

The Story of My Life

by Burt L. Riskedahl

I was born on September 8, 1940, in Bismarck, ND to Clifford and Erna Riskedahl and named Burton Lee Riskedahl. Within a few days I arrived in Tuttle, ND, the place I would spend all of my growing up years. WW II was waging, and the USA would become deeply engrossed in the war shortly after my first birthday, following the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japanese airplanes on Dec. 7, 1941.

I believe the home I lived in with my parents to start with was a small house in northern section of Tuttle, a rental belonging to Roy Gorsline, a prominent Tuttle pioneer who remained a friend to my dad during his lifetime. When I was still quite small we moved to an older home my parents had purchased, which was located several houses south of the current English Lutheran Church in Tuttle. It was next door to the corner house then occupied by the Clarence Hirsch Family and later owned by Walter Magstadt. My early memories include realizations that the adults were talking about the war often, including the issue of rationing. I was aware of books of coupons or stamps that people had that they would have to use to purchase certain food items that were in short supply, i.e., sugar. My sister, Barbara was born shortly after my third birthday. I don't recall the specifics of her coming home from the hospital, but I recall the years that she and I were the only kids in the family, before sister Laura was born in 1948. I have a vivid childhood memory of the day of the war ending in the summer of 1945. The memory includes visions of adults in a celebratory mood, being excited and happy. The day includes a memory of being up very late with my parents and attending a neighborhood celebration that occurred in the 'Summer House' at the home of Art and Lynora Scherbenske, about 8 miles SW of town. While there may have been other kids there, I recall it like I was somehow in the spotlight and that with encouragement from adults I started dancing around the room and acting like a clown, that someone offered me a 'tip', then someone gave me a hat...as I continued 'entertaining' other people put coins in the hat. In reality, I probably was acting like the proverbial monkey with the organ grinder man, with the cup in his hand. Anyway, I remember adults being more exuberant than I was accustomed to and being excited about a number of coins I went home with.

Another vivid memory from the mid 1940's was Pete Hanson, Uncle Ray Riskedahl's hired man, being at our house working from early morning to evening for a number of days, staying overnight and being with us at meals. While he was at work with a pointed shovel digging a sewer system in our back yard, including a place for a septic tank and a drainage field, all with a pointed, long handled shovel, no machines of any kind. This resulted in a small bathroom becoming part of the house upstairs and running water in the kitchen. As he was digging Pete found a large firecracker and gave it to me and explained what it was. I had never seen one. He told me if I lit it with a match it would make a loud bang. I must have thought it was a good idea not to discuss that with mom. I found matches in the house and went into a corner of the outside foundation wall where I got down on my knees and lit it on the ground. There was a huge explosion right in front of my face. I ran into the house crying...because I couldn't hear anything and thought I was deaf. That was not a good day. I was probably 5 years old. It was questionable judgement by Pete. The other preschool memories relate to church, my mother playing the organ, an elderly Pastor Belgum, and my dad staying in bed on Sunday morning when mom and I, and I suppose Barbara too, went to church. My understanding was Dad was entitled to stay home because he had stayed up very late Saturday night, working at the general store where he was employed.

My memories of the years between 5 and 8, seem for the most part happy. I recall special friends in the neighborhood, including Margot Sathre. I remember many family gatherings, mainly Sundays and holidays, on both the Riskedahl side and the Sauter sides of my family. These family memories seem more vivid on the Sauter side because of the regularity of my mother's contact with her sisters and her parents in these early years, all of whom were in Tuttle... Hilda, Louise, Ruby, Lynora (on a farm) and Mae. I think Viola was gone after the war, (she had served in the military) married to Jack and living elsewhere. These years also kindled my long standing and close friendship with Vern Sauter. In that era, we had nicknames, he was 'Ole' and I was 'Peter.' I had no brothers and Vern was somewhat behind his older brothers....and we bonded as 'brothers.' Our friendship continues to the present day. I would say we were the closest of friends throughout our school years in Tuttle, then in college together at Jamestown College and even grad school in Social Work at University of Denver, culminating with my graduation from DU and both of us getting married in the summer of 1964. Vern and his wife, Martie would graduate the following year and live for a short time working in Denver, but then moving to Texas for the next 50 plus years to the present. The geographics and establishment of our own families resulted in much less, and less intense, contact from 1964 on. I count my friendship with Vern as one of my life's really rich blessings, and our lives have tracked amazingly similarly, each blessed with two amazing children, and wives who have hung with us...now for 57 years. (We also each have two amazing grandkids.... born in close proximity in years, with the 2 older ones graduating from high school now in 2021.)

I do recall a sad event early in 1948 with the death of Aunt Minnie Sauter, the wife of Fred Sauter. Her premature death occurred following the birth of daughter, Patricia. My memory is of my parents sitting in the kitchen of our home with Uncle Walter, talking about the pain and hardship this would be creating in the family. The year 1948 is also significant as it is the year my younger sister was born on Sept. 16 and the day she returned home from the hospital was our first day as a family living in the new home that had been constructed over the spring and summer, next door to the Tuttle School. I remember some stressful time for my parents, apparently during the pregnancy with Laura and in the stress of building the new home. I remember seeing my parents stressed out and engaged in some arguments or disagreements about the new house.

In those 5- to 8-year-old years my memories focus on school and positive experiences with other children my age in the classroom and on the playground of Tuttle Schools. I remember Mrs. Petersen, the wife of Prof. Petersen, Supt. of Tuttle Schools for many years, ending in the early 1960's, she was my teacher in both first and second grade. I remember my third-grade teacher Miss Jacobs and how much she was loved by the students. Other grade schoolteachers, Mrs. Vinje, Mrs. Schroder and Ione Goldsmith in grades 7-8. Throughout the grades how report card time was quite stressful, being concerned about how my parents would react to any unsatisfactory grades. I remember associations with high school students starting during this time as a result of being in the School Band from the time I was a 7th grader.

High School was a good time of life. I did not excel academically, and my recollection is being ranked 7th in my class of 17, far behind Valedictorian Marvin Heidt and Salutatorian, Jeanne Mehlhoff. Notable teachers in addition to Prof. Petersen were Ed Heppner, Band Director who developed an outstanding band that attained a Highly Superior rating, I believe in my sophomore year of high school. John Wanser was also a person I looked up to because of his personality and Eastern accent and attitudes. He and Kay lived next door to us the years they were in Tuttle, in the upper level of the Art and Lynora Scherbenske home. My dad and John Wanser became close friends through the years and the family friendship with John and Kay was reactivated when Margo and I moved to Bismarck years later in 1973. John and Kay took us under their wings, introducing us into their social circles and helping us become established in the Bismarck community. John had been the basketball coach in Tuttle High for several years before transferring to Bismarck Schools in 1959. My four-year experience with basketball, playing on Mr. Wanser's teams was a highlight of my high school years. In my senior year our

team made it to one of the last Class C state tourneys, where we finished 4th, losing the third-place game to Tower City by one point.

High School graduation in 1958 was followed by four years of study at Jamestown College. It was a choice that had been influenced by Mr. Wanser and other family members who had preceded me there, including Jim and Vern Sauter and Liz Hinkle. Through the years before I arrived at JC there had been other THS graduates who had gone there, some who were prominent athletes and others who were scholars. I graduated in 1962 with a bachelor's degree in Sociology and Minor in Psychology. I dated different college girls during the four years, but in my senior year became increasingly taken by Margo Paulsberg, who a couple years later in 1964 became my wife. She was a serious student, a musician in the college band and a cheerleader for the Jimmie teams. We stayed in close touch the two years I attended the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver. We became engaged over the Christmas holiday season of 1961 and were married in New Rockford at the Lutheran Church on June 21, 1964

The 9 years following marriage seem to hang together as a segment of years of finding, sometimes with struggles, my professional career path in life and starting a family and making several geographical moves. I had attended graduate school with the assistance of a stipend from Lutheran Social Service of ND. My first job was with LSS in Fargo, ND in the child welfare area, adoption and foster home work. Because I had a desire to work in Psychiatric Social Work my stipend was 'bought out' by Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota and from early 1966 through 1968 I worked at a residential treatment center for adolescents in Duluth, MN called Bethany Children's Home. Our son, Mark, was born in Duluth in November 1966. With the help of Clifford and Erna and a U Haul truck we moved to St. Paul MN on Thanksgiving Day, 1968, in anticipation of getting settled, starting work as a clinician at Wilder Child Guidance Center in St. Paul and looking ahead to starting night law school in the fall of 1969 at Wm Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul. The years following were hectic. Our daughter, Diane, was born in March 1969 and a few months later we began the routine of my work at Wilder from 8am-5pm Monday-Friday and attending law school night classes four nights a week, Monday-Thursday, 2 nights a week from 6:30-10:30 pm and the other two from 6:30-8:30 pm. The summers were times of real enjoyment of the out of doors on weekends especially. We had started tent camping shortly after Mark was born in Duluth and made frequent camping trips during the summer months combined with periodic trips to ND when we could for family visits.

I want to acknowledge Margo's commitment during the hectic years described above. Her field of study at Jamestown College was Medical Technology. Her final year of study for her B.S. Degree was a full year internship at Fargo clinic, the year following our marriage in June 1964. She and my sister Barbara were both 1965 graduates of Jamestown College. Margo's first professional position was in the laboratory of St. Luke's Hospital in Fargo, where she worked until our move to Duluth, MN in February 1966. Shortly after that move she became employed at St. Mary's Hospital in Duluth, where she worked until Mark's birth in late 1966, returning to work their part time when Mark was 6 months old, until our move to St. Paul in November 1968. She took a break from clinical work after our move to St. Paul, caring for the two children full time my first two years of law school, but then returning to work at University of Minnesota Hospitals in Minneapolis until we moved to Bismarck in 1973. After we were settled in Bismarck Margo resumed clinical laboratory work full time for several years. The responsibilities, including being on call and at times, shift and occasional week-end work were challenging with living out in the country and the responsibilities attending two children in elementary school. In the late 70's Margo joined the staff at the University of Mary, located south of Bismarck and only 3 miles from our home. For the next 25 years she was the primary administrator overseeing the science labs at the school related to biology and chemistry and became a classroom instructor working with the U of Mary

Medical Technology students. The work was gratifying and the schedule much more conducive as it included free time for other activities like gardening, during the summer months.

The next segment of my life story seems to include the many years between December 1972 and the end of my full-time legal career in 2006. We had just returned to St. Paul from ND after the Christmas holidays of 1972, and I was starting my last semester in law school. On Dec. 29, 1972, we received a call, informing us that my dad, Clifford, had died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack, four days after Christmas. We flew back to Bismarck on a blizzarding night, were met at the Bismarck airport by Uncle Alfred, dad's brother from Steele, who drove the four of us to Tuttle late at night. It was a devastating week for Erna, for Laura, who was still at home following the holidays, and Barbara, who flew back from Baltimore with her husband, Albert and their 3-year-old daughter, Kara. The following months were painful and distressing. Erna's grief at the loss of her husband of 33 years was occurring in the midst of needing to resolve issues related to Riskedahl's Store, other investments Clifford had managed, as well as farmland he was riding herd on. My plans after law school had not been defined by the time of Clifford's death. Within a month or so, we made the decision we would return to ND, partly to be available to assist Mom, but also in the belief the move would bring us closer to our roots and the family ties that had been important to us. Margo's parents and her siblings were living in New Rockford, where she had spent most of her growing up years. Settling in Bismarck, would mean moving to a vibrant city and a good place for our children to continue to grow and develop. Mark had just completed kindergarten and Diane was 3 years old when we moved to Bismarck in early June 1973. As a result of the move, they would both spend their entire elementary and secondary school years in the Bismarck public school system, Mark graduating in 1985 and Diane in 1987.

After passing the ND Bar Exam in mid-summer, 1973, I began work as a Legal Consultant with the North Dakota Public Welfare System, later the North Dakota Human Service Department. Concluding that Administrative Law was not the field I wanted to remain in for a career, I began the private practice of law in Bismarck in mid-1974, moving on to full time Judicial work as the Burleigh County Judge in October 1979. After serving several four-year terms as county Judge I became a State Trial Court District Judge, retiring from that full time position in April 2006 at age 65 ½. The next three years I served as a surrogate judge, a part time fill-in judge, followed by 5 years of part time mediation work, primarily in the family law area, all in the Bismarck area. Being finally fully retired at the end of 2014, Margo and I decided to sell the 43-year-old home we had built on 10 acres, 10 miles south of Bismarck, overlooking the Missouri River. We moved to St. Paul, MN in July 2015 and in December 2019 to a town home in Oakdale, MN, an eastern suburb of St. Paul.

Our son, Mark, is married to Melissa Powers, and they have lived in Portland, OR for the past 18 years after meeting and marrying as students at Lewis and Clark Law School in Portland. After marriage and graduation from the law school they lived in Eugene, OR for a short time before becoming affiliated with Lewis and Clark Law School, Mark as the Executive Director of a Clinical Legal Services Program working with the law students, called the Northwestern Environmental Law Center. Melissa is a full-time professor with the law school. Our daughter Diane, is an Anthropologist and has been in academia since completing her formal studies in the field, teaching as an adjunct faculty member in the Anthropology Dept. at University of Toronto. Her husband, Muhammad Ali Khalidi (Max) was a philosophy professor at York University in Toronto. They were married in December 2001. With the new 2021-22 academic year, both will be full time faculty members at City University of New York, Max in the Graduate School of Philosophy and Diane in the Anthropology Dept., teaching both in the undergraduate and graduate schools. In the summer of 2021, they will move from their home in Toronto to their new residence in Ossining, NY along the Hudson River. Max and Diane have two children, Zayd, who is starting college at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, BC in the fall of 2021, and Layla, who will be a sophomore at Ossining High School. These two wonderful grandchildren have consistently been present in our

thoughts, and our lives, though at a distance much greater than we would have preferred. They are both serious and studious students who have done very well academically. Beyond that they are creative kids, enjoying music, games, artistic challenges and socializing with friends.

I conclude my life story with an expression of gratitude for my roots and for the many family members of the Sauter family who, along with my Riskedahl relatives, helped me with my growing years and self-identity. I am so grateful for them, for the closeness of these families, and the love and support that emanated from them during my growing up years. I am appreciative of the many wonderful extended family gatherings and the support and encouragement from aunts and uncles. The many years in Bismarck with regular contact with cousins and the annual Salsa Fests held at our place for many years in the fall were very special times. Likewise, I feel much gratitude for the town of Tuttle, North Dakota, and for the sense of community and opportunities for growth and development which have been instrumental in shaping the life I have been fortunate to live. The move back to Bismarck after Clifford's death afforded the opportunity to have Erna in our lives and the lives of our children in a way that was enriching for all of us. She lived 34 years after Clifford's death, most of it in Bismarck after her move there in the mid 1970's. She died on July 28, 2006, after several weeks of hospice care after a recurrence of an earlier cancer. All three of her children had the benefit of many hours with her in the days and weeks leading up to her death.

Compiled in May 2021