

William Lenz

I was born in Little Chute on February 22, 1912 to Joseph and Annie Lenz. I already have 3 brothers and 3 sisters. And later my parents would add another brother and sister giving me 8 siblings. I went to school here in Little Chute and graduated from the 8th grade. I came from a very religious family. My older brother, John, went into the priesthood but before he could complete his studies; he died of a ruptured appendix and was ordained on his deathbed. I have 2 older sisters, Minnie and Thecla who went to the convent to become sisters.

My childhood was very normal and uneventful. This would change after the age of 16 when I went to work for the Kimberly Clark paper mill. I was there about 2 years when at about 4:00 in the morning on March 19th, 1912, I was removing broke from between the splitter and calendar on the No. 01 machine when I slipped and both on my hands were drawn into the machine. I was able to remove both arms but not before they were severely crushed. I was rushed to St. E's Hospital where both my arms were amputated below the elbow region. After my recovery, I was fitted with prosthetic arms. Kimberly Clark offered me a very generous settlement or a permanent job. I ended up with both.

In 1921, I met a young woman who came home from the convent to decide what her call in life was to be. I am happy to say that I was it. Barbara Lillian Nushart and I were married in May 2, 1922. In April, 1923, we were blessed with our first son, Cletus. In January of 1928, our second son, Richard came along, and in March of 1933, our last son, David was born.

The loss of my arms was not as restricting as you may think. Aside from dressing myself, shaving, brushing my teeth, combing my hair, and a few other things, I was very self sufficient. I could cut the lawn, hunt and fish, feed myself, fill and light my pipe and use the bathroom, swim and even hold my grandson, Jerry. In 1936, I bought land and had a cottage built on Lake Poygan. I enjoyed it immensely. I also rabbit hunted with my sons and grandsons until I was 78. I deer hunted until about age 70 with my son, Dick. I even shot a deer.

I was not much of a traveler. I left the state of Wisconsin only twice. Once was with my wife to the Chicago World's Fair in 1936. And the other time was to go to Menomonee, Michigan to buy oleo because it was not allowed to be sold in Wisconsin.

During prohibition I made moonshine... and a lot of it! My vats down in the basement were so large that I stirred them with a canoe paddle. My brother, who was an electrician, helped out by wiring my stove ahead of the electric meter thus preventing my electric use from being recorded. Federal agents visited my house once looking for evidence that I was making illegal liquor. After finding none, because my still was

hidden in the Fox River, and seeing my condition, they decided to move on. I continued making moonshine and other liquors into the 1950's.

I did like to drink wine, particularly Gallo white port. For Christmas, my family would buy me gallons of it. It was very common for all of it to go by the time my birthday came on February 22 to unsure that I would get a fresh supply of it as birthday presents.

Let's go back to my cottage and fishing. There were times when my grandsons would take me out fishing. Now remember they were about 12-14 years old, I had artificial arms, there was a boat with a motor, obviously water, we did not wear life jackets, and a quart of wine. Before we left the dock, we had to take a drink of wine for good luck, then a drink when we found a spot, a drink for the first fish caught, or a drink to get the fish to bite. By now, I had to pee, then a drink to refill what I just peed out. Hmmm, the quart is empty now so we have to go back in. Elapsed time-- about an hour. Another great fishing adventure. I love spending time with my grandsons.

In 1959, I retired from Kimberly Clark mill after 49 years of service. At that time, I was the employee with the longest tenure at Kimberly Clark. Before I retired, I decided that because I was losing my dental insurance, I needed to get false teeth. I went to the dentist and told him that I needed to get dentures. He put me in the chair and readied me for tooth extraction. He was about to give me the anesthetic when I told him to just pull one and see if I needed it. He looked at me as if I was crazy but pulled the first tooth-- Not too bad—pull another. He pulled the second, third and the fourth. He then said that I had to have anesthetic not because of my pain, but because he needed it.

My wife and I lived a wonderful retirement until 1972 when she died. Life was just not the same without Lil. In early December 1974, I entered the hospital for only the second time in my life with a perforated pancreas. The operation that was needed to repair the damage would send me into a nursing home. I declined the operation and asked to be made as comfortable as possible, but Dr. Van Leishout said he had to schedule me for the surgery. On Wednesday, the day of the surgery, Dr Van came in to put the stethoscope my chest. I took a deep breathe and went to be with my Lillian. Despite my handicap, I must say that I lived a full and wonderful life.

My name is Jerry Lenz, Bill's grandson.

Little Chute Historical Society Cemetery Walk 2012



