

LOWELL ELSON BJELLA – HIS STORY

By Lowell Elson Bjella

MARGET AND LARS

It was 1894 when grandpa Lars Bjella came to America from the country of Norway. Seems he had been in a brawl at a local beer hall in the city and made a hasty departure. The reason for this was he thought he had killed a man, and he felt this departure was necessary.

After his arrival in Minnesota, he discovered the victim involved did not die, so all was forgotten. Lars went to work on a farm for another Norwegian immigrant who had come to the area approximately twenty years earlier. Their work schedule was to arise at 6:00 A.M., feed and care for the horses, have a good breakfast, and be out in the fields by 7:30 A.M. This work was plowing or planting, putting up hay, and bringing in the harvest.

Lars tells in a letter written to his family, still in Norway, that he would send money that was owed his brother. Also there would be money for his wife, Marget, and their four children; Sigre, Jenny, Tollof and Timan (Tim).

It wasn't until 1899 that he wrote in a letter, that he and the farmer that he worked for, had gone fishing, and after one day, their catch was enough to feed everyone in their household all summer.

During the year of 1900 the remainder of Lars family arrived in Minnesota. Each of the two boys was given an axe and a crosscut saw. They cut one hundred cords of wood that winter. Lars would hunt and fish to keep food for everyone.

In the spring, Tollof, age thirteen, and Tim, age ten, each received a new bicycle, as a reward for their work.



Bemidji, MN, 1919

Grandpa Lars was known as a timber baron who would hire the local farm boys to cut timber and haul it to a railroad near the town of Rosby. For each strip of timber they would receive a certain amount as payment. Lars would buy the stumpage and let all the poor land go back for taxes.

Grandmother Marget died in 1921 and Grandpa Lars died in 1953. (They are buried in the Aardahl Cemetery, Beltrami County, MN.)

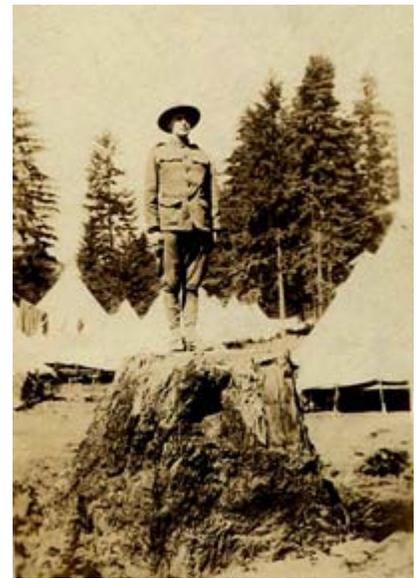
Lars



During the year of 1901 until the beginning of World War I, all efforts of the family were involved in improving the farm and clearing the land. During this time the eldest daughter, Jennie, married a neighbor boy who was of Swedish nationality. This Lars did not approve of, and made it very clear by not speaking to either of them for a period of seven years. The reason for this treatment was Norway and Sweden had been at war during the year of 1905, and there was much bitterness between the two countries; ending with a victory for Norway. A statement was made by the Swedish government that the land was not worth fighting for anyway. Even today, May seventeenth is always celebrated by the country of Norway.

In 1917 both brothers, Tim and Tollof, were drafted into the army and entered World War 1. They asked to be kept in the same unit, but were denied. Tollof went to France and Tim was stationed near Washington State with an Engineering battalion. When the war was over, Tollof came home with a health problem, which affected him all his life, and he died at the eighty-one. (More about Tollof before his death later)

Tim immediately went to work on a farm, claiming homestead rights in 1911, and going to school at this time. He completed a total of five grades and this was his only education. The farm had good soil, but was under water due to topography. As a result he went to work for a logging company owned by A.M. Bagley. After a short time, he was put in charge of all the timber moving equipment.



**Tim 1918 WWI, Army,
Vancouver, WA,**



Bertina (Anderson) and Tollef – Tim in back



Tollef, Tim, Marie, Segre, Hilda (Jennie is missing from this photo)

FAMILY

Timan married Constance Aakre in 1924 in Grygla, MN. Their children were Lowell Elson, Feb, 27, 1927 – Oct. 2, 2011: Audrey: Cheryl, Jan. 19, 1929 – Nov. 14, 2004: Tim (Buddy) and Russell

Tim and Connie and Their Children



Timond, Dolly (Asudry), Russell, Lowell, Tim, Cheryl, Connie 1944



Lowell, 1 year old, 1927

OUR COUSINS FROM THE IRON RANGE (NORTHERN MINNESOTA)

The family of Emil Ersbo: Every summer during the thirties the Ersbo family would drive from the Iron Range, always in a new car, to Bemidji to visit. Beatrice and James were the only ones at home that were able to be with us (cousins).

For one week it was fishing, swimming, picnics and other outdoor activities. As this was during the summer the younger children attended Bible school and our cousins accompanied us, while Dad, Tollof and Jenny (Mrs. Ersbo) would reminisce with Grandpa Lars on how different it was when they arrived from the country of Norway.

They mentioned how Marget, their mother, would walk to the town of Cass Lake and carry a bag of flour and a bag of salt and before arriving back home, half of it would be given to the Indians so she would be safe on the trail.

In about the year 1925 Tim bought the one hundred sixty acre farm from his father for the amount of ten thousand dollars. A full quarter section was eighty acres of pasture, seventy-five acres of tillable fields, leaving five acres for building a seven-room house and a barn for three hundred head of sheep. Also, there was space for forty head of livestock, a granary, well house, wood shed, machine shed, hog shed, and two separate garages.

The crops grown on the farm were small grain, potatoes, legumes, alfalfa, etc. The farm always made a good income for the family; including one hired man and one part-time hired girl.

Tim worked the farm for six years. After that time Tim always held a job in the city of Bemidji. Starting his first co-op farm store and was fired when he asked for a ten dollar raise. This was after building the largest farm store in town.

GROWING UP ON THE FARM

As promised – back to Uncle Tollof

Late in the summer of 1934 Uncle Tollof came over to our farm to inform us that stray dogs had run more than one hundred and fifty of our sheep to death, leaving us less than a hundred and they were scattered through woods near the upper Mississippi River peninsula. This was on land Grandpa Lars was lending to Dad (Tim).

Dad was in south St. Paul delivering cattle to the stockyards; so it was necessary that we salvage what was left of our flock. My uncle stayed with the flock the following night, keeping them out on a point. When the dogs came around, he would frighten them away by shooting at them. When Dad came home, notice was given to all neighbors that any dogs that ever strayed on his property would immediately be shot; likewise, if his dog strayed they would have the same priv-

ilege.

Every Sunday morning a group of farmers in the local area would meet and compete at the Rifle Range, which was, located in a large grove of Norway and white pines. This was next to our farm. The purpose was that if any dogs came into the area, they would be disposed of with the help of a twenty-two Winchester.

During the winter months Dad (Tim) would feed and water his sheep in less than two hours and then go visit with the neighbor boys while they cared for their dairy cattle, which was an all day job. One day Mrs. Anderson came out to the barn and told Dad to get on home so that her boys could get their work done. Tim was very offended by this lack of hospitality. The following year it was necessary to install a new sheep fence along the Anderson farm. According to law, the Andersons had to meet Tim's type of woven wire, which was much more expensive than what was necessary for dairy cattle. When the Anderson's refused to comply, our attorney sent a letter to them. That settled the matter. What made this situation somewhat awkward was that the Anderson's were in-laws of Dad's older brother. (Tollof married Bertina Anderson)

Andrew Anderson and Dad were close friends and eventually Andrew left the farm making his parents angry all over again. Dad convinced him to work with him in the tall timber of northern Minnesota as a crawler tractor operator. Andrew would do almost anything for you when given credit for being a great guy. As a result of this, the men would tease or fool him into showing his muscular strength by lifting heavy objects. Finally, he realized they were using him to do their work.

Living on the farm had its rewards and its shortfalls. We lived two miles from the nearest school and my first grade report card showed that I had missed a total of forty-nine days, due to heavy snowfalls and closed roads. (Being a township road, it was the last to be plowed.)

During spring the Kalkin brothers, with a six horse team, would pull a "V" plow through one and a half miles; leaving snow banks which would be ten feet high. The following year I received a pair of skis for Christmas, which shortened the distance, as my sister and I could go cross-country. It was five years later that the county was authorized to improve the road from a township to country road status.

9/29 of March
 from Lowell Bjella
 To grandma and
 Aunt Agnes we have
 390t a little Baby again
 how is Buddy i was
 to town with daddy
 and Bot some candy
 i would like to send
 some Easter eggs to Buddy
 in writing to Buddy
 Dolly and Baby went to
 the Ladies aid and i stay
 home and care of Mamma and
 Baby
 Lowell
 do you no a nice
 name for are Baby
 water on the river

Lowells letter to his
Gradma and to Aunt Agnes

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SCHOOL YEARS

During the eight years attending this country school, Miss Chrisofferson required me to stand in the corner of the classroom from nine thirty AM until eleven fifty AM because I was tardy due to deep snow that slowed walking. Miss Lemmer had a background in music and taught us to sing. Miss Delgard threatened to move me back one grade unless my reading improved. That was the year I had my first pair of glasses. Miss Nelson was with us for three years, and this was long enough, because she was keeping too many pupils after school as school custodians.

By the time I reached seventh grade, there was a total of forty-three students in one classroom with seats available for only twenty five. Also finding a competent

teacher for a salary of sixty dollars a month was very difficult, plus the fact that the boys were rather unruly. Seems their only pastime during recess was fighting in the form of rough and tumble wrestling with no holds barred. Thankfully, the worst injuries were bloody noses. The teams would be the Northwest versus the Southeast for a period of approximately two weeks and the boys there were not winning complained to parents. I cannot speak for the other guys, but I was reprimanded by being kept home to saw fire wood.

When beginning the seventh grade, Dad decided what was needed to curb my excess energies was extra duties. This resulted in the hired man we always had would be going into town to work with Dad and I would assume his total duties. This entailed caring for the livestock; which was forty plus animals, pumping water by hand, feeding, milking and separating, and cleaning stalls. These chores were done twice daily. Before and after school and these chores continued through grades seven and eight.

A new teacher came beginning in eighth grade, named Oteena Stay. The best description of her was that she was tough but fair. After a disturbance on the playground, we were all called in and asked why there were so many fights among the older boys. Our reply was there was no playground equipment. Immediately we were put to work making invitations and placing them in every mailbox in the surrounding neighborhood.

The invitation was to come to a basket social along with some instructional information. The response and results were great! Enough funds were collected to purchase equipment like the city school. A short time later, the Bemidji Chamber of Commerce would give a merry-go-round to the school that turned in the most sales slips in Beltrami county. Our school won the contest, hands down. This item was valued at three thousand dollars. Oteena had a way of giving us the encouragement we had never had before and as a result, she taught at our school for many years.

There was a total of forty-three students the following year; which brought the total in the classroom to thirty plus.

At age thirteen, it was mandatory that Confirmation meetings begin. This required meeting with the Lutheran minister each Saturday morning over a two year ordeal. Reverend Buiede advised us that he would be moving to a new area and Evelyn, Gudren, Kendel and I should be able to complete the requirements in six months time instead of the necessary two years. This meant memorizing seven pages of the Catechism every week and we were all in agreement and began our studies. We were also studying to pass our State Board exam in the spring. As a reward for these two accomplishments, Dad presented me with a Bulova wrist watch and I was the envy of all my friends.

As a freshman in the first year at Bemidji High School our first hour class was a course in Industrial Arts. The Agriculture teacher, by the name of Pinky Johnson,

convinced twenty of us to join his class. Now, his class was a riot! The fifty minutes of his class, Pinky was gone forty eight minutes for breakfast while the unsupervised class had great fun doing everything except the chapter we were supposed to be studying. This happened as many as four days per week and the fifth day we were expected to outline everything we had read. Now Pinky had a fine judging team that, as a rule, won trips to Kansas City most years. Finally, due to lack of interest in Agriculture classes, the subject was terminated in about 1972.

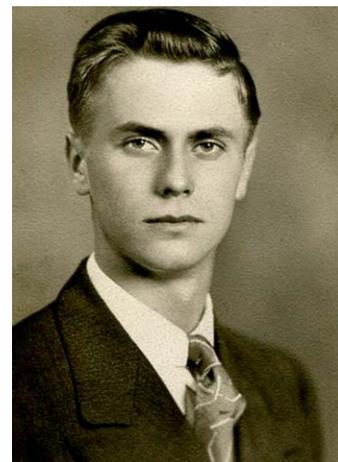
Mr. Kerns gave the best years of his life teaching all instruments in Bemidji High School Band; plus composing songs for cheerleaders to promote sports activities. He was known state wide for his marching bands.

Most of my sophomore year was in Phoenix (Arizona) Union High School which had near four thousand students. This was where I received my best grades due to the more professionalism among the teaching staff. I learned from K. Mullins, our Ag teacher, the value of being punctual.

Back in Bemidji: There was no public transportation for rural students in our area, and as a result, I was enrolled at North West School of Agriculture (affiliated with University of Minnesota) for my junior and senior years of high school. The advantages were six months with more credits and six months to work on the farm. Plus completing a senior class in three sessions. Most of the classes were agriculture based. It was in this Agriculture class that I learned to appreciate playing center on the football team and I graduated from there before being inducted into the Army.



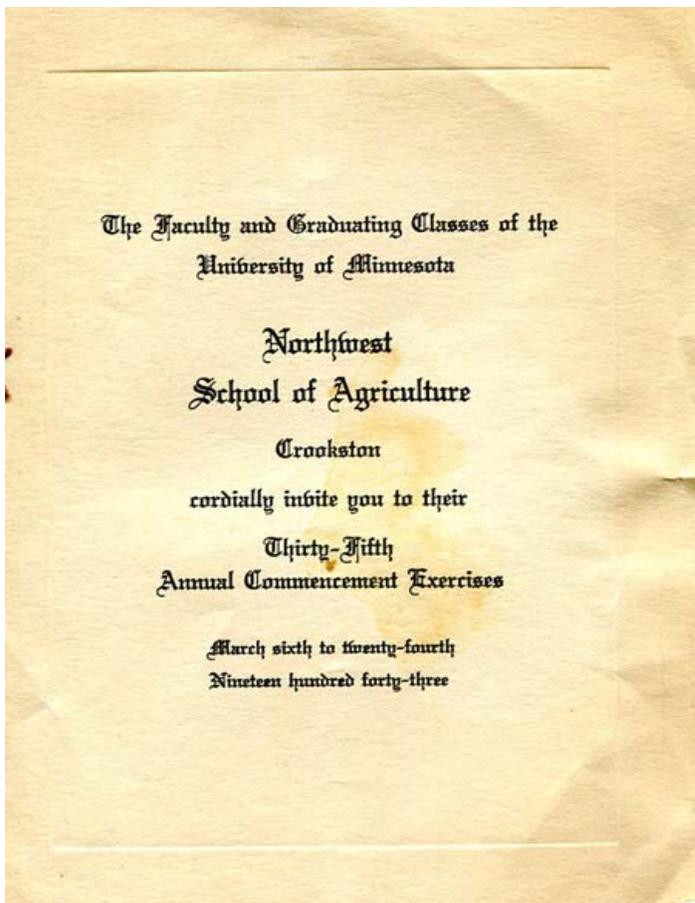
Bemidji High School



Lowell 1942



Lowell, Crookston Grad



Lowell and Lowell Knutson at Crookston Graduation March 1944



HELLO KNUTE YOU OLD KID!

BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA
C/O WESTERN UNION
JANUARY 4 1944

DEAR LOWELL,

JUST HAD A MINUTE SO THOUGHT I WOULD NON-
CHALANTLY DROP YOU A LINE.....SO HERE IT
IS JUST IN CASE YOU DONT KNOW WHAT I MEAN
MY PET.

LOVELY WEATHER OUT TODAY LOOKS LIKE IT WILL
SNOW JUST ANY MINUTE AND IF IT DOES GRRRRRRRR

WELL I SEE YOU HAD QUITE A SEND OFF YESTERDAY.
THE WHOLE GANG WAS THERE TO KISS THE OLD BOY
GOOD-BYE. US KIDS WATCHED THE BUS GO. DID
YOU SEE US, YES-NO? GLORY WAS WATCHING ALSO
THERE WAS A KID ON THE BUS NAMED DON MITCHELL
I GUESS WHO WAS GOING BACK TO SOME MILITARY
ACADEMY. HE HAD MET A GIRL FROM CROOKSTON
AND WAS RIDING BACK WITH HER AND WAS GLORY
MAD. OH BOY HER RED HAIR JUST SHONE.. WHO
WAS THAT KID THAT CAME IN THE OFFICE THEN
SWISH OUT HE WENT AGAIN. ANYHOW JOY THOUGHT
THAT HE WAS CUTE. I DONT THINK I EVEN GOT A
LOOK AT HIM. SHE SAID HE HAD CURLY HAIR.

BY THE WAY, YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED TO KNOW
WE SENT THAT TELEGRAM FOR YOU.

(SEE THAT LAST LINE---WELL THATS WHAT I GET
WHEN I GET INTERRUPTIONS AND HAVE TO REMOVE
THE PAPER AND PUT IT BACK IN AGAIN. WELL
SUPPOSE I WILL HAVE TO MOVE AGAIN SHORTLY CAUSE
THE MESSENGER IS SCRUBING THE FLOOR.

I HAVE A GREAT IDEA. THOUGHT I MIGHT SEND
MY LITTLE PUDGIE (I CALL HIM LOWELL SOMETIMES)
UP KEEP YOU COMPANY AND ALSO KNUTE SEEING AS
HOW MARVIN ISNT THERE ANYMORE. HOW DOES THAT
STRIKE YOU? PRETTY GOOD NO?

IM GOING HOME AT NOON TODAY. HOPE THE SUN
KEEPS COMING UP. MAYBE IT WILL TURN OUT NICE
AFTER ALL. BYE FOR NOW

LOVE, BONNIE