

Old Neighbors March 2023

There was one time at Mankato State College, which was before it became Mankato State University and long before it changed to Minnesota State, that my friend Dan Miller was explaining to one of our big city colleagues that we in the small rural area of West Concord would call someone a neighbor even though they were probably down the road 3 or 4 miles instead of 3 or 4 houses down the street. I always figured that if you were north of town you were a neighbor. The people south of town or west of town would consider the same thing.

If they were a close neighbor, that meant you either shared a fence-line with them or you could at least see their barn or silo from your place.. But much like my big city friends, the really close neighbors were the ones you knew best and could rely on to hook a chain to your pickup or tractor to pull you out and get it to where it needed to be, preferably on the road.

The first neighbors I remember as a kid were the ones to the west of our farm in Concord Township that we did share a fence-line with; Lewis and Doris Wenzel. I always knew them as Doris and Louie. Louie was born in 1987 and Doris was born in 1905. The picture on this page is them celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary on their farm which I'm guessing here again was around 1950. I'm basing my guesses off of the picture of my sister who was sitting next to Louie. Karolyn herself thought she was 8 or 9 in this picture which would put the year very near 1950.

Doris and Louie were the nicest people. There was one time I decided to leave home. Actually I just went down the road to visit the Wenzels. More accurately, I went to see the dog Pepper. Whenever I did visit, the dog and I were best of buddies. The picture you see of a small boy was me and Pepper sitting on some rocks in the middle fork of the Zumbro River that flowed right through the cowyard outside of Louie's barn. I'm not sure it was this time or another time when Doris got a call from my mom to ask if I was there. I'm sure Doris said something like; 'OH yes, he's here sitting in the creek with the dog'.

If you describe trouble as being up a creek without a paddle, I'm sure I was up a creek more than once. My mom learned not to call; she'd just drive down to get me. I liked to go watch Louie milk his cows. Louie was not an overly big man but he was a strong hard worker. Back in the day, the milk would be put in those milk cans that held around 10 gallons or so. He would lift those 80-85 pound cans like they were gallon size.

Louie had a glass eye. He lost one in a farming accident when he was using a wire stretcher on a barbed wire fence and the wire snapped and the end of it went right in his eye. I'm hearing this story years later when my dad and I are out in the pasture fixing fence and I'm using that old yellow wire stretcher. Note to parents; don't tell your kids about an old farm accident when they are using the same piece of equipment that caused this accident. From that point on, I would never give the wire one extra pull to tighten it just a bit more. That's why my barbed wire fences were a bit loose.

Another great memory I have of my good neighbors is a summer day around the year 1970. My dad and I finished baling our hay just ahead of a thunderstorm that was moving in. We knew that Doris was driving the old Minneapolis Moline on their baler and Louie was on the wagon loading and stacking the hay. My dad said hook up that empty hay rack and we'll go help them finish before the rain. I can still visualize the look on their faces when they saw my dad drive up to one of his windrows of hay and start the baler. I was on the rack loading as fast as I could as we were trying to beat the rain. They were forever grateful and my dad and I were just glad we could help. Heck, that's what neighbors are for.

Doris had an auction on the farm after Louie had passed away in 1973. They for many years drove a grey and white 1956 Buick. It was a beautiful car that I, for many years regretted not buying that day. I saw one at a car show many years later, not the same two-tone color but the same style. The memories just came sweeping back to me and it brought a smile to my face to just remember my good ole' neighbors.



Louie and Doris Wenzel with dog Pepper in 1950. Karolyn Kleven Raddatz on the far left. If the story I was told is correct, they got the dog as a gift for their 25th anniversary.



Emery with a grown up Pepper sitting in or near the creek in 1957.