

## Milda's Life Diary

Once upon a time, on September 9th, 1921, to be exact, a baby girl was born at the hospital in Spring Grove, Minnesota. Her parents gave her the name of Milda Lucille Dahl. Eighty-nine years later that baby girl is now that lady who is beginning to write her memoirs, and as you see, I've used the initials of my maiden name to identify my autobiography. My father always liked to tell me how proud he was when the doctor who delivered me at the hospital said to him, "Isn't she a bright one ?" I was the first child born into a household of 4 adults; namely, my father Oscar Erland Dahl, and my mother Sarah Helmina Ike Dahl, plus my maternal grandfather Knute Olson Ike. and maternal grandmother, Maren Dammen Ike.

I have a rather uncommon first name, Milda, and I'd like to tell you how I came to be given that name. My mother told me that she found it in a Sunday issue of the Minneapolis, Minnesota, newspaper. Every Sunday that newspaper printed a front cover, full page of pictures called "Pretty Girls of the Northwest". One of the girls on that page of pictures was named Milda and my mother chose the name because she liked it and also because it started with the letter M. It was the custom at that time to choose a name for your children that started with the same letter as that of a grandparent. In my case, my maternal grandmother's name was Maren, and my paternal grandmother's name was Liva, so my second name became Lucille. In my lifetime I have never known another living person with the name Milda, although very occasionally I have seen it in print. The origin of the name is in Lithuania. On my trip to Norway in 2001, I was surprised to learn of a company called Milda. The name is found throughout the Scandinavian countries.

Since my maternal grandparents were descendants of Norwegian immigrants, they still spoke only the Norwegian language. My parents had grown up in Norwegian-speaking households, but they had also mastered the English language by the time I was born. As a result of this combination of 2 languages being used in my home, I learned both the English and Norwegian languages simultaneously. By the time I was 3 years old, I have been told that I could speak both languages equally well. To this day, 89 years later, I can speak the English language without the Norwegian brogue in my enunciation of words, but when I revert to the Norwegian, it is very evident that I have retained the "Norwegian brogue" in that language.

I have often been asked how my parents first met since my mother was born and grew up in the Spring Grove, Minnesota community and my father was born and grew up in a small town in Dane County, Wisconsin. Both of my parents were born into farm families and when my father was old enough to leave his home and find work to earn his own livelihood, he chose to go to the farm community of Spring Grove, Minnesota where he found employment with a

farmer who needed a "hired hand" as farm laborers were called at that time. This meant that my father lived and worked full time at a farm that happened to be located adjacent to the farm where my mother was living with her parents. In the early years of the 1900s, social life in the community centered around neighborhood gatherings which were usually dances in conjunction with lunches which the eligible ladies would bring in a basket or box. These box lunches, as they were called, were auctioned off to the highest bidder, who would have the privilege of eating lunch with the lady who had brought that particular box lunch. My father always liked to tell the story of how he had determined which box lunch belonged to my future mother. He outbid everyone else in order to meet the lady who would later become his wife and my mother. She was a small lady, like me, and dad would always say, "There she stood, just like a little doll".....his pun, because my father's last name was Dahl.

Of course I did not realize it at the time, or until many years later, but I enjoyed lots of advantages by being the only child in a family with 4 adults. My birth did not happen until eight years after my parent's marriage. My mother, Sarah, did not conceive until she went to a doctor who "turned her womb", as I was told. I was the "only child" for five years until my brother, Clinton Odell Dahl, was born on August 24, 1926. Because of the 5-year difference in our ages, I always have felt that we did not spend much time together, or get to know each other very well. We were in the same grade school for a 3-year period, but never together in the same high school or college.

During the first 6 to 8 years of my life my mother and grandmother had a great time outfitting me with beautiful feminine dresses and clothes. My mother had spent a period of time (I don't know how long), in Austin, Minnesota, where she attended school to become a seamstress. My first dress was my beautiful organdy baptismal gown with slip to match. This dress boasted a lot of lace work as trim, all lovingly tatted and crocheted by both my mother and grandmother. I am proud to say that this baptismal gown is still in pristine shape after 89 years, as I have taken very good care of it. The gown has also been used at the baptisms of several close family members.....namely: my sons, Robert Ray Thompson and Timothy Jon Thompson, my niece Julie Jeannine Dahl Newhouse, great nephews Tyler Jordan Smith and Adam Tuchscherer, plus great nieces Elizabeth (Abbey) Tuchscherer, and great niece Ashley Tuchscherer.

However, my mother's seamstress training had to be cut short because since my mother was the youngest child in her farm family, my grandparents were then growing quite elderly and they needed help with the farm work. My mom told me that her parents asked her to return home to live with them and "help milk the cows". And so, mom obediently returned home and left behind her dream of becoming an excellent seamstress. Her expertise and love for sewing and all that goes with it still showed itself in our home. For many years she did a lot of embroidery work and made many beautiful dresses for me, up until I

was almost out of high school. During the 1930s mom's health began to fail and for the years mainly between 1930 through 1942, she was unable to care for our little family which consisted of her husband, her aging mother, and my brother, Clint, and myself.....in the manner she would have wished. My mother's illness was never diagnosed, as health care in that era of time was not something readily discussed or "paid attention to". Mother was hospitalized twice during these years. The first hospitalization was during my sophomore year of high school (1936-1937) and the cause was referred to as a nervous breakdown. She was cared for at the Spring Grove Hospital at that time. The second hospitalization was in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. I am not certain of the length of time she was in the hospital during either of these two visits. Today I am sure it would have been labeled as severe depression lasting over a 10-year period, at least.

At the time of mom's second hospitalization (1941), I was a sophomore at Winona State Teachers College in Winona, Minnesota. which is a city about 20-plus miles away from the LaCrosse Hospital. I really had no way of going to visit mom in LaCrosse, but my ingenious college girl friend, Carol Briggs, came up with the idea that she and I could hitch-hike the 20-plus miles to LaCrosse. Being young (20 years old), and adventurous, I agreed. As I think of what we did, I shudder at the thought, but surely God and his angels protected us. You must remember that this was during World War II years and hitch-hiking was not as dangerous as it became in ensuing years. We made the trip from our dorm room to the hospital and back in one day's time.

The depression years, beginning in 1929, had a devastating effect on our household of six people (grandparents, parents, and children). The year 1929 was also the year that my grandfather, Knute Ike, then 90 years of age, became ill and consequently he was bedridden for three long years. This period of time was before people had access to nursing homes or professional care for ill and aging family members. Since we were still living on a farm, for the next ten or more years my mother tried to carry a workload that eventually severely undermined her health. During that period of time she was caring for her bedridden father, her aging mother, myself and my brother Clint, both of us under 10 years of age, and her husband.....an entire household of 6 persons. In addition she also helped with the regular farm work such as milking cows, caring for chickens, and doing the cooking for all 6 of us. At the tender age of 8, 9 and 10, I remember trying to help in the household. However, I must mention one time when my help was more "hindrance than help". My grandfather's bedroom was on the second floor of our house and one day mom had prepared a dinner for him. She had it all placed on a tray and asked me to carry it up the stairs and into his room for him. My efforts to negotiate the stairs ended in my "tripping up the stairs" and spilling everything off the tray. To this day, 80 or more years later, I still remember how terrible I felt when I had that accident. My grandfather, Knute Ike, died in August of 1932 during the height of the depression years. This was my first close experience with death. Knute

was 93 years old at the time of his death.

I have very little recollection of my life from birth until I was about 8 years of age. All during my growing up years I was a bit of a “tomboy”. In my entire life I have always been very agile, and having one brother helped make me into more of a tomboy. I learned early how to play softball and was always one of the first girls chosen when we chose teams to play softball. Toys were virtually non-existent in my childhood. We did have a swing in our yard which consisted of a board seat on a rope which was fastened to a tree limb. As a substitute for toys, imagination took over and the ordinary household and farm tools became toys I had learned how to use a hammer to drive nails into a board. My parents were proud to tell this little story about me when I was about 4 or 5 years of age. My grandfather was watching me and “playing” with me. I learned quickly, and grandpa gave me a few lessons for life, as I like to call them. Grandpa Knute told me that “some people learn quickly, some people learn slowly, and some people never learn at all”. One day grandpa and I were playing in our yard and he started to tease me by not doing as I wanted him to do. In exasperation I told him, “Now grandpa, you are one of those people who never learn at all”. I told him this in his own Norwegian language, as these were the years I was absorbing my second language, Norwegian.

With our lack of appropriate toys, my brother and I had one accident/incident that could have resulted in tragedy. When I was about 10 years of age, my brother Clint and I were playing “catch” over our empty clotheslines. Since we didn’t have a regular ball to play with, we were using a large, hard, glass marble. Both us had “good aim” and when it was Clint’s turn to throw, I looked away temporarily as Clint threw the hard marble. It landed squarely on the side of my nose. I can still remember hearing my scream and seeing my nose bleed. However, the hurt was only momentary and so was the nosebleed. In those days one never went to see a doctor until, in my words, “you were at least half dead”. My parents didn’t feel it necessary to have a doctor check out my injury. It wasn’t until 40 or 50 years later that I found out my nose had been broken in that mishap. I was having difficulty with allergies and breathing, so when I consulted a doctor about my problem he asked me if I had ever had a broken nose. He told me that as a result of that blow to my nose, I have a deviated septum, and to this day at 89 years of age, I still have a deviated septum.....that’s doctor terminology for a crooked bone in my nose. That was a very close call, as that hard marble hit me very, very close to my left temple.

My brother Clint and I had one other mishap that you may find interesting. Both of us attended a one-room schoolhouse, where all eight (8) grades shared one teacher. In good weather we would walk approximately one mile to the school. Sometimes we would walk by way of the roads and other times we would take a shortcut through our fields, woods, and pastures. One day as we were returning home at the end of the school day, two (2) friends, along with my brother and me had stopped to rest. We were chatting about something and I,

in my foolishness, started teasing Clint, who was the only boy in the group. Clint reacted to my teasing by lifting his lunch pail and slamming it onto my head. The resulting cut on the top of my head started bleeding and the four of us made a beeline to get home as fast as we could. There was no trip to the doctor's office this time either, as the cut healed well on its own. My beautiful "tam" headpiece was ruined from blood stains however. My lesson learned from this episode was that I never, ever again, thoughtlessly teased or made fun of anyone, even as a joke.

My first eight (8) years of education were received in a one-room red brick schoolhouse. As I'm typing this I think back to those years and wonder how all of us survived all the inconveniences we faced every day. At the time of this writing (2011), that little red brick schoolhouse is still standing in the very same spot, about one mile from my childhood home. In the year 2004, Ray and I made our last trip together to my "roots" in Spring Grove, Minnesota. I came away with pictures of the schoolhouse as it looks today. Above the front door entrance, in very large white numbers, is the year it was built.....1903. I attended the school from 1928 through 1935. At that time, there were no pre-schools or kindergartens in our community. I was not enrolled in first grade until I was seven (7) years old. Since my great-grandparents and nearly all of the people and their ancestors in the community had come from Norway as immigrants, they followed the practice of their old homeland where children did not start school until they were seven (7) years of age. Fortunately, I and my one and only classmate in first grade, mastered the school curriculum of both first and second grade in one school year. At the beginning of the second year in school both my classmate and I were placed in the third (3<sup>rd</sup>) grade and we never had any problem in keeping up with the curriculum.

The inconveniences mentioned previously consisted of things such as: two (2) outhouses (one for the girls and one for the boys), where toilet paper was always the previous year's Sears or Montgomery Ward catalog pages. Yuck ! There was no running water, either hot or cold. There was a pump near the school building, where someone had to pump the water into a bucket and carry it inside to pour it into the water cooler. Don't know why they called it the water cooler, as there was nothing to cool the water, It was always room temperature.

There was no telephone in the building; if there was an occasional emergency then one of the students would have to walk, or run for help, to the nearest farmhouse where there was a telephone. There was one such emergency with my brother Clint when he fell against a concrete wall and suffered a minor concussion. Clint was trying to do some circus trick by balancing on the top of a very large round ball. He didn't stay on top very long before falling headfirst into the concrete wall ! The students were playing indoors, in the basement of the schoolhouse that day, as it was raining outdoors. I remember Clint lying on the top of a long table at the front of the classroom. Since Clint was my brother, I was sent to the nearest farmhouse to

call my parents and tell them to come and get Clint. As usual, he was not taken to see a doctor. A period of rest was the treatment for him.

I recall a couple of other happier incidents during my elementary school days in that one-room schoolhouse. I remember vividly my participation in a Christmas school program that was performed for our parents. I was eight (8) years old and I did a little solo act by singing the song "Jesus Loves Me". As I sang the song I was seated in a small rocking chair, while rocking back and forth holding a doll. My mother had sewn me a new deep-red colored dress for the occasion and I can still recall the awe of the audience as I sang for them that night.

Two other memorable events took place near the close of my 7<sup>th</sup> grade school year. It was customary during that period of time to have spelling bees in all the schools. In my School District 37, I was the winner, and this entitled me to participate in the county-wide spelling bee held at the County Court House in Caledonia, Minnesota. Caledonia was the county seat for Houston County, Minnesota. At the county spelling bee I was the runner-up to the young boy winner. As the second place winner, I was eligible to continue on and participate in the Minnesota State Spelling Bee which was held in conjunction with the Minnesota State Fair. I did not receive any placing in the State Spelling Bee, but I did have the honor of participating in it. I still remember the words that "tripped me up" in both contests. At the county spelling bee I misspelled the word intelligible by using only one 'l'. At the state spelling bee I went down on the word kindergarten. I spelled it as kindergarden, Since I had never attended a kindergarten as a child, it was a common mistake (and the word kindergarden is even listed as a second spelling in Webster's Dictionary). But I was proud to have been a contestant in both county and state contests. After one more year, I graduated from eighth grade and that concluded the first seven (7) years of my schooling in a one-room school house. I had completed all eight (8) grades in the time span of seven (7) years.

The next chapter of my life began when I entered the Spring Grove High School in the small town of Spring Grove, Minnesota. In the fall of 1935, the town's population numbered about 800 people and there were 32 fellow students in the freshman class that year. My daily life changed rather dramatically that year because during the school week, I was no longer living in my family home. During this period of time, students who came from surrounding farm areas rented a room in someone's home in the town of Spring Grove and stayed there for the week, in order to attend classes at the high school. There was no such thing as public transportation and our parents would drive into town on Fridays and we would be taken back to our parental homes for the weekend. On Sunday evening or Monday morning, parents would return us to our rented rooms in town. This was an ongoing schedule for the next four (4) years of my life, until I graduated from Spring Grove High School in the spring of 1939. It was not an idealistic arrangement, but it did

give the rural students the chance to continue their education. I remember those years as being rather lonely. I must include here another event that remains in my memory. There was no public transportation and roads were not black-topped...only gravel was used to coat the road surfaces. In the spring the roads were often reduced to just plain "mud". On one of the Fridays when my father arrived to take me back home, he came for me with our horse-drawn buggy ! The roads were too muddy for even a car to navigate. I still remember how embarrassed I was. The horse and buggy brought us safely home and I never found out if anyone saw us or not.

I had always done well in my school studies and I was very surprised and pleased to learn that at the end of the first grading period my name was included on the Honor Roll. I was doubly surprised and pleased about this because I was now competing against 32 students in my class instead of only two (2) students in my class at the one-room school. After that, my name was on the Honor Roll continuously through my high school graduation in 1939. I was also pleased to learn that I was accepted into the National Honor Society in my senior year of high school. Activities in my high school years included participation in operettas, class plays, and vocal groups. In my senior year I was a member of the mixed chorus group that won state recognition and then competed in the National School Vocal Competition Festival held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Not bad for a chorus that originated in my small home town of Spring Grove, Minnesota, with a population of less than one thousand people. In my senior year, I and a fellow classmate performed a dance routine during the break of the senior play. We were scheduled to appear only one evening, but the two of us received such ovations that we were brought back for a performance on the second night also. That experience earned me the nickname of "the dancing doll of high school days". Coincidentally, my last name was Dahl. The only "down side" to the whole dance, as well as other performances, was that during my high school years my mother was chronically ill and was unable to attend these events. All these years later, I still feel the disappointment of that.

My next adventure began in the fall of 1939 when I entered what was then known as Winona State Teachers College, in Winona, Minnesota. I spent two (2) very happy years there, after getting over being homesick in my freshman year). My family was still feeling the effects of the depression years of the '30s during that period of time, and money was "extremely tight". Having a nickel to buy an ice cream cone was a great event. During my freshman year I was placed on a student work program to help pay for my expenses. I was awarded a scholarship in order to attend my second year of teacher training. Half way through my second year at Winona State I was granted a loan from the college, to be able to finish my second year. This was a loan I had to repay during my first year of teaching.

In order to stay in school and participate, ingenuity was the name of the game.

When it came time for the Spring Prom, the Dean of Women at my dorm offered to help me get a dress for the Prom; however, I had been a bridesmaid at my cousin's wedding the previous summer so I wore that bridesmaid dress at the Prom. That dress was a beautiful shade of blue and my seamstress had fashioned it in the same style as the dress worn by Scarlett O'Hara in the movie, "Gone With the Wind". I felt "really special" in that dress. But I didn't have a proper wrap, and I still chuckle at the thought of what I did as a substitute. I ordered a very pretty white short wrap from the Montgomery Ward catalog, and wore it very proudly on Prom night. After the evening was over, I very carefully wrapped it back up and returned it to Montgomery Ward in order to have my money refunded to me.

A little humorous sidelight happened on Prom night. It was the rule that on special occasions we would be granted the privilege of a 2 a.m. curfew. If we were not back by curfew time, the door would be locked and we would have to ring the doorbell. This meant the Dean of Women came to the door to let us in.....something we avoided at all costs. On Prom night my boyfriend and I arrived a few minutes after 2 a.m. We were happy to find the door unlocked, so we decided to have another long kiss. It turned out to be a very short kiss because at that moment the door opened, an arm reached out and I was pulled inside by my arm. The Dean of Women had been waiting for just such latecomers ! After an admonishment, all was well and life went on as usual. I still chuckle at the thought of that incident.

The college awarded a two-year Teaching Certificate back then. At the end of my sophomore year in the spring of 1941, I graduated from the two-year course and received my Teaching Certificate. Even though I did not want to cut my education short at that point, lack of money and family circumstances made it necessary for me to apply for a teaching position in order to help support my family financially. This change in my life, at that time, was one of the saddest things I have ever had to do. The rural school in which I had been hired as a teacher was still a one-room school where I had all eight grades under my tutelage. The fall session did not begin until the last week in September.

At the beginning of the month of September the fall quarter began at Winona State Teachers College, but of course I could not be there because I was scheduled to take over the rural classroom as my first employment in the work-a-day world. I was so distraught, upset, and lonely for not being able to join my former classmates as a junior at Winona State, that every morning I had a lengthy crying spell and that scenario lasted for the whole month of September. It was the most miserable month I have probably endured in my entire lifetime. My father tried to console me by saying, "you will be lucky if this is the worst thing that will ever happen to you in your life". But you know what ?.....I still look upon that "happening" as one of the worst times, if not the absolute worst happening of my life.



I remember the day my parents drove me to Byron, Minnesota, to my living quarters for my new teaching position. I rented a room in the home of one of the area farmers. I had a comfortable room and was treated as one of the members of the family. Neither the farmer's house or the school house had indoor plumbing however. I was still in primitive farm country. Yet this small community was only eight (8) miles away from the World-renown Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Within a few years (5 to 10), society advanced quickly and I was probably in the last wave of one-room school teachers, before one-room schoolhouses disappeared into posterity. For this district the school year was only eight (8) months long. It was the longest eight months I can recall. The school year was in 1941-1942. Pearl Harbor date fell on December 7, 1941, and from that date on, social life of any kind came to an abrupt halt. My teaching years were the most bleak years of my life. My monthly salary was eighty (\$80) dollars a month. During the last month of that school year I had the misfortune of developing a case of the mumps, which I no doubt caught from association with my students. I spent 2 weeks in bed in order to recover and it was rather a major upset for me and the children as the final testing time of the year came during that time. A substitute teacher was called in until I recovered.

After only one year at the Byron, Minnesota, school I moved on to a slightly higher-paying district in the small town of Canton, Minnesota. This school year of 1942-1943 I taught a class of fifth and sixth grade children. This was a step up from my first year of teaching. The elementary and high school students were housed in one large building. The teaching staff at this school consisted of seven young single recent women college graduates and we seven made our own social life on weekends by getting together in one of the teachers' rented rooms to play cards. Each of us rented a room in someone's home in that village.

Three (myself included) of the seven teachers rented rooms from an elderly widow who lived very close to the school. Unfortunately, the three of us were asked to move out of her house only a couple of months after school began. The widow was used to living by herself, in total quiet, and if any of us came in after ten or eleven o'clock at night, it disturbed her so greatly that she finally asked us to move out. That episode created a bit of gossip for the community. However, all went well after the three of us found refuge in another home and all was well for the rest of that school year. World War II was now in full swing. The school year went by in "much of a blur" for me and when the year ended every one of the seven young teachers moved on to other schools. The one episode that etched itself in my mind that year, for all time, was that the song "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas", sung by Bing Crosby, became popular. One of my students asked me if he could sing that song during the students' Christmas Program. Of course I said 'Yes' and ever since that children's program on a December night in 1942, every time I hear "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" I am immediately transported back in time to a school gymnasium in Canton, Minnesota. Nearly every young lady had "a special

man” in the service somewhere in the world at that time. We were all missing our loved ones, and it was especially heart-wrenching for me because a year earlier I had broken off a close relationship with my boy friend, Richard Ashley. Richard was Ray Thompson’s best friend, and as many of you know, Ray Thompson became my husband six (6) years later. I even remember that I was wearing a bright red dress trimmed in white (a standout dress). Strange, how a “moment in time” became a bittersweet moment for all time.

For the third year of teaching, I secured a position with the Mabel, Minnesota, school district. This small town was just a few miles “down the road” from the Canton School. For the 1943-1944 school year I taught a class of fifth and sixth grade children and in the following year of 1944-1945, I taught a class of only sixth grade students at this same school. My future husband, Raymond Thompson, was drafted into service with the United States Army in November of 1943. I recall his trip to Mabel to say “good-bye” to me. For the next two-and one-half years we saw each other on only two occasions for a one-day visit each time. There was no TV or email in those years and due to censorship of wartime, even mail was very infrequent, like every few weeks or even months. So, again, life was very lonely.

I recall, with fondness, one incident that happened during my years at the Mabel school. At recess time the teachers were expected to supervise the children at play in the school yard. This incident took place when I was outdoors playing softball with my sixth grade students. You see I not only supervised, but I played with them. Remember, this was a very small town and the school yard bordered railroad tracks that ran past the school. We were in the middle of a softball game when a train came down the tracks, going very slowly. The engineer stopped the whole train to watch us play. Suddenly the engineer shouted out to us, “who’s the best player ?” One of the students shouted out in response, “the teacher”. The next comment from the engineer was, “which one is the teacher?” Since I was the same size, physically, as most of my students, it was a logical question. At the time, this little happening was quite flattering to me.

The two years I spent in the Mabel school system dragged by slowly. World War II just cast a pall over life in general and in spite of my success in the teaching field, I was very disenchanted with my own life. It was at this time that I decided to leave the teaching field. I did not apply for any teaching position at the end of the 1944-1945 school year. However, I was surprised that by the end of that 1945 summer, I had received teaching offers from twelve different schools. I turned down every one of them. The superintendent of the Mabel school system told me he was disappointed in that because he had written me a very good letter of recommendation. Unfortunately, I was not aware that I had received such accolades. These are the kinds of things that happen when communication breaks down. I tried to talk to my parents about my direction in life, but they were of no help to me at this stage. I lived at home with my

parents that summer of 1945 and I remember so well how I agonized over “what to do next”. I would lie awake in my bed near an open window, listening to the wind in the row of evergreen trees just outside, searching for an answer. As I am writing this, about 65 years later, I cannot help but wonder what my life would have been like had I taken the last and best offer of a teaching position in Austin, Minnesota. As it turned out, however, this was the time when I decided to change careers. At that time, had I been at the stage where I am now, (some 65 years later) in my Christian walk with my God, I am convinced I would not have changed careers.

Toward the close of the summer of 1945, I packed my small suitcase, bought a ticket for the bus that I rode from Spring Grove, Minnesota to Minneapolis, Minnesota. There I spent a couple of nights in a YMCA while I explored the Minneapolis Business College and enrolled for the one-year Secretarial Course of study. I had saved enough money from my teaching years to pay the year’s tuition fee, but since I had given most of my earnings to help support my parents and brother, I did not have enough money left to cover room and board. The business college staff helped me locate a family that was willing to give me free room and board in exchange for household help and child care of their three children. My new family lived in the Edina suburb of Minneapolis and I spent about 45 minutes each morning and evening riding the street cars in order to get to my school. With these arrangements in place, I was off in my new direction of study to become a secretary. Because of my work obligation for the family with whom I was living, I had no study time other than the time I spent each morning and evening on the street cars, traveling to and from school. This time was spent learning shorthand and bookkeeping. Using this method, I had no problem keeping up with my studies.

A couple of interesting sidelights to that year was that the husband of the family with whom I was living, was a senior vice-president of the Skippy Peanut Butter Company in Minneapolis. The family lived in a very nice home in Edina. I had five blocks to walk each morning before I could board the street car. These last years of the 1940s decade were the last years of the street car era in Minneapolis. The youngest of the 3 children I was caring for, a boy, was about 3 years old at the time and one evening after dinner he decided to go on an adventure. He set out by himself and walked five blocks to the theater where he went in to see a movie. His frantic mother and I called the police and fortunately he was located within an hour’s time.

After completion of the one-year secretarial course I received my certificate and was hired to work in the advertising department of the Cargill Company in Minneapolis. I then lived in a dormitory-like building called a Girl’s Club and again I rode the street cars to work. During the ensuing two years World War II ended and my future husband, Raymond Thompson, was released from his duties as a corporal in the U. S. Army. Ray and I met for the first time while I was attending Winona State Teachers College. We met through a mutual

friend that I was dating at the time. Communication during World War Two was very, very limited. This was long before computers, email, or even good trans-oceanic telephone service. Letters could take anywhere from weeks to months before delivery. Ray and I had seen each other on only three occasions during his three-and-one-half years in the Army. In the first part of the year 1946, Ray received his discharge papers and returned to live with his mother in Winona, Minnesota. For the next one-and-a-half years Ray and I spent time getting reacquainted, and I continued with my secretarial work at Cargill's in Minneapolis, Minnesota. At the end of the year 1947, the two of us had decided on marriage and January 4, 1948, became our wedding day.

Financially, we were not ready for marriage but with the exuberance of youth, we "took the plunge" anyway. Ray and Lester (his older brother by 10 years) decided to go into business for themselves, and with the help of another established company, they located in Red Wing, Minnesota. Our first home was in a rented apartment in Red Wing. The two brothers' business venture did not fare too well and after two years Ray decided it was time to move on. It was then that he decided to return to college and claim his rights to the Veterans Bill for free college tuition. At the time, even my first pregnancy did not stop us from moving to Valparaiso, Indiana, where Ray had enrolled in Valparaiso University's Engineering Department. By going to classes during the summer sessions, Ray graduated with his Civil Engineering Degree in only three-and-one-half years.

The time Ray and I spent, living in a Trailer Court there on the Valparaiso Campus, is proof positive that "where there is a will there is a way". Remember, I was pregnant at the time we moved to Valparaiso. Our first son, Robert Ray Thompson, was born on July 23, 1950, and Ray had only six months credit toward his 4-year college degree at that time. But there were many other couples there in the same situation in those post World War Two years. Even though Ray's college tuition was paid for by the U. S. Government, and Ray received a small stipend for our living expenses, we always ran out of money before the month ended. This meant that we had to come up with some other way to cover those extras. The cost of rent for the double-size trailer that was our home on the Valparaiso University Campus was \$25.00 a month. To cover that cost, Ray and I became managers of the Trailer Court. That position paid us \$21.00 a month, consequently our rent then cost us only \$4.00 a month. But we still needed money for food, clothing, and any other necessities. Our meager savings ran out rather quickly, so Ray was fortunate to be able to obtain work in the Engineering Department at the University. Milda also added to the effort by doing typing work for the University.

