

## **A Certain Kansas Lad**

### **Preface**

- This biography was authored and penned by Dr. L.B. Sharp about his own life, covering a time span from his youngest memories until 1936. The actual year of writing it is unknown.
- The original account contains 27 handwritten pages on a notepad spiral-bound across the top edge. This notepad is housed at the Morris Special Collections Library at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois. Box 13; Folder 4.
- Transcribed by researchers Julie Carlson, 2/2015, Faculty member, Dept. of Educational Leadership, Minnesota State University, Mankato, and Clifford Knapp, Emeritus Faculty Member, Northern Illinois University.
- [NOTE: In some places, the editors were unable to interpret particular handwritten words or letters in the manuscript. In those cases, contextual clues were used to conclude the most likely correct word or phrase and spelling of people's names.]
- [NOTE: Transcribing and language smoothing includes the following: Typographical errors/misspellings were corrected; most abbreviations were written in full; many dashes between sentences were replaced with periods; ampersands (&) were replaced with "and"; and a few words in brackets were added.]

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This brief sketch is written looking backward, trying to see this lad as he grew up and went forth -- it is not from the angle of being this boy himself but as though it were someone else who knew him intimately and knew his every thought and more and was telling it to another person. The lad himself therefore in so far as possible does not know it and is not speaking. As nearly as possible of course - it is an attempt at objectivity - catching the high spots and low ones too.

His mother born on a farm in Ohio near Fredericksburg - her parents and grandparents farmers - all sturdy and hard working - just plain earth people. His father was born in Whitehouse, NJ - his grandfather was a man not on too good terms with work - but managed - liked horse racing and such. This lad's great grandfather was a most hard working man - a master carpenter and built many of the houses in Whitehouse, NJ. His workmanship can be seen especially at the Whitehouse Inn.

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This lad's father was raised by his grandparents - not room in their own house. At 17 he went West to Ohio where his older brother Asa was - and worked on a farm and later started on his own. Then he met Emma Stucker - they were married and moved to Kansas near Carbondale - about two miles west - later moved to Carbondale just on the edge of town where they lived the remainder of their lives.

It was in this house on West Hill that this particular Kansas lad was born - born in the southeast room. He was the youngest of 4 children - 3 boys and one girl - a fact he never forgot and the other children never let him forget. He was the baby - always and always will be. He took his rightful brunt of many things - always gullible to run errands - the older children wise in their ways could catch this lad in almost any trick. Of course this lad got wiser as time went on - when other children were gone from home this lad was

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managing things of the farm etc. He did not have anyone to run errands for him - a hardship it seemed at this time though now he does not think so.

His father was a big hearted person - very neighborly - very sociable, and had a lot of fun out of life - a hunter, good workman, had quite a few interests, good musician, play the violin very well for a farmer - was excellent at reading music and knew tune - was very particular - music was a dominant hobby. He was a good penman - good reader though did not read many books - was a current event reader - dabbled in politics and was always a staunch democrat - was in the nursery business - did fairly well - later took up insurance business and did very well - but the advancing times caught him short and he had to get out. The lad can remember when there was much family talk about a certain sale of a farm about to be made. If the sale were made we could all eat and get some clothes. It was a grave matter - the sale did not go through and the family was in bad circumstances.

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The insurance business was over or nearly so - something else had to be done - so back to farming and father took the examination for rural mail carrier. He managed his dwindling insurance business while carrying mail - but in two years was out of insurance or insurance left him. Bertha & Loretta McClain took over his remaining clients and to this day the McClain sisters do insurance in most of Carbondale property.

Mail carrying was a hard grueling job 6 days a week over country roads, in all kinds of weather - 26 miles a day. Father was almost painfully conscientious - the mail had to go through. He took an awful beating and practically, finally, died on his mail route - came within a few months of retirement and would have gotten \$30-40 per month - enough to have kept mother & father. This lad's father was a mason and was well known in the state as he was well posted - knew all the mason's lectures and could give them very effectively.

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He had a fine speaking voice - made good talks at school meetings - political meetings, etc. He was quite a good musician and loved to do it. He sang very well - organized [a] male quartette - sang in the quartette at political rallies - at programs - etc. He was a good checker player, recited poems well - had many poems among his

papers - wore a mustache - kidded a lot - enjoyed joking and when in the mood was a lot of fun.

He was not in very good health the last 30 years of his life and that affected his outlook on life. He would go on mail route day after day when it nearly killed him to do it - but he never complained.

He was proud of his household and managed things as he wished, kept things to himself a bit - was a generous provider - spent every cent on food and necessary clothes for all - certainly was not a stingy thought in him - was very anxious that his children get a good education. He fought for better schools - served on school board for over 25 years - did much to

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improve the schools in Carbondale - wanted his children to have [it] better than he had and he certainly succeeded in his wish.

This lad's mother was a sturdy very hard working woman - she had a very happy disposition as a rule. When she was down she was down - but when up was exceedingly jolly - enjoyed fun and made it when others were around.

This lad can easily see that his mother had a terrifically hard job - no conveniences regarding the house - oil lamps, coal stove, cut wood, carry coal - cook, wash dishes, wash, iron, bake bread, and churn - worked the garden, raised chickens, etc., etc., etc. Her death very untimely - an intestinal hernia no one knew she had it - she did not either. For many years that was evidently the source of her unsteadiness and moodiness. She was of very sturdy stock and would have lived a long life if her difficulty could have been found earlier.

Enough for this lad's parents - He can remember being in existence at about the first grade in school - 5 or 6 years old. Evidently from hearsay he was cuffed around as most "baby in the family" kids were. He was taken on a trip to Oklahoma when he was a cute baby but does not remember it.

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He was taken to some Indian schools so Indian children could see a white papoose.

The period of grade 1 and 2 - he remembers learning to read - the old yellow cards, fine print, badly worn cards - had to read the stories. Anna Carpenter would pass out the cards each day - some were yellow, some green, & some white. He remembers his first dinner pail taken to school.

2nd room - grades 3 & 4 - His sister was teacher for 3rd grade and Nora Beasley 4th grade. His play mates Lester Belton, John James, Helen Steners and others. In 4th grade he played his first violin solo (used his 1/2 sized violin his father got for him). The piece was "Rosebud Waltz" - the carrying of violin case, music roll, music rack to

school was a big event. He performed the number for a monthly program given on Friday afternoon.

5 & 6th grade - nothing special - had pink eye & had to wear glasses - stigmatism - eyes improved in later years - playmates Albert Frazier, Howard Foster and Eddie Foster (colored). But these two years and also while in 3 and 4 grades he was picked on very devastatingly by older kids. It made a made a bad scar in his lips. His parents did not approve of fighting - and he dared not get

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get in a fight. Just why older kids picked on him he does not even to this day know - during the 7 and 8th grade years he grew rapidly and took quite an interest in sports. He practiced running - get up early and run a mile at least 4-5 mornings a week. In 8th grade he participated in the track meet for grammar school - and they had all the events just like HS and college - the 100 yd, 220 , 440, 880 mile - discus hammer and shot. In the co track meet he put the shot, discus throw, hammer throw (all 1st places) won 1/2 mile also - took 3rd in pole vault enough to kill a college man - but his buddies Eddie Foster did also 100 yd, 220, 440, high jump & broad jump - and Chester Crits won the mile run.

He was a great prankster - took a mouse in to the schoolroom, kept it in his pencil box. He and Howard Foster climbed to the school belfry and rang the big bell hitting it with an extra clapper between the regular ding and dong. Had good friendship with John James a boy who never talked - knew many answers in class but would not talk. Always

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had the sharpest knife of any boy - up through the 8th grade he had no girl friend or special one - wanted one but could not cut in ahead of the boys who had the girls he wanted - so on to High School. Athletics dominated. He trained hard - ran every morning after chores were finished - threw hammer, put the shot and threw the discus using a stone lid. Made his own hammer using an old sledgehammer at first and later bought a regular 12 lb. hammer. First two years of High School the teachers were fine - made him and others toe the mark. He organized the HS orchestra and carried it through High School. He like dramatics - somehow evaded chemistry and physics in HS. The last two years were academically not so good - fell down in some grades - Literature, for example. The superintendent of schools was Nimerod Solomon Welton. Perhaps that was a reason and he thinks that all High School kids will agree - as school went sour fast. Athletics dominates football and track. Had champion teams in football and track - no coach to speak of - boys did it themselves - with only 14 in the HS football squad, no coach, the team was not defeated - country champs.

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Girls in High School - well he did not do so well. It takes a barber hair cut at least every 6 weeks and two suits of clothes a year to be in the running even if one has something extra. He flared with one or two but was easily cut out by some who had more cash and just plain better looks.

Before going on after High School - let's go back to his home life and the farm - at 11 he was working in the field just like adults. He plowed with a team at about 12 - as other boys left home he took in most of the work. He remembered the thrill of haying and he liked that best of all- though he liked to plow corn, and shuck corn. At this he became able to take 2 wagonloads from a field in a day and that was as good as neighboring farm hands did. The thrill of the ear of corn banging against the bump board on a frosty morning is never to be forgotten.

He grew his own watermelon and cantaloupes at 12 - made his own boat and fished from it.

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Made quite a few mechanical inventions - some successful, some very disastrous to chickens and the mule. He loved his cat, dog, and horses (some of the horses) - like to hunt and fish - wanted to play the piano but did not want to practice - was good to make believe when it was necessary to do so. Loved his neighbors - especially Uncle John and Aunt Molly (no relation), his two German bachelors and their fine white horses Katie and Harness - Mr. & Mrs. McCrery. He liked every one it seemed - even his class mate Tessie Freeman (colored) who smelt to the high heavens. Back to family - he liked haying best, the smell of it, the speed of it, and the hard work of it - was able to stack baled hay nine bales high using a pitchfork and a bale weight 80-85 lbs. In HS days he was an ox of strength - he had no worries of anyone picking on him. Secretly he wished many times to even things up with some who had picked on him in his early life but family training took over and felt it was not honorable to do so.

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He did even up things one time in a wrestling match (friendly) and took great delight in making one of his bully friends say "I've had enough".

Haying - the thrill of loading a wagon, going to the Railroad station, signing for a box car and loading it, getting the weigh bill - sealing the door and later to see his father get the check - got his spending money in HS days by \$2 checks - but \$2 went a very long ways in Carbondale.

HS graduation - class motto "not finished just begun" made a big impression and the motto is still good to this day. He was honored by being offered a teachership at Quenemo, Kansas - 7 & 8th grade. Usually you had to start in a rural school first and go to a village. Quenemo was about 600-800 people. He was called Prof - a title that flooded him with pride. Ernest Thomas was responsible for getting him the position

as he was superintendent of Quenemo schools and was a Carbondale HS graduate years before. It was largely for this lad's athletic prowess he got the job - he helped with the Quenemo HS football and track team - also basketball

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about which he knew little. He helped E. Thomas organize a town football team and what a town team it was. Emporia Normal School sent up their 2nd team for some scrimmage practice and ran into a hornet's nest and got the pants trimmed off from them. Prof Phipps (coach of the Normal team) and reported to Bill Hargiss the coach that they better get their Kansas lad to come to Normal School. So Hargiss made a trip to Quenemo and offered most anything I wanted - job for board & room - laundry route. I took the deal and started in with summer school. It was big stuff to this farm small town lad. He had only about \$20 when he landed in Emporia.

PS to say that his teaching position in Quenemo paid \$50 per month. He had to get a hair cut at least once a month! And had to have at least two suits of clothes and two pair of shoes. He gave money back to his parents - paid board and room at Quenemo so did not have much.

But at Emporia for the next three years he earned his way through college. It was a tough grind but was worth more than much of the college credit - no time for foolishness and no time or money for dates. Naturally he was induced to college

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for what he might do in Athletics.

First his jobs - carrying laundry - had to work up his own customer list. He was given a route through the new Process Laundry. As students came in to register he would get them to promise their laundry to him - with 4 other guys doing the same thing for other laundries. The competition was keen. Different business than plowing corn or loading baled hay etc. He caught on fast as he had to. He got 25% commission - had to collect the laundry at each student's room - dump out the dirty shirts, underwear, and socks and god darn some them stunk - tie up the bundle and mark it - take the laundry to a collecting place so the driver could get it. He had to purchase a bicycle (\$10) and learn to ride it so he could carry on his laundry business. After 3 months the bike was stolen and had to buy another. He had to deliver the clean laundry - keep accounts - collect money from penniless students and pay to the New Process 75% of the account. He had a bank account and how

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that account kept alive by being always so low he never knew. Every time he showed his face at the laundry the manager worried about his money - would always want to get accounts settled. So this lad had to hound the students who in turn hounded their parents for dough - but this all helped the lad through school.

Waiting tables for bed and room took at least 3 to 4 hours a day - but it meant sleep and eats. Laundry took 3 afternoons a week and every spare moment in between. All this was not quite enough so odd jobs were grabbed whenever possible. The biggest haul for a 15 minute job was \$2.75. A man had dropped his wallet down the hole of a Chic Sale. I agreed to fish it out. He had tried to use a rake and was not successful. He sized up the situation (that is what the lad did) and said for \$2.75 he would get it. His fishing experience paid dividends. He invested 10 cents for a 3 pronged fish hook and the job was simple. He turned the garden hoe on the wallet and collected. He mowed lawns, raked grass, worked in gardens, fired furnaces, worked in Emporia Gazette Office, janitor work at the college and numerous odd jobs.

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At times he was moving ahead - bought clothes - haircut a month and did all right.

During football and try out seasons he had to practice every afternoon with the squad but still had to carry laundry and wait tables and odd jobs. He did he do it - it now seems incredible - to take a look at his expense account kept through about half of his college life gives a better picture of his endeavors. He certainly did not spend money on foolish things. He could not. He dared not. There was no recordings of money for dates until the last year of college. As in HS and then in college the group who had some extra cash got the dates. He had a very devoted room mate Delmar Dercy. They roomed together - were about the same size, wore each other's clothes and that helped in appearance around college. ewas brilliant and a lot of fun. They had a wonderful time rooming together. Delmar had to work his way through college to - so these two had much in common. They wrestled playfully a lot in their room - just for the hell of it. The land lady complained - as it was rather

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hard on bed clothing especially when one would poke his room mate head through a sheet etc. The land lady Mrs. Hemmingway raced upstairs to stop that racket and damage one day. They two lads heard her coming and hid under the bed. She thought they jumped out the window. The lads discovered that they had not cleaned under their bed for 4 months at least. Their faces and heads and clothes were covered with dust and lint - at least, said one, we mopped under the bed. These two lads actually used each other's money - or pooled their wealth - upon many occasions they would buy a bowl of soup and divide it. Delmar was steward of a boarding club and the other lad was a waiter at the same place. Delmar and the lady running the club had a disagreement and Delmar quit - but said to the other lad - you stay on as it means board - but our lad said "You quit, I quit" so these two went out looking for a land lady who wanted to start a boarding club. They found one and soon these two lads had the gals following them to their new club.

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These are a few examples of getting through college the tough but good way. After Delmar left - the lad was by himself. He fired furnaces, mowed the lawns, and other

odd jobs at the Judge Higgins home for his room. The furnace in winter had to be fired up at 5:30 am - empty ashes etc. While waiting for the furnace to eat up the first shovels of coal, he would sit by the furnace light and try to study Rural Education - one course he liked because it was not easy. The Higgins had an obstreperous son in HS. They thought the influence of the college lad would be good on the boy so Junior moved up in the attic with our lad. Each was so bred in his own way the influence was nil but they did get together late at night in the area of the ice box and that helped in our lad's food budget.

Now the academic part of our lad's college career was not so that(?). How we ever got through he can't figure out to this day. He came within

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a hair of making Phi Beta Kappa if that means anything. At least his name was up and he was nosed out by one of his very close college friends Bill O'Connel. Bill deserved it. Our lad was Captain of [the] track team - Captain of football one year and manager one year and was manager of [the] college glee club and god how our lad must have sung - guess it was bass or something. He was a YMCA Centennial President of his class the last year. He had so many friends among students and faculty - the faculty almost dared not give him low marks. He best course, the one he got most out of was in governmental problems taught by U.E. Myers who is now in Washing running some Public Institute of Information. He got more out of this course because of the method that was used in teaching.

He knew a lot of business people as he worked in some of the stores at Christmas season and at odd times too. He had a bank account and carried his own checkbook. He knew policemen, truck drivers, and such. He majored in Manual Training. He liked it - it took little time for study and it was easy. His minor was agriculture - as he

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like farming and enjoyed learning what he should have known when he needed it.

One day he was doing some extra work in wood turning. He like it especially so was doing some extra. It was 4 pm. Suddenly a student rushed in and said, "Get the hell over on the track field. Don't you know a big meet is on and they have called you for shot put and you are about to lose out and we will lose this meet. Bill Hargiss is furious." Our lad was wood turning and forgotten so out he dashed - did not even put on his track suit or shoes - stepped up in the circle - made one put with the 16 lb. shot and broke the state record. Well, just an incident he remembers well. Bill Hargiss cooled down rapidly.

Our lad as you can see could not afford really to get into the heavier "stuff" like Physics, Chemistry, Literature, etc. They all took so much time and our lad had to work - but he did get a lot out of the courses he took - a bit thin perhaps but a lot none the less.



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Now he finished college in 3 years by going winter and summer. He was granted 8 credits because of war service. As to his dates - he did not have a service date until his last year. As a popular athletic man on the campus he had excellent chances and he was sprucing himself up a bit more as some of the corn silk had blown off his ears, etc. He had a little extra money for a bit more clothes - but dates cost money - not much - as his account book shows - 30 cents sometimes would do it - 50 cents and never over a dollar. But he did not ever have a steady girl in college until the last year. It is a shame he did not. He needed it but could not help it of course. During the 2 years after he first entered college he can't recall of having [a] half dozen dates at the very most. In fact he can specifically recall only 4. His education in this regard was seriously lacking and he says that only two dates were for the second time. He recalls one very attractive girl who he was sure that she liked him he talked to at the club when he was waiting tables but never dated her. He and Delmar Dercy just played around and sallied the girls but never dated - guess Delmar and our lad were chiefly concerned about a place to eat and sleep. Delmar had a steady girl anyway. Vannie Ward was her name. They went together for several years and eventually were married. Our lad used to go to Wards with Delmar - sort of like one of the family. By reading this brief sketch one

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can see all that our lad never had much experience with love or dating or both. He was not a very good judge of love certainly and could not know much about it. His heart had a few jumps in High School days but he seemed to lose out - too his parents were skeptical especially his mother. She seemed wary without much reason. The most he ever went steady with one girl in H.S. days was about 8 months. As he looks back on those days now they were just flames and no more. Nothing happened at Quenomo where he was a "Prof" for 9 months - as a "Prof" in a community you just didn't have dates. It would cause so much talk. He always wanted to avoid any trouble. He might have been better off if [he] would have had some kind of trouble. Well we got away from his college life and drifted back into his High School days. But up to now you have a rough idea of what a rough, green and unknowing lad he was. He was however getting some very vital "on your own or else" kind of experience. He did seem to stick to things once he started and he did have a lot of patience. To see that lad on a bike with a great big sack of laundry over his shoulders - steering the bike without using the handlebars was quite a sight.

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In his last year he started to steward the faculty club - a high honored position - just collect the money, keep accounts, be sociable to the faculty, kid them along - seat a college dame and hold her coat, etc. It was a soft job and excellent menu. He ate in the kitchen and Carolina (culinary chef) was his pal. He gobbled up quantities of food and he had use for it - but the management decided on the coming Jan. 1 they would not need a steward - so our lad had to fend for himself. So he went back to the bowl of soup but now ate the whole bowl of soup as Delmar was not there to

share it. He got some extra soft jobs and so enjoyed the freedom of eating on a restaurant stool.

But to go back - Alice Whitney a grad of Wisconsin University - a great school - a major in Home Ec. - came to Kansas for her first position. To give a bit of background, she came from a fine family. Her family was dean of Emporia School at University of Wisconsin. He died when Alice was about 5 or 6. She went through Madison grade school and Madison High. Their family was all well educated substantially so - the boys in Engineering - Ed and Brad. The literary background of the entire family was high. Alice did well in High School and college - grades were fine.

Now it has been learned bit by bit - her love life was long and intense. She and a boy, Merrill, went steady through H.S. or most of it and

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continued steady through college. It was all set and everyone knew. Then all of a sudden the man left her cold and the reason is not known, at least not by the writer - a dirty trick to be sure. It was too much - a tragic affair in a woman's life. When she finished college in mid-year she beat it for a job - anything she could get. An offer of a position in Home Ec. at Emporia Normal College came. She took it, finished the spring term and spent summer in Madison. In fall she boarded at [the] faculty club where our lad was stewarding and eating his fill in the kitchen. Football season was on and our lad was busy and of course as Captain and stuff was well known among faculty. He was cashing in on his college career so to speak. Some how acquaintances between our lad and Miss Whitney became more than casual. Our lad was of course thrilled to think that a faculty member - an honest to goodness faculty person - could be interested in him - but things went on fortunately. He had a bit more money as record will show - he took her to dinner after a football game

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at a hotel down town - 50 cents per person. Incidentally he learned from a Home Ec. faculty person that you should not eat with your knife.

Well he never had a date as steady. It all seemed amazing. He thinks it best not to go further into his feelings - simply to say he was walking on air and some kind of a tide had carried him completely away - where he did not know. Those two had to keep their attentions secret as a faculty person just does not associate seriously with students so it went on through the winter. War was on and our lad by spring wanted to go in the service. He volunteered in the Navy, the only branch open. He had applied for other schools (too young), tank corps, marines, and aviation. Marriage was decided upon to take place before going with service - so May 28 was the date. More pressure and feelings made it easy for [a] simple wedding - could not have had [it] other any way. Our lad borrowed the only money he ever borrowed in his life. \$60 and frankly that was for wedding papers and easing up the last two months of school. Wedding at his brother's house in Topeka -only family present -

simple and lovely affair - on to Kansas City to Chicago and our lad in wonderment - on to naval

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station and Alice on to Madison - married but nothing to show for it except a picture and a wedding ring which she paid for. War was not so bad. Our lad did not contribute much he feels - did not get out of the country. In fact did not get out of the Naval Station. He managed to get an Ensign Commission before leaving.

What to do in civilian life - PS to say he had been selected as Superintendent of Schools in Lyndon, Kansas had it not been for going in the service.

Back to Kansas to farm and teach. He looked around Madison - nearly connected in real estate - tried it a few days and said no - got lead for community service work in Michigan - took it (it was under the Playground & Recreation Association of America - 3 1/2 years spent at it. His main influence was A. N. Farmer who hired him and another man he worked with - Iswald Pettet - dumped into a type of work he had not prepared for (pay 2200) - went to their training school - was stationed for 1 year in Ishpeming and Negaunee, Michigan- his football ability helped to hold the people. He coached the town team made up mostly of hard men who worked in the iron mines.

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He was supposed to partner this new community service program - everybody cooperating for community service etc. Two communities were sharing his salary. It blew up the following spring - not before a huge company pageant was put on - he became a pageant director - after the capable Nina B. Lawkins set it all up. After the North Peninsula episode, he was sent to Detroit working with [Iswald] Pettet - nearly got landed as resident club director of a service men's club operated by Legion - close call. From Detroit he traveled - in all covered 15 states and worked in over a hundred communities. An editorial appearing in the Creston Town paper about him stopped his course cold. In effect the editorial was most complementary about this young man but he was on a goose chase etc. The editorial was right. So a leave of absence from the PRAA and to Columbia - spring term went on - worked in summer in Madison (tax evaluations) - back to Columbia in fall and continued right on for MA [Master of Arts] and in 1929 PhD - position at University of Columbia - 4 years and U of C reorganization and had to be squeezed or get out. He got out - went to US Office of Education for [a] year (nearly)

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and then unto New York City Board of Education. In 1925 started with Life Camps - here on the story is well known. The main point is our lad had one thread of interest that he kept pulling - camping and schools.

So in 1936 he had to decide - full time in camping or University work. He could do either. Time [Magazine] had purchased the old Life [Magazine] so an opportunity opened then to pull that school camp thread.

A great discussion it was and it was talked over and over - give up tenure, retirement insurance, faculty pomp and tassels, etc.

Now to think upon his...

[End of handwritten narrative - this last sentence was left unfinished. Was this intentional perhaps, knowing L.B.'s often quoted adage of "not finished, just begun"?]

[L.B. made the decision to leave university academia and became the first Executive Director of Life Camps. The name of Fresh Air Farms was changed to Life Camps, Inc., with L.B.'s insistence. "Who ever heard of farming fresh air?" he used to joke.]