CHAPTER lV

Lizzie Comes Home

by

Rosina Burkart Raymond

The sun was still high in the west as I drove toward cousin Francis' home to return his car - to the Liebergen place where Matt was born, married, and ultimately--died. To the ancestral homestead of his grandfather, Josef Burkard.

There would be time to go to the St. Kilian cemetery before I dropped off the car and went back to Green Bay, where I'd been visiting brothers Conrad, Wendel and their families.

A gentle breeze wafted through the turned-down window, dispelling somewhat the August heat as I drove westward approximately a mile on highway 54. Past aunt Ket's house, the Ripp homestead and the Martin Heim place. Relative row. Cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandmother--all who'd always had an open door for me.

I put down the visor to close out the sun's glare, but try as I would, nothing could close out the flood of memories my visit to Matt's house had engendered. Memories, I knew, would be yet more poignant when I arrived at the cemetery.

As I came to St. Kilian Road (at the western end of the upper village) I turned southward. The quarter mile drive raised a billow of dust that forced me to turn up the window despite the heat.

I parked near the iron gate leading to the cemetery, and the nearby deserted one-room red brick school house where German had been taught until our involvement in World War 1.

Where the older brothers attended the early grades, and where Conrad had the responsibility of running across the road to ring the bells in the St. Kilian church tower, to signal the Ave for the noon day Angelus.

"Whew! that was like an oven," I said to myself as I got out of the car, and proceeded to walk among the markers. I paused briefly at some, longer at others with special thoughts and memories of many relatives and friends. And I was put in mind of Greys Elegy written in a Country Churchyard.

The Curfew tolls the knell of departing day.

The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,

The plowman homeward plods his weary way,

And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Peace and quiet pervaded the air. An occasional chipmonk scurried away at the sound of my footsteps on the grass. As the breeze stirred gently between evergreens interspersed with headstones and crosses, it Carried with it the sweet smell of hay being cut by a nearby farmer. And only the steady drone of his tractor broke the silence.

About fifty feet from the old school house I came to a relatively new marker. In bold letters it read: Clarence Burkart, son of Matthias Burkart and Elisabeth Ripp Burkart (and then the significant birth and death data.)

"God grant him peace," the inscription below read. The words echoed in my mind as I read the inscription aloud from the very depths of my soul. Then turned away.

As I moved on to the old part of the cemetery, I noted with sadness the many flat on the ground letter-obliterated markers, and thought, 'these are the forgotten ones who noone remembers once worked, suffered, played and loved--and maybe they were as worthy, or even more so, than those with the upright, clear-cut markers---who knows?'

In the old cemetery (about a hundred feet west of the little school house) I came to the Burkard marker, that of my immigrant ancestors who'd died in the cholera epidemic of 1855.

Many of whose descendants had since changed the d in the name to a t, presumably because the sound of the two letters in German is the same. Again---who knows?

And I remembered the first time I'd seen the marker and the four small identifying stones at the foot of the graves. I'd been visiting Francis' mother (aunt Annie) and expressed interest in our immigrant ancestors. "Oh, you just come with me," she'd said, "we'll go up to the cemetery and I'll show you something."

She'd then gone into her profusely blooming flower garden, cut an armful of peonys, iris and fern, and said, "We'll put them on your parent's graves."

"That would be nice," I'd agreed, and we'd gone on to the cemetery where she placed the flowers on the graves...After a few moments of silent prayer and meditation I'd followed her to the Burkard marker. "Now you're gonna learn somethin' for sure"

"Ooh, but it's all in German--and the letters are kind of faint. Can YOU make them out?"

"Yah sure, that don't make no difference, I know them words. I can read it and translate them for you. You can write it all down." And she'd done just that.

The letters, (which I had restored in later years) fortunately could still be deciphered. below the uppercase BURKARD, the inscription translated read: " Here rest in God the bones of the brothers Josef, Michael, & Johann. Also Antonia, wife of Michael. Died from cholera on Sept. 6,8,11 & 15. Born in Dettelbach, Bavaria, Germany. Rest their ashes. For them to be remembered in appreciation from their children."

My aunt had called special attention to the fact that Josef, (her grandfather and my great grandfather) had been the first to die of the dread disease. He and his wife Eva had given hospitality to an immigrant Belgium family, not knowing they had been exposed to cholera.

I thought of my dear Aunt as I stood before the marker. What a great thing she'd done for me that day---among the many other fine things in her lifetime. A lifetime that extended some years beyond that cemetery visit. She'd given me the first concrete data about people in whose lives I was developing a tremendous curiosity. A curiosity that grew into an all-consuming persuit - a lifetime search to make flesh and blood people out of those from the past.

Finally, on my way toward the gate I came to Matt's and Lizzie's marker. Perhaps I was subconsciously saving this stop for last. Perhaps, because I'd just come from Matt's house, here I'd enveloped myself in memories of him, and where he still seemed much alive, my thoughts now were more especially of Lizzie. Lizzie, who I'd never really known as a whole person and about whom I'd always wondered so much.

A flood of memories swept over me as I stood there alone save for the birds and chipmonks.

It was the night of the wake, November 21, 1921. A steady snow had been falling and threatened to be ankle-deep by next day. The day of the funeral. Lizzie lay in a dark gray cloth - covered casket in the front room of Matt's house.

Cousins Melchior and Mary Heim had been renting the place while Matt lived with his sister Annie and family. They had kindly loaned Matt his house to bring Lizzie home after her seven-and-a-half-year absence.

Lizzie's close-cropped hair which had grown during her six- week semi-conscious illness was severely combed back, not permitting the usual curly tendrils to soften the sharp contours of her face. Her beautiful, classic, finely chiseled features. Her Alsacian heritage. Six weeks without food, and the last nine days without liquid, had brought her to this emaciated state. Paralysis of the digestive tract, the death certificate said.

A black dress, relieved by a small white collar covered her once ample bosom. And a dull-black rosary was entwined in her long thin fingers, with the small metallic crucifix between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand.

"Now she got rest, she's with god," was the undercurrent of conversation by the handful of relatives and friends gathered in the sitting room. They'd sincerely felt that at long last she was at peace and with the Lord.

As he sat quietly by himself, engrossed in his thoughts, memories and what might have been, Matt said little…

"Come here girlie," uncle Conrad, Lizzie's brother the priest, had said drawing me on his lap as I stood lost among the seated folk, "My sister wanted this little girl right from the first when her four boys were born. Then she finally got her, but had her for such a short t-only a little over two years". And a faraway, sad look came into his eyes.

In awe of him, yet relishing the attention, I had sat stiffly on his lap for a while. Since he was one of only three in our town who'd gone into the priesthood he was revered by everyone, including the members of his family. Even Matt, his brother-in- law, referred to him as "Father Ripp."

His Roman collar, gold wire glasses, piercing intelligent brown eyes, black cassock-clothed body set him apart from all the rest in the room - along with his polished English, without a trace of the 'Lothringer' dialect he'd learned from his mother and Aunt Ket, her sister. Or the Southern European German dialect of his father. Even his German contrasted sharply, for he'd studied at the Seminary in Innsbruck, Austria for five years.

He'd worn a zucchetto (not the more formal baretta), which permitted his curly brown hair to frame his thinning pate. To the simple folk of that farming community he was indeed an outstanding person.

I'd been conscious of my new dress as people remarked how nice I looked. When aunt Maggie, (Matt's sister) with whom I'd been living for the past two years, had learned Lizzie's death was imminent she'd gone to Baum's in Green Bay to purchase a dress for me while I was at school. It had to be dark for mourning. The navy-blue middy dress with white braid-trimmed sailor collar was one of the few 'store boughten' ones I'd ever owned. No time to order from the Sears Roebuck catalogue, either. "It's a little long, but you'll grow into it," aunt Maggie had said when she'd tried it on me.

That night, I'd slept in Matt's house, over the front room where the blue couch now stood - where Lizzie's casket stood.

A deep feeling of desolation and lost hope had enveloped me as I pulled the covers over my ears, as if to shut out the reality of her death. Now she'd never come home to us, as a mother. Never be there with a "Piece of bread with sugar ", when we'd come home from school hungry-—like the rest of our cousins.

Never make pretty dresses for me.

Fragile, vulnerable as a wind-tossed thistle in a field of clover, I'd finally fallen into a troubled sleep, to be awakened in the morning to the cold stark reality of the funeral. And, to the mournful tones of the Requiem as uncle Conrad had said the funeral mass for his sister.

At the cemetery, as Matt had stood in ankle-deep snow, with his five children encircling him to say our last farewell, I'd looked up at him and saw him cry for the first time in my life. Two giant tears rolled down the crevices of his face.

Now, as I stood at the same spot where both were resting side by side, with the sun getting lower in the west, I recalled too, that day when I first learned a change was taking plaoe. I'd come home from school a few days earlier to find aunt Maggie standing by the front room window of her home in Bay Settlement. Since dusk came early in November we'd soon have to light the kerosene lamp, but not just yet.

As I'd opened the door, thrown my books on a wooden kitchen chair, I was surprised at not finding my aunt bustling in the small kitchen, making supper. "Hello, isn't anybody home?" I'd called out.

"Yah, I'm home, come in here once," she answered.

I'd gone into the large front room with her braided and hooked rugs on the soft wood floor, her potted geraniums on the window sill. And there she was, seemingly watching a light snowfall. Apparently trying to get up the courage to tell me what she had to. She turned toward me, and said hesitatingly, "There's something I gotta tell you." Concerned at the expression on her face, I'd asked, "What, what is it? What's wrong?"

"Your mother's real sick-—they don't think she'll live. we better go to see her tomorrow. We'll hitch up the rig and go to Green Bay. It'll be Saturday and you don't need to miss school."

“Oh” I'd answered, not fully comprehending.

The following day she and uncle Bill and I had gone to the Brown County Asylum. (I'd been there before, at least once that I remembered.) We’d entered the slide-drawn, semi-darkened room, bare, except for a bed, chair and small dresser. As we approached aunt Maggie said, (while I stayed close behind)

"Lizzie-—Lizzie, I brought somebody to see you." Though fragile and weak, she'd turned slightly toward us, opened her large brown eyes and looked directly at me. My child-mind said she'd recognized me and I waited anxiously for her to speak. She didn't. She couldn’t---her throat was paralyzed.

Realization that now I would never get to really know her as my mother (and a person) swept over me like a black cloud that would never lift, and I felt totally devastated.

The sun was lowering by the minute when I came out of my reverie. I hurriedly said my inner farewells to Lizzie and Matt and was on my way.

"Thanks for letting me use your car, Fran," I said as he walked toward me from watering the cows near the barn, after I'd driven the gravel semi-circle leading to the house.

"Oh, that's okay, anytime. Did you get done what you wanted?”

"Sure did, just now came from the cemetery. Seems like I know more people there than I do in this town anymore."

His blue eyes saddened momentarily at the thought of his deceased mother that my remark had engendered. "Umhmm," he nodded, "that's just what Ma used to say—-but now let's

go in the house and maybe Delores will fix you something to drink and a bite to eat before you catch that bus to town."

"Good, I'd like that. I'm a little hungry."

We went up the few steps leading to the kitchen of the old house where uncle Pete Fran's father) was seated at the table with a glass of beer. He looked up at our entrance and said, "Hello, boy it's a hot one out there. I got purty doggone thirsty drivin' that tractor on the binder after you left this afternoon. How about a beer with me?"

"Hey, that'd really hit the spot," I answered, as he got up and went to the refrigerator. His agile step, slender, solid frame, deeply tanned, relatively wrinkle-free face and full head of snow-white hair belied his eighty-five years. Until recently, he'd been known to still dance a jig, and even climb to the roof of the house to make repairs.

While we'd sat drinking the cold frothy beer my uncle had poured, Delores, Fran's city-bred wife, sliced summer sausage and placed it along with rye bread and butter on the table.

"I'm sorry, but we had supper early tonight because we got that Schafskopf game at our house," she'd said, "But this ought a hold you 'till you get to town."

"Oh sure, that'll be just great. But really Delores, you shouldn't have bothered. I practically ate you out of house and home when I first got here today." Turning to uncle Pete, I'd added, "And I guess I talked and questioned the daylights out of you. Right?"

"Yup, I would say so, but I liked it."

Delores smiled knowingly and went about washing their supper dishes. At that moment five-year-old Annie (Fran's and Delores' daughter) had come in the house with two kittens she'd been keeping in the barn. "Ain't they cute, Aunty,?" she said holding them out to me.

"They sure are, and so are you," I'd answered as I hugged her and stroked the kittens.

She'd smiled timidly, then put the kittens on a chair in sitting room.

Earlier in the day my uncle and I had talked at considerable length. He answered my many questions as best he could, volunteering anecdotes while his alert mind went back into time.

Always curious about why he and aunt Annie had come to live on the homestead, especially after he'd been away from farming, having worked in a paper mill the first four years of their marriage, I'd asked, "How come you took over the Burkard place?"

"Well by golly I guess I just kind a got pushed into it. You know Annie's brother Joe was a batchelor, and after your grandpa Melchior died he took over the farm. And his mother Appolonia kept house for him. Well, that went on a few years. Then he met a girl from Luxemburg that was quite a bit younger. Let's see now, her name was Kellenhoffer Barbara, that's it. Well, purty soon they got married and she moved in. To make a long story short, her and my mother-in-law didn't git along. And she got kinda queer too. She sawed a real good bed frame all apart, in little pieces-—just for nothing. And there was other stuff too---anyways, one day she kicked grandma out of the house.

Took her clothes an' a lot of her things an' put it on a pile in the yard. Poured on kerosene and set the whole works afire."

"Oh no!" I'd interjected, as it crossed my mind that was probably where my grandparent's framed marriage certificate went, since noone had ever been able to locate it.

“Oh yah,” uncle Pete had gone on, "and when Joe come in from the field he found his mother sitting on the front steps just crying her heart out. Well, Joe knew right then ’n there they couldn't live there no more. And that's how they and their baby Olive moved to Marshfield. They lived there till he died. around 1950 —-I think.

"Yaah...she was in ’n outa them mental places. Annie went there to take care of Joe a whole month before he died. She done the same for Matt and all the others." His voice shook at the memory.

"I know--I know, she was really a very saintly person." Uncle Pete pulled himself together, and went on, "Anyways, they held an auction and sold everything."

"The farm and everything?" I asked, flabbergasted.

"Yup, grandma needed a home and the family thought one of the children oughta buy the place. Oh---how I remember that day! Everybody was there. Stephan, Valtin, Andrew, Gertie, my brother Theodore ’n Lena, Jake ’n Hannah Heim, Martin ’n Katie, ’n Matt ’n Lizzie, Martin---lotsa others---all standing around except some of the women that was doing the cooking. Purty soon Annie's brother Martin, that was single an ’still living’ than, an ’was standing next to me said, "Pete, you buy the place. Ma needs a home and she can get along with Annie."

At this point he had digressed momentarily, then continued, "Yah---Martin was the youngest of grandma's fourteen children and was gonna marry my sister Mary. They already had the second call in church’n everything was purt near all set for the wedding Then he got real sick, all of sudden, and died. Diabetes, they said. That was in September of that same year--1911. That would made four Liebergens marrying four Burkarts.

"Anyways, before I knew it I bid, and nobody bid against me and I got it for $9,900. I'd saved me $1,500 from working in the mill, but I said to myself, where am I gonna get the rest? Anyways, I ran around like crazy looking for a mortgage. At last I got one from Dennis in Bay Settlement."

I'd interrupted him, "You had something to worry about after you got the mortgage too. Believe me, I know. Dennis held the mortgage on our farm and if nothing else got paid the interest on that mortgage did. He didn't wait long to foreclose. Lots of farmers learned that the hard way. He didn't get to be a millionaire by selling peanuts in his store."

Uncle Pete smiled at my observation, "Yah, I know, that tavern of hisen across from the church helped a little too. But all dem farms he grabbed up when the people couldn't pay, that done it. So, anyways---," his face brightened, " I got me a big black team on time. Dem horses was beauties! Weighed fifteen hundred and sixteen hundred pounds apiece. I paid $450.00 for em

"Wow! that was a lot of money those days."

"You dam tootin’ it was! But dem horses was real beauties. When I was a young man we had a yoke of oxen on our farm. They're strong but don't move fast."

"How fast would you say?" I was curious to know.

"Hmm, about like a cow, or fast as a person would walk. But they could go on for a long time. Golly, I kin remember that one ox we had I could use in the garden to cultivate with an’ he wouldn't step on nothing. Bettern a horse. Theodore couldn't handle dem oxen at all. They'd run away."

Wanting to get back to more significant family information, I'd asked, "Did you ever work in the north mods, like my father?"

"Nope, Matt did, yah, but not me."

"You knew him as a young man though, didn't you?"

He'd looked at me somewhat surprised, "Oh sure, but not before he was married."

Now it was my turn to be surprised, "But you lived only a mile or so apart. I know you were quite a bit younger, but didn't you go to the same school?"

"Nope, I went to Bay Settlement - the little schooling I got, and Matt went to New Franken--the little he got. We had to stay home and help with chores and in the field where the land was cleared and we could plant. There was still a lotta trees 'n stumps on our farm—-like on yours. Me and Theodore blew up the stumps with dynamite."

His reference to the blasting had called up a memory for me and I interrupted him, "Oh yes--I know about that dynamiting business. I used to watch my father through the window in the house. He'd light the fuse and when that fire would creep toward the stump he'd go limping away as fast as he could to a safe distance. I was always scared, yet, kind of fascinated when I'd see the pieces fly in every direction before I'd even hear the explosion."

"Yup that was mighty dangerous an' mighty hard work. After you blasted you had to use the stump puller. You hitched the ox, or horses, on the contraption -yaah- and Matt had one of them too and your brother Conrad helped him with that."

Hesitating, yet anxious to take advantage of his talkative mood I'd then said, "Now, I'm going to ask you something real personal."

"Ooh?---well, go ahead and ask. I got lots a time."

"Okay, then here goes. Where, and how, did you meet aunt Annie?"

He'd smiled at my question and responded, "Hmm, that's an easy one to answer. We met at a dance in Schneider's hall."

"At Schneider's hall? It was there already? Heck, I even danced there when I lived around here." And I'd gotten up to look out the east window over the sink, "You can practically see it from here."

"Yup, and I remember dancing once, me and ma---I guess it was a waltz, and we was the onlyest couple on the floor too. Then, John Basten, him and his wife, they danced together. All at once he comes up to me and said, "Pete, I gotta quit dancing, I can't dance good as you," then we was the onlyest couple on the floor. Yup at Schneider's hall," his voice had trailed off at the reminiscence, "that was the onlyest place to dance.'

"About how often would you go dancing?' Saturday night,

"Oh no, never Saturday night, or Sunday. That was forbidden, during the week once, maybe twice if there was something extra.'

"When you'd take aunt Annie to the dance would you pick her up with your horse and buggy?"

"Mope. We walked."

"I see--but you had to walk to get to THIS place."

"Yah sure, I walked through the woods---there was a path. I done that when we went to the dance, or when I come to see her---always walked."

"Okay, then I have to ask you-and you don't have to tell me--when you came home from the dance, did you sit on the milk stand and talk for a little while too?"

"Not much. Took her home, kissed her goodnight, and that was it."

"You didn't sit on the milk stand--hmm, my father told me sometimes they sat on the milk stand 'till three o'clock and sparked." "Maybe they did. Not us."

Noting uncle Pete's discomfort with so many personal questions, I'd shifted the discussion to the house, "Tell me who built this place?"

"Here you got me--I don't rightly know. They moved the house from back there in the field near where the old barn is to where it stands now. On the way they broke off the shed. They hadda go back an' git it later. An' ma always said her grandpa bought dem forty acres from Wendel Sohler right after he came from the old country in 1847. And Sohler bought the land from the government for a dollar and a quarter an acre when he come from Germany in 1845. Grandma always said the house was over a hundred years old."

"I suppose she and grandpa were living there when they moved the house?"

"Oh sure, quite a few and the kids was born already. Andrew and Matt were young boys, they helped with the movin'."

Wondering what logic there was in moving the house over half a mile from its original site, I'd asked, "Why do you think they'd moved it?"

He'd thought for a few seconds, then answered, "I never heard say, but I suppose they wanted to be closer to the church an' the new school place. An' they owned this land now—yaah - the village was growing and everything was closer. Where we're at was just a cordoroy road dem days--rough like that too. But it was still the best way to go from New Franken to Green Bay."

"Better than the first Indian trail," I'd interjected cynically.

"Well I should say so." Seemingly wanting to return to the discussion about the house he'd gone on, "Yah, the shed fell off--they built it on again. Later on we used it for a summer kitchen when me an' Annie moved here. It was a couple steps lower. Then Matt raised it up even 'n made a nice kitchen outa it. He built that culvert too--that goes back in the field to the old barn."

While I was pleased with my uncle's talkative mood, I'd suddenly realized if I was to get any 'mileage' out of Fran's car I'd better leave and said as much, "Gee, uncle Pete, I'm sorry to cut this short. I really enjoyed our little talk, but I'd best get going now. See you later."

"Me too, and I gotta git out in the field or else that grain'll never git cut."

After a quick snack of summer sausage and bread, I made a move to leave said, "I better get out there by the road or I'll surely miss the bus."

"Hey, why don't you stay and I'll take you into Green Bay later," Fran offered, "You could play Schafskopf with us--Louise and Vicky. I'll be here too."

I was tempted, especially when uncle Pete invited me further with, "Yah you stay, and I betcha I'll take your pennies from you too."

"What do you mean too?" I turned to Fran and said," Has he been beating everybody lately?" " I suppose so, but we'll take care of him tonight."

"Oh yah?" uncle Pete challenged, " well by golly, we'll just see once. If you'd stay we could make two tables easy, because Theodore an' George an' Mary are coming too. If we got a extra the dealer kin always sit out."

"Oh gosh, I'd really love to stay and play Schafskopf, just like old times, but they're expecting me in town. And I have to go back to Michigan day after tomorrow."

Schafskopf, (Sheephead) the card game played by relatives and friends, often rotating homes as far back as I could remember.

Matt had taught Clarence and me, using kitchen matches for stakes in lieu of pennies, or just for points. Not infrequently he'd let us win, and look good-naturedly the other way when we thought we'd fooled him.

After saying goodbye amid come agains, hello to the family, and many thanks, I went outside. Uncle Pete followed me. He took my hand, rather reservedly, "I--I just want you to know I really hated to give you away---but-—it was all just too much for Annie."

"I know-I know, I understand," I smiled weakly, and gave his hand an affectionate squeeze. Walked to the side of the road while he raised his arm in farewell as he went into the house.

I passed the lilac bush he'd said was already there when he and aunt Annie came in 1911. The rambling rose she'd planted.

Two large peony bushes that, with their red and pink flowers and pungent fragrance in spring, had given pleasure to all when I'd here for about a year.

As I stood a few moments, waiting for the Sturgeon Bay bus, I felt my aunt's presence and personality. And missed her, as always, whenever I returned. And uncle Pete's words, " I hated to give you away," echoed in my ears. It was all so long ago, yet, like only yesterday...

Matt had rented our farm and the downstairs to cousins Alois and Rose Burkart. We'd moved upstairs. He'd made a makeshift kitchen out of the east end of the long room, furnished it with a kerosen stove, work table and water bucket, the usual kitchen cutlery, and eating area.

I'd worked by the day as carpenter, butcher, and general 'Mr fixit'. "We'll get Matt, he'll

figure it out," was the usual solution when any kind of mechanical problem beset neighbors or relatives. And he generally did.

Sometimes he was paid. Sometimes the recipient had done something in kind for him or us kids. And sometimes, the recipient would say, "Ich bezahl dich anders mal." But, frequently that 'I'll pay you another time' didn't materialize.

And Matt didn't have the heart to persue it.

Absorbed in my thoughts about the tine we'd lived upstairs in Matt's house, I recalled Conrad say in later years, "We were doing all right by ourselves. I did the cooking and Wendel and Benny helped with you little kids. Then the parish priest stuck his nose in, and convinced our father to break up the family. He said we couldn't live that way.

And that's how we'd gone to live at the Liebergen place.

Matt, Wendel, Clarence and I. Where grandma Appolonia had been living with aunt Annie and uncle Pete. Where cousins Regina, (my age) todler Louisa, and new-born Victoria lived.

Where the bed-ridden hydrocephalic cousin Martha (Matt's godchild) lived.

While Matt had continued to work by the day, Wendel was the Liebergen hired hand, employed to pay board and keep for all of us. Conrad and Ben had lived with nearby farmers and worked as hired hands for them.

One day when aunt Maggie (Matt's and Annie's sister) had come from Bay Settlement to visit, she'd observed the situation in the Liebergen household and said, "Annie, it's all too much for you, I'll take the girl." And that's how I'd gone to live with the Reynens for the next two and a half years. With cousins Joe and Jack who became like two more older brothers.

With alcoholic uncle Bill...

Matt had placed Clarence in an orphan's school run by religious brothers in conjunction with the Robinsonville Chapel about five miles away. He'd paid ten and twelve dollars a month board for us, respectively.

When I was ten, Matt had told aunt Maggie that he was planning to reestablish the home. She'd had misgivings, saying a girl growing up needed a woman's direction, but Matt insisted.

He'd gathered together Wendel, (now a young man of nineteen) Clarence and ma. Wendel would help with the farm work and household. We'd come home at last.

The bus slowed, then stopped. I got on and seated myself near a north window. And took a last look backward while it pulled away...

With sundown still giving enough light for observing I gave in to further remembering as we passed familiar places. The aunts's house directly west of Liebergen's. The aunt, who'd died during my stay. Who, Regina, Clarence and I had included in our night prayers at aunt Annie's insistence, as we knelt at our bedsides the evening we'd learned of her passing. Our earliest experience with death...

The aunt, whose husband Anton, (brother to grandfather Melchior) had been killed some years earlier when his horses ran away. The aunt, formally named Margaretta youngest sister to aunt Ket, Christina, and my grandmother Elisabeth, mother of Alois, Matt Burkart junior (the village blacksmith), Joseph, Kilian, and lone daughter Catherine married to Laurence Schauer.

All double cousins to me.

Across the road, the Joseph Schneider home where classmate Bernadette had lived. Where Matt had had his accident. From where uncle Pete, who'd hitched up his black team to fetch Dr. Huberty, had also taken Matt in his sleigh to await the Green Bay and Western...

A short distance further on, the Schott place. Built by great-grandfather Andreas, who had come to New Franken with the first group of settlers as a young man and married Katherina Mueller—also an immigrant. Where Appolonia, the eldest child was born, grew up and married Melchior.

The bus moved along. Evening had set in. But there was still sufficient light to see the sprawling brick complex as it came into view. The Brown County Asylum. Later changed into the Brown County Mental Health Center.

Here Lizzie had spent the last three years of her life after she was transferred in October 1918 from the Northern Hospital for the Insane where she'd been since June of 1914. (Now known more euphamistically as The Winnebago Mental Health Institute.)

Chronic dementia. Incurable, they'd said when they discharged her. And here she'd died at fortytwo.

Here I'd seen her for the first time in over four years, when I was six and a half, just before we'd left Matt's house and to live with the Liebergens.

Try as I would, I couldn't close out that first time as we rode past the asylum.

Clarence and I had been playing near the west windows of the long room when Matt said to us, "Come on kids, we go visit mom" We're going to visit your mother.

"When, when?" we'd wanted to know, surprised and excited for we hadn't ever visited her before.

"Now, this afternoon," he'd answered, directing us to the washstand and bowl to get cleaned up and change our clothes. Meanwhile, he'd also directed Wendel to harness red Dan and hitch him to the buggy.

When all had been readied we left for the asylum, about eight miles away. Clarence sat next to Matt and I on a little stool at their feet. We'd chatted excitedly on the way.

We'd always known our mother was somewhere. Too far away to visit we'd been told, but now that she was closer by we'd actually see her!

Upon our arrival, after Matt had tettered Dan to an iron hitching post, we'd walked up a few cement steps into that big brick building. As we'd entered a wide, bare-floored, curtainless room, Clarence clutched Matt's right hard, I his left.

Loud, ear shattering screams had eminated from one of the side rooms. Hyena-like laughter from another. Sickening body odors that mingled with disinfectants came wafting toward us we'd our way toward straight-backed chairs. Past several women who were sitting on bench-like couches, some of whom had looked at us curiously, others who were completely oblivious to our presence.

All with close-cropped hair. All in baggy, drab grey, loose-fitting garb.

One had clutched a piece of cloth, pulled at it, talked to it. Another, put and took balls of cotton-in and out--of a brown paper sack. Still another held a disjointed conversation with herself, laughing and crying intermittently.

"I am frightened " I'd said to Matt, pressing tightly against

"Me too! " Clarence echoed while Matt had tried to assure us that there wasn’t anything to be afraid of.

Shortly after we'd seated ourselves an attendant came to us and asked who we wanted to see.

"Lizzie Burkart, these children's mother," Matt had responded.

"Well—I guess it'll be all right," she looked at us somewhat concerned, "I'll go and try to fetch her."

Within minutes she and another attendant, one on either side of Lizzie, had emerged from an adjacent room. Lizzie, shuffling slowly along in slouchy slippers had allowed them to lead her toward a chair. A dark grey, baggy institutional dress covered her slightly rounded figure. Her dark brown hair was cropped to within an inch of her head. (So she couldn't tear at it, Matt said later.)

Gently urging and pushing us to where she was seated, Matt had said, "Dear Lizzie, I have brought the children"

She'd slowly focused her large brown eyes on us, then let out a pained, low cry of recognition, "The children, the children" and she held out both arms and pulled us on her lap.

Rocking back and forth, crooning and talking incoherently, she'd held us with an iron grip. Held us as in a vice. Held us as though she would meld our bodies with hers. Make us part of herself again.

We'd screamed in pain and fear. She was a stranger to us.

Because of our ages, four years had erased all memory of one we'd once known as a loving mother. Now all that remained was what we'd heard said, in guarded voices.

Matt and the two attendants had loosened her arms amid her protests of "No, No, No!" and pulled us away from her. Took her forcibly back to her room---the room with the bars and straight jackets...

When the bus pulled into the station Conrad was there to meet me.

"You been waiting long?" I asked, kissing him a warm hello.

"No, I just got here. Timed it out pretty good, huh? That bus was right on schedule. Supper's waiting at home, Minnie's got it all ready. Bet you're hungry---."

"Yes, kind of-—so let's go," I settled down next to him on the front seat of his Ford.

I felt very close, realizing that while he had some happy memories of our Lizzie, he also had even sadder ones than I