

Minnie Parks Binder

February 24, 2021

Background: I visited with Minnie at her home in Table Rock in the course of writing a tribute article about her husband Willard, but found her own story too interesting to pass up. Sharla Cerra. Edited 4/20/21



I was born in Pawnee City in 1930. My parents were Daniel and Louise Parks. We were 3 girls and 4 boys, so 2 sisters and 4 brothers. I was the youngest.

Violet, Nebraska (Pawnee County town that no longer exists).

We lived at Violet then. We were about ½ to ¾ mile from the actual Violet. I haven't been there for years. Fred Rinne, who is my uncle, owned the farm that was around the area where it was. I don't know if there's still any. There was never very much there.

When I was a child, I remember –Crawford I think his name was – was a magazine salesman and he lived there, my Uncle had a farm right close to Violet, and I think there was a church that used to be there but I can't remember much about it because it was deserted by then.

Farm south of Pawnee City

When I was 8, we moved south of Pawnee city to a farm that belonged to Maude Aikens, who owned other land in Pawnee county as well. My parents rented.

Country School

I went to country school – Districts 4 and 5, Barker and Gravel Hill. I went 2 years to one and it was closed for a while, 2 years to the other. We were half way between the two. I graduated 8th grade from Gravel Hill.

[Do you remember any of your classmates?] There was Howard Peckham, who became a dentist, started school with me.

Pawnee City High School

I went to Pawnee City. I graduated high school in 1947.

[What high school activities did you like most?] I was on the student council. I was not musical so not involved with that but it made me feel bad because my friends were very musical. I helped with the yearbook, and there was a weekly school paper, the Pawneeian.

I took [and successfully completed] normal training, which took a lot of time so you could be qualified to leave country school without going to college.

Country school teacher

I taught country school for 8 years.

I taught at Gravel Hill (District 5) , and then Kennedy (District 13, I think). Eight years total.

I felt very comfortable teaching at a country school because I'd grown up going to country school. My sister had taught country school. It was just kind of natural.

[How much was she paid?] All I remember is the last year I taught, and I think for the whole year, not sure if this is completely right, it was just over \$1,000. I had to do the janitorial work, get the water. I was fortunate. At Gravel Hill we had an oil stove, so I didn't have to get wood or coal. We had a furnace in the basement at Kennedy, where the wood was piled next to the furnace.

[How many students?] It varied some, but my average was 7.

[Do you remember them?] Oh yes. I don't think many live around here. I remember when I taught at Grave Hill I had the Flanagan family and also another

family—can't think of the name right now—the kids were Ardyce, Doris, Ross, and Lane, but can't think of their last name.

When teaching at country school, I lived at home. Gravel hill was just $\frac{3}{4}$ mile so I walked. Kennedy was just a couple miles and I drove my brother's jeep to school. The family used it when it was muddy, that was our go to vehicle.

Entertainment

The main event was that we went to Pawnee City on Saturday nights. My dad would go into town to get groceries. When I got old enough, I went with him. That's where I met Katie Binder, we met when we were both young, Katie, Forest's wife. [Wife of Forest Binder, mother of Lynn, Kim, Steve, & Susan.] She and I went to high school together, we were in the same grade. When my dad was shopping, usually I'd help a little, but mainly there were a bunch of us kids that would just kind of hang around town and see what was going on. That was the event of the week!

County fair.

I never will forget, one time, before I was 8, they made me wear a crepe paper dress and be in the parade and I was so worried about that paper dress!

I remember when the county fair had the harness races – that and the other races, riding races, too. I remember the harness races because as a kid I rode ponies and riding races were common but the harness races were something special, they had the little two-wheeled carts.

Ken Wherry of course was the one who pushed things at the fair. If I remember correctly, my dad's and Ken Wherry's birthday were about the same time, February 27.

Church

We went to church to Salem United Church of Christ. It used to be Evangelical Reformed. That's where my mother grew up. She was a Rinne and grew up just a mile north. The church was Evangelical then.

Meeting Willard

We'd seen each other. He had gone a few times with my friend Virginia Crom [later Mezger], and I knew who he was. Virginia's dad was a painter and he had a van/truck, and when there were football or basketball games, Mr. Crom would clean out his truck and we girls would ride in the back of that van to the games, 3 to 4 of us could go tother.

At a football game, I think it was, I had gone with my brothers that time. Willard asked to take me home, but we had a rule that when I went to a game with my brothers I had to go home with them. I don't remember exactly when happened whether he gave up, or what but time passed.

Later I brought a poster about Salem's ice cream social and ask if I could put it in the lumber yard. He wasn't there and his dad insisted I had to stay and ask Willard if I could post that poster up. He wouldn't give me the OK. It was a really long wait! He was so insistent!

Willard came. We went to the Reno Inn and he took me off for lunch. [What did you have for lunch?] I don't remember, probably a hamburger or something. The funny part is my family knew about it almost before I got home. Mary Freeman's mother worked there, and Mary was married to my brother Leland. So you can't do anything in a small town before they know what's going on.

[How old when you took the poster to the lumberyard?] I was probably about 24. I had starting teaching when I was 17, and had been teaching for 7 years, so probably about 24. Age then -9- started teaching when 17, so I had probably 7 years, would have been about 24. Willard was a couple years older than me.

Our first date, he was sponsoring the youth group at the Methodist Church here and they were having a skating party at Sycamore Springs and he asked me to go. Marilyn Wright knew that was our first date and she would always tease me about how they went along on my first date! Because the youth group was there.

We dated for two years. We went to movies, and then to a café and have a sandwich afterwards, some ice cream. [Where to the movies?] Pawnee City, occasionally Humboldt, maybe even to Auburn a time or two.

[Where did he propose to you?] As I remember, we were coming, I don't know if Pawnee to Table Rock or the other way. He took the back way. He stopped on a road that was pretty isolated, and he stopped and proposed.

We were married at the Salem's Evangelical Reform Church, married in the Fall of 1954.

How Willard came to have the lumberyard

Willard lived on the family farm west of town.

Willard had allergies, and whenever they would harvest or put up hay, he would get all choked up and break out. Because of the allergies his mother came to town and talked to Mr. Woods, who had the lumberyard at the time, and he was putting it up for sale. She thought being in the lumberyard would be cleaner, Willard and his brother Leland bought it. Their brother Chick used to help but was never a part owner.

Setting up a home

At first we lived with Willard's parents for a while, as we built the house where Milan Tomek lives. That was while I was teaching school. We were married in November and I taught school until the following May.

We moved into the new house in July 1955. We raised the kids there until the kids got too many for the house then we built this one.

Grandma Binder was close and she was a really good seamstress . She made our drapes, she came up when we first finished that house, we were sleeping in the bedroom right next to the house next door. It has a corner window and she had a fit that we didn't have curtains on that window yet. She went home and made curtains out of chenille, must have been a bedspread, too. She thought we definitely needed curtains!

Jon was born in September 1955. The kids came about every two years. We have 7: Jon, Becky, Martha, Peter, Charles, Sarah, and Sam.

[Did you know to cook when you first were married?] I won't say I didn't know, but I didn't know much. [What kind of meals did you make?] We used to have roasts, and chicken, and Willard's mother was a whiz at dressing chicken – I could never keep up with her, but we used chicken quite a bit. We had some pork. He and Leland were in partnership, so there were farm animals.

Leland did the farming and Willard took care of the lumber yard, as we had kids, the kids would go out and help pick up rocks and different job, and he would take

equipment from the lumber yard. They owned the farm together, too, not just the lumberyard.

We were both raising our families, Leland and Wilma and us. We went out to their place a lot. They had an apple orchard and in the Fall we'd go out and pick apples. I don't know how Wilma got them started. They always raised real good sweet potatoes and we'd go out and they would share those.

Civic affairs.

Willard was active in civic affairs, but I was usually home taking care of the kids. He was mayor for a lot years., 24 years, 1966-1990. [She donated a clock given to him, with a plaque honoring his service as mayor.]

Quite honestly, there were things he had to do, go take care of water or sewer, back then they just ALL did that kind of thing.

[Fire department?] No, he wasn't active in the fire department. The firemen liked their liquor and he wanted to no part of that, I think. That was never said, it's just my thought.

Table Rock Sugar Maples

When we moved to this house, we planted some of the sugar maples. The older one down that way was there already, Richard Mezger helped me plant the one in front, and we planted a whole row in back.

The ones at Sam's house [son Sam], he has about 5, we planted those, Sarah and I [daughter Sarah].

Sarah always said, "There ought to be a law in Table Rock that if you live here you have to have a maple tree."

When you go down this street, there's a maple there, two by the church, some in the park, we planted one or two there.

Tomek's planted the ones on the highway but we planted a lot up here, too.

[How old are the other trees?] The oldest ones are probably around 50 years old. Addie Wilcox already had hers. Addie was kind of the one that got me started to give them away. Addie she valued those trees, and she gave, Doris Morehead, her daughter who lived in Pawnee, some, so Pawnee has quite a few trees from here, too.

Motherhood

[Have you enjoyed being a mother?] Oh yes! I think I was, I don't know how to put it, I loved having a big family, but I was kind of stupid, I didn't realize how much work it would be! I had more admiration for my mother after I had more kids.

Jon is in Wyoming, Becky is in Michigan, Martha is in Illinois, Sarah is in Kentucky. Charles, Sam, and Pete live in Table Rock.

Willard was a good dad. In some respects he taught the boys too well, they are all hard workers.

That's one of the big things about a big family, you learn people are different, and you need to tolerate it.

She goes to the Methodist Church in Table Rock, belongs to the bible study group. The group now is Susan Peterson, Glee Covault, Shad Gager, Edie Tomek, and Pastor Dorothy [Smith].

Retirement years

After the kids left home, for : quite a few years, Willard and I would travel some. Wherever the kids lived, usually. We enjoyed traveling together. Visiting family, kind of goes with traveling.

At home, Willard liked to spend time cracking walnuts, he cracked a lot of walnuts! We never did much besides church and family.

We've had some good friends over the years. Johnny Bowens, Lillian until she passed; years ago, the Workmans, Mary Ann and Duane; Bob & Becky Sitzman, probably some I'm not thinking of. Some of our friends from away were people in the lumber business, one or two years Willard was on the board of directors for the lumber dealers and we went to some of their affairs.

[What are you doing with yourself lately?] I mainly visit family. I went in August to Illinois then on to Ohio. Becky would like us to come to Michigan but I'm not sure I can make it.

[Ever been on an airplane?] We flew when we went to the Holy Land, and we also flew to Mexico, that's probably it.

We went to the Holy Land for our 40th wedding anniversary. It was so wonderful. It makes the bible come alive. It's not just a book. When you're there, and realize that certain things happened right here it brings it to life.

In Mexico, Willard was friends with John Stewart with Wycliffe bible translators. We went out where there was an Indian tribe, that was interesting. There's a place in Mexico where a famous botanist came from, a special place in his honor.

We went to the Philippines twice, to visit Becky when she lived there. That was interesting, makes you realize how some of the more primitive countries have changed; the first time we went most of it was pretty primitive, the second time ten years later they had made many changes, McDonald's had moved in, more modern things had affected them .

Martha was over there with her for a while, when Martha was there she went and lived in a village for about three months, came home and had dengue fever, picked it up over there.

End of this visit