

Good Afternoon!

My name is George Eugene Biesterveld and I have been blessed with many talents. I was born on November 25, 1904, to John and Petronella Biesterveld in Dunnville, Wisconsin ~ near Eau Claire. I was the youngest of 16 children! When I was only two years old my mother passed away from a horse and cart accident, and I moved to Appleton with my dad and a few of my brothers. In 1909 I moved back to Dunnville with my father. But we eventually moved back to Little Chute where my father bought a home at 408 Pine Street and I continued to live there into my married life. We then moved next door and my son raised his family in our first home. Both houses still stand today.

I was stricken with polio as a youngster which left me somewhat crippled causing me to walk with a limp. Because of my disability I was only able to work odd jobs that came along. As a young man, I did odd jobs with a neighbor including some construction work. His name was “Peerenboom”.

On September 5, 1927, I married the love of my life, Alegonda Vande Leygraaf. We had five children, four daughters... Joyce, Therese, Ann and Rosemary and one son...Raymond.

As a young carpenter, I did a lot of cabinet making and creative woodworking. My wife, Alegonda, and I raised bees on my brother-in-laws farm, and processed honey to sell. We also maintained a large garden on that farm to grow food for my family – my favorite was a bed of cantaloupe! My wife and I, along with our children, also enjoyed weaving rag rugs, which brought in a little extra money for the family.

I eventually landed a full time position as the janitor or “custodian” for St. John’s parish, which included working at the church, schools, and cemetery. Cleaning and maintaining both buildings was a huge job. In the summer months my children helped. There were many rows of desks to be moved in order to scrub and refinish the floors. Other work included fixing desks, cleaning bathrooms and painting projects.

The church was another part of my job; it needed to be kept clean and maintained too. The fun part for our children was ringing the Angelus bells at 6:00 a.m., 12 noon, and 6:00 p.m. The bells were rung by pulling on a huge rope that went from the church entrance high up into the steeple. My

children would hang onto the rope and ride on it up to the balcony and then back down. The bells also had to be tolled manually for masses and funerals. The earliest ringing of the bells for Sunday worship was 5:00 in the morning, and if it snowed the sidewalks had to be shoveled before that!

Each summer, parishioners celebrated Corpus Christi with a parade. Six large wooden altars were placed on corners throughout the town. The parade would stop at each altar as we celebrated Benediction. As custodian, my job included maintaining and setting up the altars. My grandchildren decorated the altars with fresh flowers.

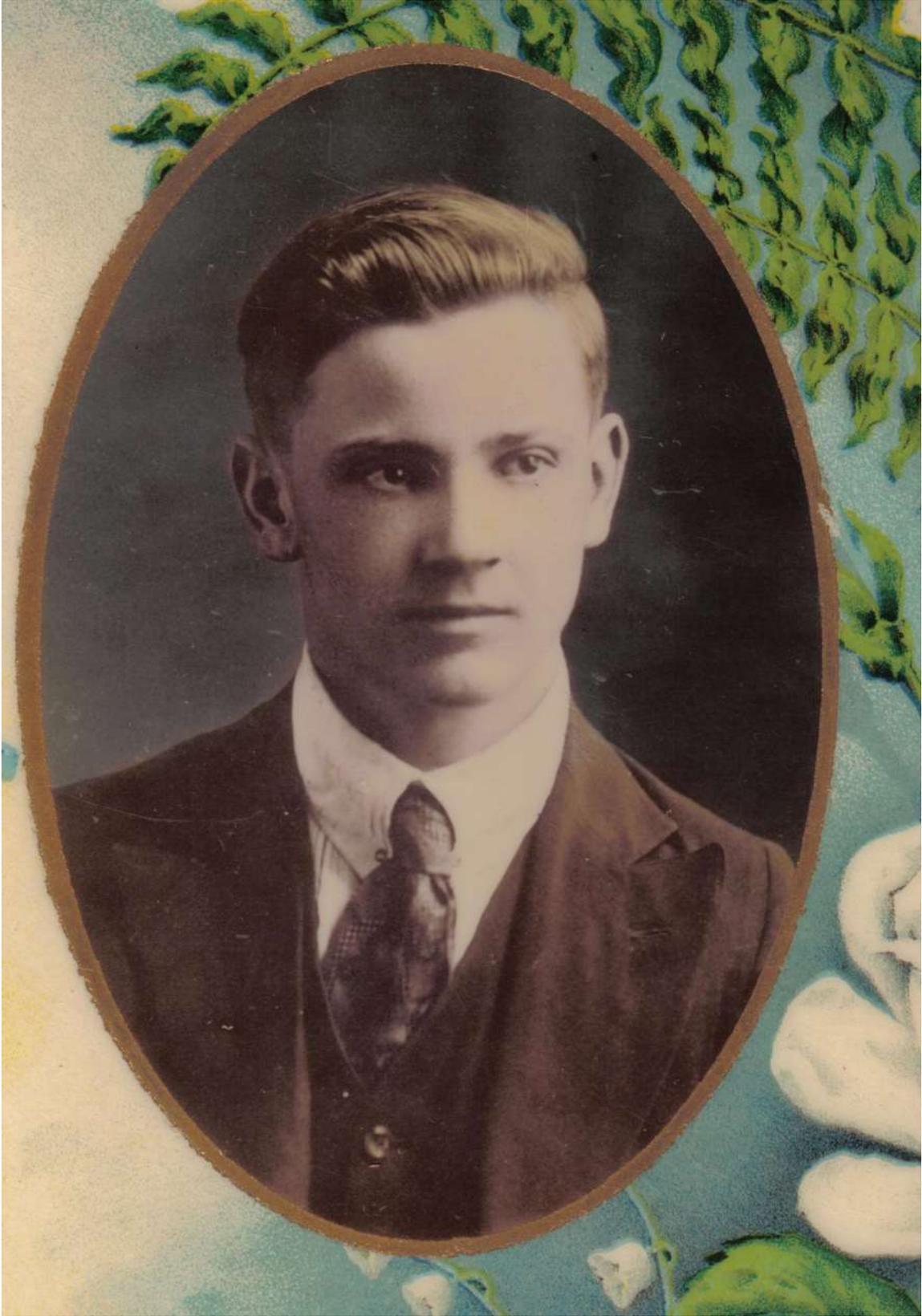
The cemetery upkeep was another part of my job. Lawn had to be cut, bushes trimmed, and graves dug and then refilled...all by hand!

Many in the community remember the excellent woodworking I did, but my family remembers me as a free spirit who would do anything for anybody at any time.

I enjoyed my bees and gardening, and continued helping my children and visiting my grandchildren, until I suffered a stroke, which partially paralyzed me. My wife and children cared for me at home, but eventually I moved to Parkside Care Center. I passed away in 1982 at the age of 78.

Thank you for coming today and sharing my story!

Little Chute Historical Society Cemetery Walk 2012



*Martin House made by George Biesterveld*

