

Recollections from Jim & Helen Schlies
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Jim Schlies, born January 30, 1899, has worked his farm southeast of Wausaukee for the past 63 years. He bought 80 acres, mostly stumps - the year before he married Helen Schaf, born January 24, 1903.

Helen's family had moved to Athelstane when she was five years old. "My mom was so mad when she got off the train!" Helen remembers. "She would have liked to go back to Indiana. She took one look at the sand stirred up by the buggy wheels and said "How in the world are you supposed to raise a family in this godforsaken country?"

Jim, a native of Wausaukee, had to drop out of school after sixth grade in order to help his crippled father, but when his brothers were old enough to take over, he headed to Chicago. He'd met a lively little girl at a "one horse dance". He knew if he ever wanted to get married, he had to earn enough money to get his start.

Jim worked for the New York Central Railway and Helen had a job as a proofreader at a banking supply company.

The first-year Jim "batched it" on the farm, and the following year, his bride moved in. The couple had saved just enough money to get a foothold on the place. Then we worked and save like crazy to pay for the rest of it, said Helen. With their own chickens, eggs, meat and vegetables they never went hungry, she added.

Was it hard work? "You ain't kidding!" laughed Jim. Only 18 acres were cleared when we bought the place. Stump pullers, dynamite and muscle did the rest. Helen remembers the dynamite days, when she carried the pail full of dynamite on to the field and Jim would set the charge and light the fuse. "When he'd say, run, we'd run! It's a wonder we have any arms and legs left". She still has a cupboard built from the dynamite boxes.

The couple raised six children: Charles, Norma Jean, David George, John Earl, Michael Lewis, and William Richard. Charles passed away at age 31.

Taking care of a family and working in the fields at the same time took some ingenuity. When Charles was old enough, I put him in a fruit crate and took him out to the fields to pick stones, Helen remembered.

Helen still tells a story that tickles Jim. "One time when Norma was about five and David was just a baby, I went out to pick apples. I told Norma, don't you let him kick his covers off, but David would squirm around and kick them off every time. The next time I came in, she had his feet tied together! I guess she figured that was the best way to keep them on.

Children and parents worked side-by-side in jobs that never seemed to end -- digging potatoes, filling silo, baling hay, cleaning the barn. "No matter what you did, it was hard work in those days the way we did it",said Helen.

"I can't complain", Jim reflected. "Maybe she can....."

"No", Helen answered. "Life is what you make it. You have to work together. If one pulls one way, and one pulls the other way it's just like a team of horses. It just won't work".