A lifetime of family and blessings

BY KATHY TANDERBURG

Some people know instinctively the rewards that come from hard work. Mercer County native Art Boeckel said he learned it from his father, Ludwig, who learned it from his mother, Elizabeth. Elizabeth Boeckel was a widow when she made the long journey from Russia to Mercer County in 1918. Traveling with her were her four sons, Jochanes, Joseph, Ludwig and Peter. She was a determined woman when she boarded the Kaiser Wilhelm bound for America and a new life. They weathered that first year with her sister, Rosina Galster, who was already settled in Mercer County.

The following spring Elizabeth filed a homestead claim seven miles north of the location that later became Beulah. The land was in the area where Dakota Gasification Company is now.

Peter, 15, was too young at the time to file a homestead claim, but her two other sons soon followed suit. Then Ludwig, 16, followed as well, filing a homestead claim in 1923. Looking back, it's clear that this widow, a woman alone with her sons who left Russia during hard years, had understood the value of owning land. With America offering it, she accepted it even with the hard work it would take to make it hers. Settling in sparsely populated, barren and unfamiliar land, Elizabeth had determination when it came to making life better for her family. This trait is one she passed on to her sons, who in turn passed it on to their sons.

Art and Pauline welcomed the birth of their youngest, a daughter named Pauline, on March 30, 1919. Art celebrated his 95th birthday March 3. Though his body may be weary at times, his mind is sharp and memory clear, and he still remembers his father's lessons.

They recalled stories told by his father of the first home the family had, a mud house built before Art was born.

"They built themselves a house that first fall of mud and stones. You couldn't stand up in it. My father told us in the winter it would blow shut and they would have to make a tunnel to get out," Art shared.

That around and they might steal her away, so as soon as I could I asked her to marry me one night after a dance," Art recalled.

It was March 3, 1938, when Art proposed to Pauline. She told him she thought he would never ask. They married March 30. Art said his father worked hard so he could help each of his sons with a start once they were married. Art has been thankful his entire life and he learned his father's trait of sharing.

"When each of us married (father) gave us a few acres, a pig, a cow and five horses to farm with. From them it was all up to us," Art said.

When Art and Pauline started out, he worked to save enough money for a little house on their place.

"In 1939 I went to the bank to borrow money for a pickup to drive to the river where the dam is now. I guess I took the trees to make fence posts and then I sold them for 10 cents each," Art said.

Art also worked for mines for a couple of years to earn money. When he had enough, he bought a house south of Beulah to move to the land. The house had been used as a boarding house at a mine.

"The house was just smelly. You couldn't stand it! Pauline went into it every day for a long time to clean it and when the smell was gone she painted it," Art said.

Over his lifetime, Art was a good manager who was able to add acres as he went along, like his father before him. He also learned the trait of sharing and giving others in need a helping hand.

Art recalled once when his children were in school, a guest minister with a doctorate degree asked if he had attended college.

"It was only 20, but guys would tell me Pauline was the prettiest girl," Art said.

Art Boeckel enjoys spending time with his children, son Donald and daughter Rosella Sailey.

Art found this amusing because his formal education stopped at the fifth grade at a country school. Art said he had more education than his father, who had stopped at the second grade. After Art completed the fifth grade he told Ludwig that he wanted to stay home and farm. His education since then has been the school of hard knocks, learning from his father along the way.

"I told that minister no I didn't have high school or college, but I walked through the high school once when my son went there," Art said, laughing.

Art's favorite part of his life over the years has been farming and his family.

"I loved farming. That's all I ever wanted to do," Art said.

Art recalled how his father had four plows, each pulled by six horses, and two drays each pulled by four horses. Then Ludwig bought an iron horse, a 2220 International tractor run by a steam engine.

"That did more work than all those horses together," Art said.

Art and Pauline Boeckel shared many good years together.

Art and his brothers, the six sons of Ludwig and Dorothea Boeckel, from left, are Albert, Herman, David, Ervin, Art and Herbert. Circa 1940s.

Art and Pauline Boeckel farmed north of Beulah for 25 years. They moved into Beulah in 1972 when the mine and power plants and DGC were in the planning. Art continued to farm from town, on land in another area, for 25 more years.

He credits not only his father and mother for teaching him lessons in life, he also credits the Lord for showing him the right way. The family is members of Prairie View Church of God, Beulah.

"After a year of marriage Pauline and I accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Our children were raised in a Christian home," Art said.

Their children are Donald Boeckel, married to Carol, and Rosella, married to Clarence Sailey. Their oldest child, Duane, died at the age of 6 after a horse kicked him.

Sady, Pauline died December 1957 at the age of 78. Art, who misses his bride still, continues to live in their Beulah home.

Today there are five grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren.

"I am grateful for the many blessings the Lord has bestowed upon him. It's been a good life," he concluded.