He was 27. Farm Wife lost another son to a stroke at age 51. This is every mother's worst nightmare, and this Farm Wife had to live through it twice. It's torturous to try to understand the loss of a child. Years later, as I talked with Farm Wife, I asked her what fate's terrible hand of cards has taught her about life. She replied with teary eyes and a crack in her voice, "It still doesn't make sense."

I can't think of a more important time to have your family around than when we experience loss. She was smart to invest so much energy

That afternoon, we could hear the hustle of lunch being prepared and I knew that I needed to wrap up our visit. I was pleasantly surprised that our experiences (of work, of family, of grief) weren't lost between generations. At a strong 90 years old, Farm Wife doesn't even live at the Health Care Facility. She was staying there while she healed from a broken foot. Farm Wife is impressively healthy, and she manages her own cooking and chores. She is eager to return home where she enjoys reading and quilting in her free time.



Patty Dix

By Joshua Hess



Patty Dix is well known around the Sauk County Health Care Center. She served as a CNA for the first eighteen years, and as the Medical Records Supervisor for the last twenty-two years. Patty has many stories to tell about her forty years of work at the Sauk County Health Care Center, some of which

include my grandpa, who worked alongside her for many years.

Patty is very friendly. I gathered that she is truly genuine and really cares about her work and the residents. Her favorite part about the job, in fact, is the residents. She enjoys seeing them come out of rehab, strong and willing to take on the world. She informed me that, in 1974, the previous location of the Sauk County Health Care Center housed 380 residents.

They worked on the farm, prepared meals, and helped with the upkeep of the buildings. Things have changed however, with only eighty-two beds at the new location. Their meals are prepared for them daily and the rest of the work is done by staff and caregivers. It must have been a much different atmosphere back when her and my grandpa worked together.

“Oh, Marty? He’d always come up and give me hug,” responded Patty when I asked if she remembered working with my grandpa.

There are many great things about the Sauk County Health Care Center. The care level provided is one of them. The only way this is possible is with the help of a great staff. Patty is wonderful and I’m pleased to have gotten the opportunity to sit down and talk with her about her life and experiences at the Sauk County Health Care Center.



Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). Stained glass window room at the Sauk County Health Care Center



The Story of Leon Sturdevant: The Man, the Legend, and the Honest Truth

By Timothy A. Wohlers

As I stepped onto the premises, it was cold. There was a familiarity in the air. I knew I had a long day ahead, but I was up for the challenge. I sat down and began listening as Leon reminisced similar sentiments from his childhood growing up on the farm just southeast of the Wisconsin Dells...

It was a cold day in April. The clock read 5:00am. There was a scent in the air – one Leon had woken up to for the last 23 years. The bouquet of alfalfa, hay, and cow manure possessed the capability of turning roses into tulips. But to Leon, it was the smell of home. As he had been driving a tractor across his family’s well-fertilized fields since age twelve, Leon was well accustomed to the aroma.



Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). Farm field across from Sauk County Health Care Center



Thirty minutes later, one could find Leon out in the barn, giving the cows their morning milking. This often took place long before first light. After that, he would not need

Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). Stained-glass window in common room of Sauk County Healthcare Center

to milk the dozen or so beasts again until just before supper. From the moment he finished breakfast, though, Leon was only spared a precious hour and a half before the milkman arrived. And six hours later would mark the fateful time at which the mailman arrived, bearing the news that would forever change Leon’s life.

Leon opened the letter in disbelief – he had been drafted into the United States Army. After eight weeks of basic training, Leon was placed in transportation-specific training. Although this was supposed to last eight weeks as well, Leon was withdrawn halfway through the program. It is at this juncture that he learned of his order to serve in Korea, where Leon would spend the next thirteen months of his life. *Well, at least the fighting and combat is over, Leon thought. Plus, I won’t have to milk cows anymore. Heck, maybe I’ll even get to sleep in a little,* he mused.

Waking up at four in the morning one year later, however, Leon realized that this was not the case. In fact, military life was much worse than farm life in Leon’s eyes. He hated how officers made “you do everything by the numbers,” Leon criticized. Sure, the day was shorter. But at least on the farm, he didn’t have to scrub giant pots and pans whose purity had been tainted by careless superiors. This is what Leon found himself doing as part of KP, or the kitchen police.

“KP – that was the kitchen police; that is what it was called. You gotta wash dishes and scrub the floor – all that kind of stuff [...] You’d be in there before breakfast would start,” Leon recalled. “They have different jobs in there,” he said. “One person done the dining room [,] two people was on the front sink – that was to wash the dishes [, and] the other one was on the back



Photo by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). "Dirty Dishes"

sink – which was the pots and pans [...] That was the hardest part," Leon confessed. He endured this way until the United States Army brought him help. When the South Koreans arrived on

base, it spelled the end of kitchen duty for Leon. He was no longer a dishwasher; he was now a driver.

When he wasn't on guard duty, Leon's main assignment was to transport supplies and personnel to the different military post exchanges – or PX's, as they called them. These were essentially "stores, and that's where you'd buy everything. You had to go to them," Leon admitted. One fateful day, however, Leon received rather unique commands.

"You, you, you, and you," Leon remembered the officer saying, "have to go to building [so and so]." Those were the only instructions the men were given.

Upon stepping out of the transport van, Leon and the others were informed that the company needed "Secret Service Drivers," and that they were the ones chosen for the job. Leon was forced to take a test and provide three or four references from back home. The test proved to be simple arithmetic, at least for Leon. The references, he thought, were just a formality and would never even be checked. It wasn't until Leon returned from Korea that he realized how wrong he was. For once he arrived back home, Leon discovered that the military had not only checked his references, but also requested return letters from them. *Whatever a Secret Service Driver is, it must be important*, Leon thought.

A few weeks later, Leon and company were called back. The officer said, "Well, your

references [are] good, so you're a driver." From then on, Leon had a new job title as one of the most entrusted men in the Army. He found the process rather amusing, though, as he doubted he would ever be called upon to transport anything secretive. Again, Leon was mistaken.

One day, Leon again received the orders to "go to camp 'so and so,'" he recollected. "Building number 'so and so.'" Leon didn't question any further. He knew he must be sensible when dealing with such sensitive matters. But Leon did wonder, *How am I going to find what building number it is?* Luckily for him, though, the building was the metaphorical "first house on the left."

"So I just drove in like this and [...] here it is right there," Leon recalled, surprised by his own fortune. Once inside said building, Leon was brought up to speed. He was needed for a special delivery to another military post.

"Okay," Leon remembered the officer telling him, "here's two men that are going to go with you now. One's gonna ride in the back of the truck and the other's gonna ride in the front of the truck – with you."

Leon looked at the two men and paused – they were both Korean. Plus, "They both had loaded weapons," Leon added. He did not. Yet surprisingly, this predicament pressed on Leon's mind the least. His social acceptance was light-years beyond that of many of his generation. The most pressing query, rather, was the nature of his cargo. Surely, whatever it was, the payload was precious. But what could it be?

"Only thing I hauled was a cardboard box," Leon divulged. And with two armed Koreans accompanying him, he knew that the contents of the box had been deemed important by somebody. Although the label read "coat hangers," Leon contended, "You know very well it wasn't no box of coat hangers." In fact, Leon

believed that the actual cargo likely proved much smaller. "Some document or something," Leon figured. Without having seen inside, however, he would never find out. "I always thought about that," Leon confessed. *What was in that box?* he wondered. Perhaps Leon, as well as the rest of the world, will never know...

"But that's the only time I ever did a secret run," he claimed. Leon downplayed the honor bestowed upon him, but conceded that "the other service drivers never did any secret runs." This means that Leon may very well have made the only "secret-service" run in the history of the Korean occupation. When this thought was expressed, Leon simply shrugged his shoulders. "Why they chose me, I don't know," he pretended. His humility would not permit Leon to accept what he considered undue gratitude – an act very telling of his personality.



The newlyweds, Mr. and Mrs. Sturdevant

In 1960, Leon returned home from Korea. A month later, he got married to the love of his life. Indeed, Leon remembered his honeymoon as the best experience in his life. He and his bride spent the weekend camping and getting in touch with nature. "We'd go and pick cherries," Leon recalls fondly. "Only bad part about that was, once we got home, we had to pit all the cherries," he jested.

Like every other draftee, Leon had to spend two years in the Ready Reserve. "In '61, I got called back in," he lamented. For during this ten-month term, Leon was stationed in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Here, there was no one to the dishes

for him. But life was far better in North Carolina than in Korea. For in Korea, Leon's wife did not live on base with him – as she did in North Carolina.

Leon remembered his elation when the officers told him and his fellow comrades, "Now anybody that's married, if you want your wife down here, you can live on post with them."

Married and in the military, Leon revealed. *Maybe military life isn't all that bad, after all*, he thought. And indeed, it was not.

Leon remembered his ten months in North Carolina as some of the best times of his life. After a couple instances of being called into work on the weekends, Leon learned that he should leave base if he valued his time off. "So I would always wanna go somewheres on Friday night and be gone on Saturday – so they couldn't call me in," Leon quipped.

It was with this revelation that Leon and his wife began taking road trips. During those ten months, the couple traveled to South Carolina, Florida, Virginia, Ohio, Washington, D.C., and numerous other tourist destinations. One particular drive to Florida stuck out in Leon's mind, as well as his wife's. "We went as far as you can go into Key West and back. That's a seven-mile bridge – from Florida to the Keys. And the wife got a little nervous going over that long bridge," Leon admitted.

{ "You don't go around the mountains," he declared, "you go through 'em..." }

Later in the trip, after coming back up from Florida, the two ventured into the infamous

terrain of Virginia. “You don’t go around the mountains,” Leon declared, “you go through ‘em. The roads are tunneled underneath the mountain.” He remembered the serious demeanor of the guards at the entrance. However, the sentries’ image of security proved to be a sham, as the guardians simply waved through Leon and his wife. Aside from faulty security and “bridal anxiety,” the newlyweds found the drives to be deeply satisfying. Also, without knowing it, Leon had been practicing the skill that would serve as his future career.

By the time President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in November of 1963, Leon had begun his career as a milk truck driver. He remembered that historic day well. In the moments after the assassination, Leon was delivering goods to the canning factory in Reedsburg. He even recalled the specific words the workers said to him as he walked in the door. “They turned to me as soon as they see me and said, ‘President Kennedy was just shot,’” Leon recollected, remembering how shocking the news was. Still, Leon was one of the last to know. “Well that’s the first I knew it, you know. So he was probably shot already an hour or two before I heard it. Yeah, I remember that day real well,” Leon said softly. He described the perspicuous experience as if half a century’s passing had little effect on the credibility of such a traumatic memory.

Later in the 60’s, Leon procured a job with Goober Bros. in Baraboo – again, delivering milk. The part of that job which stands out most in Leon’s mind is the ridiculous size of his loads. “That was with a big truck with a van on it,” Leon



Photo taken and produced by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy).
John F. Kennedy

recalled, “and I’d have the truck loaded full.” One day, his load almost proved a little too full.

“There was this one day,” Leon began, “it cleared the roof – they had it way overloaded,” Leon observed. But he wasn’t the only one to take notice. After making a brief stop in Portage, Leon noticed the red and blue flashing lights.

“I think you’re overloaded,” he remembered the officer accusing him. But Leon wasn’t one to get pushed around.

“Oh, I don’t think so,” Leon replied. He was slightly nervous, and for good reason. “Back then, they had these portable scales and they put them behind the wheel - the back wheel - and you’d back up on ‘em,” he explained. Leon knew all too well that scale did not lie, nor could it be bribed to do so. He was prepared to accept the inevitable ticket, and perhaps the consequence of dumping his load. But it was not to be.

“Oh, well I guess you aren’t,” Leon remembered the officer exclaiming. “I thought for sure you was way overloaded,” the officer remarked, obviously disappointed. He would have to meet his quota elsewhere. The cop scratched his head and left.

Leon knew he was extremely fortunate in that he had to deliver to Portage first. “Cuz I had stopped to get rid of some. When I had started out, I was overloaded,” Leon chuckled. By unloading his truck, Leon had inadvertently ruined the officer’s day. The cargo that put him over the limit was no longer in back. *Sorry, Officer,* Leon thought. *But these are not the bottles you seek.*



Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). Traditional-style dairy transportation vehicle

Leon’s life then took an unexpected turn in 1975. “I had this one tire that was bad,” Leon recalled, “so they took it off. That night I got done, they took it off. They put on another one, but they put on a recap. Well the tire should’ve never been recapped. You could see by the size of it that it wasn’t a good tire. But anyway, they put that on and they had it loaded,” he remembered. The massive load, in conjunction with a faulty tire, exacted its toll near Oconomowoc.

“All of a sudden,” Leon recited, “the truck started shifting.” Leon emphatically demonstrated the motion of the milk truck with his hands. “And the weight – stacked up high like that,” Leon added, did not help. “Every time I’d swerve, I’d lean a little more into it. I thought I was gonna hold it,” he commented. “But all of a sudden, one time, it went over on its side. Once it went over, it seemed to me the cab was never stopping,” Leon described, recalling the death roll the truck had entered. He remembered vividly the force with which he was manhandled in the driver’s compartment. “Of course, then they didn’t have seatbelts,” Leon revealed. “I was just hanging on the steering wheel. And I mean, I was holdin’ onto that thing so tight. It was just going around and around. The truck went around so many times and it pulled on me so hard – all my body,” Leon recalled painfully. Amazingly, the truck landed upright. Yet years later, he could still hear the milk bottles crashing together in back.

Astoundingly, the driver’s compartment of Leon’s truck made it out of the accident unscathed. The steering wheel, however, looked nothing like its former self. “The cab never got hurt,” Leon reported. “But the steering wheel was sure bent,” he revealed. The structure had been crushed by Leon’s willpower to survive, as the steering wheel provided his only reprieve from the force of repeated collisions.

Leon painted a graphic picture of the moments just after the accident. “When it stopped, it was

on its wheels. But the van...” Leon said with remorse. “It’s just like they took a chainsaw and – right at the floor – just sawed the sides of it off. That’s what it looked like,” Leon described. He could hear the loud trickling of a creek somewhere nearby. “That’s just what it sounded like, was a little crick kinda going downhill,” Leon recounted. It wasn’t until Leon assessed the ultimate damage that he discovered this swift stream was his payload. He looked down into the median at the river of milk. *So much for that delivery,* Leon thought.

Fortunately, Leon was not the only one on the interstate that day. “Somebody was following me and, of course, he stopped,” Leon related. “He saw it happen, you know,” Leon continued, “and he was tellin’ me [about the accident].”

Leon remembered the man saying, “I thought you was gonna hold that.” The man then described the horrific scene that took place before his very eyes. He said, “It just rolled and rolled and rolled.”



Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy).
“Spilled Milk”

Shortly after, police arrived on the scene. “See, at the time,” Leon explained, “the police had these station wagons and they could be used for an ambulance, too. And so that’s what they did.” Leon described his fortune in that

he had a witness nearby. “Someone radioed it in – probably the guy following me,” Leon assumed. “Now here comes this police car, with his whistle blowin’, in a van,” Leon recounted. He remembered the words he spoke when the officer approached him just after the horrendous crash. “My back hurts awful bad,” Leon had sputtered. He recalled the officer helping him walk down to the ambulance – yes, walk down to the ambulance. Such was Leon. No near-death experience could slow this soul.

As the two men were preparing to leave the scene of the accident, Leon remembered that he had personal belongings inside the truck compartment. He relayed this to the officer and proceeded back to his truck. “He never went back with me,” Leon said of the officer. “He stayed there while I went up to the truck again. I got the box, carried it back down there – all alone,” Leon noted. Once back at the ambulance, the officer laid Leon down on a stretcher.

Leon reflected on his feelings of immobility after being laid out on the pallet. “When he laid me down on a stretcher, that was it. Once I got laid down on that, all I could do was raise my head a little bit. Otherwise, I couldn’t even get up,” Leon recounted. He was then driven by police car to the Oconomowoc hospital, where doctors informed Leon of some unfortunate news.

“You got a couple fractured vertebrae,” Leon remembered the doctors informing him. But instead of pursuing immediate medical attention, those same doctors simply left Leon out in the hallway – on a cot – for the next eight and a half hours.

“There I lay – dead,” Leon recalled. He described the excruciating pain. “It felt like the bottom of the bed was pullin’ on my back,” he graphically recounted, “and that hurt.” He remembered not only the pain, but also the hunger. Leon had not eaten since five in the morning. At that point, “It

was five thirty at night,” he recollected.

Having possibly heard his ferociously growling stomach, a nurse stopped by to address Leon’s hunger. “I’ll see if I can’t find something soft for you,” Leon recalled her promising him.



Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). “Chicken Pasta”

Minutes later, the nurse returned with a plateful of chicken tetrazzini. “I never liked it before,” Leon admitted. “But I was so hungry, I tied into that. Boy, I just cleaned that plate right up,” he confessed. He told of how the experience changed his taste. “Since then, I’ve always liked it,” Leon acknowledged. Perhaps the cheesy pasta reminds him

of one nurse’s immense generosity.

That evening, medics from the Reedsburg hospital arrived in Oconomowoc to bring Leon back to his local infirmary. “Cuz we lived in Reedsburg,” Leon explained. He relived the journey in back of the ambulance, remembering how his knowledge of the city impressed the attending medic.

The man in uniform admired Leon’s navigational skills, saying one must be an expert traveler “if you can lay down [,] look out the window, and tell exactly where you are.” But Leon was not the only one on alert during his voyage to Reedsburg. He narrated the events that likely transpired inside his family home, as well as the reaction of his concerned companion.

“Even through the house, she could see the highway,” Leon recounted. “And she was watchin’ for that Reedsburg ambulance. When she seen that come,” Leon surmised, “right away she jumped in her car.” Little did his wife know about the severity of her husband’s injuries.

Leon’s back was so badly injured that doctors apparently did not know how to treat him initially. Leon remembered the unconventional treatment he received. “They put a board on the bed,” Leon recalled, “and they said I couldn’t have a pillow.” He described the discomfort and agony. “Did that ever hurt,” Leon admitted. “Cuz then my head was down below my shoulders,” he explained. “Well that put more pressure on my back,” Leon lamented. Surely, the stiff board did not help the pain.

Mercifully, a nurse came to his rescue. “You don’t have a pillow?” Leon remembered her noticing.

He replied truthfully, “I know. The pain is killing me, too.”

The nurse, at least, agreed that this was not right. “That’s not natural to lay on your back without a pillow,” Leon recalled her saying. “I’m gonna go get a pillow,” she assured him.

When the nurse returned with the long-awaited pillow, Leon’s pain subsided in the snap of a finger. “When she put it under my head, it was just like – fifty percent of the pain away, just like that,” he recounted. And there the pillow remained for the rest of his three-week recovery at the hospital. “They never did take that pillow away, neither,” Leon said, chuckling. He believed the nurse had something to do with it. “She probably told them [not to take away the pillow],” Leon speculated. He was grateful for all of the protective hospital staff in Reedsburg. For the nurse was not the only one safeguarding Leon during his residence.

When Leon’s daughter was refused entry into the hospital, one brave doctor defended the young girl’s right to see her father. “She needs to see him and he needs to see her,” Leon remembered the man arguing. “You will let her in the hospital,” the doctor declared. Those words did not fall on deaf ears.

“And they did [let her in], too,” Leon remarked. Nobody would prove able to prevent this reunification of loved ones, due to the strength of their bond.

Over twenty-five years after that fateful accident, Leon began a new job – again, driving. This time, though, Leon drove a bus for the Vernon Area Rehabilitation Center, also known as VARC. He remembered kidding around with his passengers. He recounted one particularly funny encounter between himself and one of the female commuters. That day, Leon dropped everyone off in the morning, as was the norm. In the afternoon, he received a haircut. Upon recovering his occupants that night, Leon was approached by the girl.

“What’d you do with your hair?” Leon recalled her asking playfully.

“Oh,” he responded quickly, “the wife wanted me to vacuum the floor for her.” He then jested about an apparent disagreement between himself and the vacuum cleaner. “I started to run it, and then it sounded kind of funny,” Leon told her. “I thought I’d look underneath and see what was the matter,” he continued to tease. “But I didn’t shut it off,” he said. “I bent down there to look [and the vacuum cleaner] grabbed my hair,” Leon joked. “There went my hair,” he gagged.

He remembered the great humor this girl found in his tale. “She laughed and she laughed,” Leon recalled. “After that [,] every time I’d get a haircut, she’d say, ‘Oh, you vacuumed the floor again today, didn’t you?’” he recounted. Little to their knowledge, the two had just formed a long-lasting, inside joke. But that was not the only laugh they would share.

Leon recited another joke which he had told the girl. “That same lady – she didn’t like carrots,” Leon had observed. “You should eat carrots,” Leon offered.

She questioned his advice. “Why?” Leon remembered her asking.

He explained that carrots are “good for your eyes.”

Still, the girl doubted Leon’s knowledge. “How do you know they’re good for your eyes?” she demanded.

The answer proved simple enough. “Did you ever see a rabbit wear glasses?” Leon countered. The girl was speechless, for a second, until she began laughing. “She laughed and she laughed, and she laughed about that,” Leon recounted. The girl decided that she best ultimately heed Leon’s advice.

“I guess I better start eatin’ carrots,” she conceded. This was but one of many humorous jokes the duo enjoyed. So passed the nearly half a decade Leon drove the bus.

Although Leon enjoyed the daily witticism, the wisecracks were not what provided him with the greatest fulfillment. Rather, the part of his job which gratified Leon most proved to be the protection he provided. “I enjoyed that job, too,” Leon admitted, “cuz it was keepin’ them [safe].” And so he did. Decades of experience behind the wheel blessed Leon with the ability to both entertain and protect his precious cargo. He became known not only as a skilled driver, but also a great storyteller. Simply put, the passengers fell in love with Leon.

As Leon neared retirement, his friends on the bus were reluctant to forfeit their beloved driver. “We’re gonna keep Leon for driver,” Leon remembered them stating to his boss. “You can’t take Leon away for our driver,” they protested.



Photo taken by Amy Oganezov (Photography by Amy). Leon Sturdevant (circa 2014)

Unfortunately, the time had come. Leon retired and made his way home – to the Sauk County Health Care Center, where he still resides today.

When probed about any wisdom he wished to impart on others, Leon offered but one piece of advice. “No matter what job you got,” Leon dictated, “try to be honest. You get a lot further that way.” Leon exemplified this honesty throughout his entire life. He prided himself in his upholding the eternal verity of truth. “If you’re honest, they trust you,” Leon spoke of others. One would be wise to also trust this

council. The tremendous distance Leon drove by car, jeep, truck, van, or bus pales in comparison to the great lengths which honesty brought him.

I realized this fact as I left the facility. Coming into the process, I thought there was nothing to be learned. Having experienced many things in my short life, I doubted anything could surprise me. How wrong I was proven. Leon flipped my world upside down, or perhaps righted it. For after taking this journey with Leon, I sussed how I needed to reorient my internal compass to make it point true.

To be quite honest, I would have liked to say I knew everything before meeting this special individual. However, like Leon, I cannot tell a lie in such regard. Despite all the advances brought about by the twenty-first century – many of which still seem foreign to Leon – I had been outwitted by a seventy-eight year old man. But not just any man. This was a man with character, a man with knowledge. This was Leon Sturdevant, an honest man.

Senior Prom

By Frances Auld

“We had so much fun getting dressed,” Peggy Connors, Activity Therapist Assistant giggles. Ms. Connors brought in her own jewelry to help female residents prepare for an evening of dinner, stylish dress, and live big band music. Staff have brought in a full length mirror and one of the residents examines her reflection: beautiful hair, a lovely gown, and a tea rose pinned to her dress. She is ready to go to the Fusch Community Center for a night out.



“Their personality changes when they get the dress on,” Julie Smith, Certified Nursing Assistant says. Ms. Smith loves to share the excitement, “one of the ladies is wearing my dress from when I was in court in my junior prom.” The energy in the room, the laughter,



and the camaraderie are as genuine for these seniors as for any high school folks. The staff are clearly delighted by the residents’ pleasure and anticipation.

This is the first year for this event, says Mary Fish. The staff has made elegant corsages for the ladies and boutonnières for the gentlemen. All the residents are looking suave and excited. This event will be held again at the Health Care Center.

“The look on their faces . . . the joy from it,” Ms. Fish smiles at the room full of prom goers as they get ready to leave for the community center and the band. Happy Prom Night!





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