

Dorothy Birmingham Frantzen, "Family History, 1935-1979"¹

This family history was written by Dorothy Birmingham Frantzen for the Alton, Iowa, centennial (1883-1983). Mother gets some dates wrong, and there is a page missing that recounted the birth of Tom, the youngest in the family.²

[page 1]

I, Dorothy, married John Frantzen³ on January 21, 1935, one of the worst wintery days in Iowa history. Winter set in before or on Thanksgiving. We had a thaw the first week of January. We went to Waterloo that Tuesday two weeks before the wedding to get my and Audrey's dresses, as I recall.⁴ The day (the 21st) was clear after an all-night blizzard and -20°. Our wedding was scheduled for 9 a.m. and finally we got to the church at 11 a.m. Some of each family were present. The road was plowed out so some of the invited guests made it to church or home [for] dinner. My dad spent the day taking and getting us and the relatives to the corner to the Elma road where the cars were left. We went by sleigh and Chester Chihak got us from there in his car. John and Jack Determan (best man) stayed at our house on the Sunday night previous. We had gone to Cresco to get the flowers and left them in Our Lady of Lourdes Church.

We had our wedding dance in Alta Vista on Thursday night. Many people were stranded going home as the snow began to blow and drift the roads that night. John and I stayed at the John Hentges home in Alta Vista as it was doubtful if we would get to the place where we planned to stay. We left on our [page 2] Honeymoon on Saturday in an \$80 car and stayed at relatives Charlie Edel at Mason City.⁵ From there we went to Alton and more friends and relatives. The stay was short as we were to visit at Haverhill, Ia., and spend a few days there. Weather was better out there so we went to Mt. St. Clare at Clinton where I have a sister in the convent. We enjoyed their hospitality, met some older nuns whom I know from their teaching in Lourdes.

Our first child, Carmen Marie, was born the next November 21st. She was born at home, with Dr. Hastings, the local (Elma) physician and my mother was there to help. She was an instrument baby, 9¼ lbs weight. When I think back I wonder how it could have turned out so well. Mamma stayed a few days—she went home Thanksgiving. The next winter was worse; we had to move our bed to the dining room so we could save fuel burning coal and wood. It froze all over the house except there. The relatives and neighbors surprised us on our 1st anniversary.

¹ Handwritten text by Dorothy Mae Birmingham [1910-85], not dated but written in 1979, when she was 69 and living in Alta Vista, to judge from internal evidence. Typed with minor editing by Allen Frantzen on Jan. 9, 2009.

² Dorothy Birmingham Frantzen, b. May 4, 1910, d. August 12, 1985.

³ John Victor Frantzen, b. October 18, 1910, d. October 00, 1998,

⁴ Audrey Maurice Birmingham Nibaur, maid of honor; b. 1915, d. 1998.

⁵ Charlie Edel married Ann Stalzer, sister Rose Stalzer Frantzen, 1-16-1917; Charlie and Ann were our father's uncle and aunt.

Wayne Leo was born the 7th of August in 1937. His dad helped his father run a threshing machine and was gone all day. I did the chores but was afraid to start milking the cows as I was already having labor pains. Got Carmen ready to stay at my home near Lourdes while I was at the hospital in Elma. John came about seven and we quickly got the chores [page 3] finished. The car lights burned out on our way up with Carmen so we drove by moonlight—Papa was already gone to Elma, so we left Carmen off and drove on to Elma—still no lights but the moon to guide us. I was in the hospital 2 hours before Wayne was delivered. That was quite different—facilities and a nurse. It was a very dry summer and horribly hot. We had a rain shower that night—I recall how the air smelled as I lay there.

Mary Ann was born at home on June 14, 1939. It was a beautiful morning, wild rose aroma coming through the northwest window of the bedroom. Mary weighed 6 lbs—round, short, and real cute. We had Dr. O’Conner from Alta Vista as our doctor since he moved there from Chicago. That year we bought our 80 (acres) from Louis Wollwage from whom we had rented since the March of ’35. John was still helping as a hired man and we had no machinery of our own. He borrowed a team of horses from Clarence White, who was drayman in town. I helped build a wagon box so John could pick corn on his own. Next we rented 80 acres that his dad had bought from Gerkins—80 bought acres, a creek thru the center. We used it mostly for pasture—had 2 fields as I recall, one for oats and one for corn, 19 (acres) in one, 20 in the other. The fences were poor so it made problems with cattle. [page 4] We would chase cattle for hours to get them out and back to the farm where we lived, especially during calving time. In Nov. (11th) of 1940 we had the worst blizzard of the century. We had our pullets still roosting in the trees and many froze running blinded by the snow. John was gone. I tried to get the cows in the barn but the horses kept trying to get in, so I gave it up and went to the house. John soon returned but it was almost dark. We were lucky to get able to get to the house when the chores were finished. It stormed for 3 days. Many lives were lost, as well as poultry, cattle, and hogs in the Midwest.

Karen Elizabeth was born in June of 1944, the 27th, in the New Hampton hospital. She had black curly hair and was a doll. Carmen and June Ralph helped with the work. It was a wet year—John often told that Karen was our only crop in ’44.

As we had bought the original Wollwage home in 1939 we had much improving to do. We were in the process of remodeling our house the fall of ’47 and Allen John was born on Oct. 21st [Allen’s birthday is Oct. 20]. The house was up on timbers waiting for cement, which was not available at just that time. Allen was an average baby and the first boy born in the hospital for a month. We came to Grandma Frantzen’s home in Alta Vista and stayed for a few days until the house was settled on the foundation.

[end of page 4]

page ? missing: no account of Thomas Joseph's birth, which was March 13, 1952.

[page 5]

Our family and their families

Carmen married Bernard Doughty from Hastings, Mn., on Oct. 7th, 1968 [actually Oct. 8]. They were married in Minneapolis as she was employed at Munsingwear Clothing Co. as a bookkeeper for several years. They moved to Richmond, Wisconsin, that year, where Bernie was employed at Lyman Co. Chad was born July 3rd, 1968 [1969?]. They moved to Mounds, Mn., later, and built a home near Excelsior, Mn., where they now reside. Bernie has his own construction co. Jay was born Jan. 10, 1970.

Wayne married Ellen McCarville of Lourdes in July of 1962 [7/21]. They have 6 children: Steven 15 [1963], John 14 [1964], Rosemary 13 [1965], twins 12 [1967], and Tim, 6 [1973]. Wayne is a photographer in Maquoketa and does some printing besides, so he has full employment.

Mary Ann graduated from U of Arizona with an M.A. in sociology and worked 3 years in Tucson and then took employment with the state and lives in Phoenix. She married a Dr. Louis Santos, also a resident of Phoenix, the 14th of July 1967.⁶ She has a daughter, Helen, who was 13 on April 7 [8] and since Mary's remarriage to [Mel Linberg] and has been adopted by Mel Linberg.⁷

Karen married Ron Atwood of Waterloo there in 1963 and they have 3 children: Ray 14; Gail, 13; and Lin, 9. They attend Sacred Heart School and belong to that parish. Karen has been active in politics and Ron is an accountant for Hawkeye Tech vocational school in Waterloo where they reside at 902 West 8 Street. Karen is a bookkeeper for several individuals, working at home.

Allen is presently employed at Loyola University in Chicago. He has is Doctorate in English literature from the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, taught at Oberlin, Ohio, for 2 years. [He] received a grant from the U. to study in Ireland and England where he wrote his dissertation on "Penance in the tenth to 12th century." His book is ready for publication in the near future.

Tom, our youngest, has been married for 3 years (1976) to Irene Schmitt of West Union. They live on what was our farm, to which his dad had added 80 acres in 1952, so he has 240 acres. He bought the farm in 1977 and completely tiled it and has a hog setup where he raises around 1000 pigs from farrowing to finishing.

⁶ Louis Rodrigues Santos, 1919-1976.

⁷ Mary married Mel Oct. 26, 1974, in Phoenix. Mel was born Sept. 11, 1929.