

# THE NEXT FARMS ALONG THE ROAD

## The Brinkman Farm

LaVonne Page Howland was the oldest of 10 children.

Father was only paid once every two weeks. So groceries were bought for two weeks at a time. I can remember my mother sitting down — she would spend the afternoon, making out the grocery list — knowing the amount of money and writing it down, so much went for this and so much for that. She knew the price of everything, figuring it out, “Oh, I can’t spend that much. What do I have on here that we don’t have to have?”

LaVonne didn’t go to Webb’s Drug Store very much.

Because if you spent a nickel there, you only got one thing, but if you went to McAnnich’s, you got several things for the nickel. And they have all this penny candy. You could get five things, and you didn’t eat them all at once. You would eat one now, and then you would have one for Sunday, Monday, Tuesday.

She said her father was a stubborn, independent man.

Anybody who hired him got their full money’s worth. Whatever they paid him, he more than gave back to them. He was a very hard worker, and he didn’t say, “Well, I hired only to work from 9 to 5” or whatever. He put in far more time and was conscientious about how he did his work.

She tells about a time when Henry Brinkman stopped at their place when her dad was taking a coffee break. Henry said, “We don’t do this. You don’t stop until it’s time for lunch.” But Floyd said he did and invited Henry to have a cup. And that’s when the routine of Henry stopping for coffee began. LaVonne’s mom would often have a cake.

One time, Henry had a team of horses the men couldn’t handle, but that LaVonne could, and he told her the horses would be hers for doing chores. She also remembers helping animals when they delivered offspring when she was in sixth or seventh grade.

Sometimes when they’re going to deliver, they get into complications, so you got to reach in and pull the pigs out. We had a calf born that I helped. It took two of us to pull. And when we got him here, he was blind, so I took him to the house and took care of him. And Henry said he was mine. I babied the calf and took the best care of him, but he couldn’t make it.

I loved farming, I enjoyed being out there, even when it was cold. To this day, I love the horses. I will take the horses over a tractor any day. I would fit well with the Amish people. I hated chickens — the worst animal God ever created was a chicken on a farm.

LaVonne had to feed the chickens, gather the eggs, and hope they didn’t peck her. The chickens belonged to her family, and if there were extra eggs, they would sell them.

Henry gave us a cow, and the milk was ours. And we got a hog and half a beef a year. And we always had a big garden. Our life was not perfect by any means. It was hard, very hard at times.

As brothers and sisters, they had to work together as a family. She says there was no choice. They still have a deep-seated connection. She also says that because of some circumstances in her family, she was never allowed to show any feelings.

I never could give a viewpoint if I didn't agree or didn't whatever. That was just out. The farm was my outlet. The out and wide open. Nothing could find me. I wasn't penned in. If I could get off by myself, I could say what I felt, I could do what I wanted, I could let it go because the birds weren't going to say anything. If it was garden time, I would go work in the garden. I knew I couldn't undo or change anything, but it was a way of feeling better. Or maybe the barn would need cleaning or I would just go out with the livestock.

LaVonne says her attachment to farm life "is not so much to the building or the place but to the farming experience. The relationship between a human being and the farm. The raising of livestock, the raising of crops. You found your contentment in getting an apple off the tree. The meadowlarks singing. Watching the clouds and seeing things in them."

The first paid work LaVonne did was detassling. Next she worked for Merrit Bailey at the Cozy Corner Cafe, located in Rolfe on the corner where the Pronto Store now stands. She had to walk two and a half miles to work.

I loved it then. It was so busy. We would be open every night until ten, and Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights were just terrific. On Friday nights, there were all the hamburgers and the malts after basketball and football games. And I liked it, and that helped me overcome some of my bashfulness because you got to talk to people if you're going to wait on them. And it was the beginning of my finding out I enjoyed people.

Rolfe had several restaurants. There were four grocery stores. We had Ferkin's, which was kind of a hardware-type of store, and the dime store. There was the bakery, Whitmore's. There were four or five barbers. The jewelry store. Several service stations, and the theater. Saturday nights were lots of fun. People parked all up and down the streets, and when it was warm weather, the streets were full. You could hardly get by, there was all the talking, and you could smell popcorn a-poppin'. And all the stores would be full of people. Maybe some were sitting in the car, others were out in the street, and you would hear the laughing and the calling out to one another, greeting one another. It was a fun experience.

I was fortunate in meeting Roger when I did and getting into this family because this family had love. They had their priorities straight. Love came first with material things second. They care for one another in a genuine way. When I came into the family, they accepted me for me, not what they could get out of me. But for me as a person.

Roger and LaVonne are married and live in Rolfe. He is an electrician, and she does freelance sewing and cake baking. In fact, she made the cakes for my 50th birthday party that I held at the Rolfe school home economics room and gym. LaVonne loves making cakes. "A wedding cake especially. I can put so much into it. Be creative. Feel good. And it's quiet time. There is

nothing in the world but me and the cake. Sewing. I enjoy sewing. I can't do it for as long a period of time now as I used to."

She has served as an Elder of the Shared Ministry of Rolfe, a combination of the former Methodist and Presbyterian congregations. LaVonne describes the contrast between when our grandfathers were on the farms and the way things are now.



LaVonne Page Howland, 2003.

When they were on the farm, the church was first. When you went to town, you went to the church. The church was the hub. Today, the church is last. Socially — because of modern things and transportation, and the new lifestyles — the church has become last in our calendar of importance.

Asked if she misses the farm, LaVonne quickly responds,

Oh yes, I would have been happy on the farm. I love the outdoors. I love being in God's world. You can find a quietness. The planting of a little seed that grows into such an enormous thing and the livestock. Animals can be great friends. They rely on you but they're good friends. Looking back for me, sure it wasn't easy, the type of farming then, but I liked it. I enjoyed it, except I wouldn't have chickens again.