MOTHER'S SKILLS

COOKING

ELSIE: "Back in those days, there was no welfare or food stamps. People had a time feeding themselves."

This is where another of Andrine's skills acquired as a young girl were a lifesaver for her family.

ELSIE: "I remember mother, walking back and forth in the kitchen, wringing her hands, saying 'Oh, what can I fix for supper?' But she always came up with something good, no matter what little food we had.

"I remember one time when mother was out of flour. Dad got up very early one morning, hitched up the team and drove two miles to the little store at Loomis. He took a load of bolts to sell and came home a little while later with a 25 pound bag of flour. Mother quickly prepared biscuits in time for us kids to have one for breakfast and be able to take one to school in our lunches. - Believe it or not, we made it to school on time that day, too!"

The Larson children ate a good breakfast before starting off the day.

ELSIE: "Mother would cook oatmeal or cornmeal mush in a big iron kettle on the cookstove. We'd have hot cereal and a big slice of homemade bread.

We'd carry our lunch in a quart syrup pail. Lunch consisted of 2 slices of homemade bread with butter, or syrup if we didn't have any butter (such as in the winter when the cows were dry. We finally got smart and bred 1 cow that would calve in the fall, therefore we'd have milk in the winter.) Our school lunch was usually topped off with a cookie and an apple.

In the evening, mother always prepared meat and a vegetable for supper.

Two or three times a week, mother would bake 7 or 8 loaves of bread, and she always had enough dough left over to make a big tin of rolls."

As most farms in the early 1900's, the Larson farm provided the family with most of their food. You may recall that this is the reason they moved to a farm in Michigan in the first place. The farm fields yielded such crops as wheat, rye, beans, potatoes and corn. Some of these crops would be sold after harvest if there was enough.

A large garden by the house provided many vegetables.

ELSIE: "Mother planted all kinds of vegetables. We had celery, green pepper, tomatoes, beans, sweet corn, just to name a few."

The Larsons had 5 or 6 dairy cows which provided milk for drinking, cream, butter, and a special treat - ice cream. The family made their own butter and ice cream. Sometimes they would sell butter or cream - depending on how many cows were producing milk at the time.

The cows would calve in the spring, meaning that the family went without milk products in the late winter/early spring until the cows would calve and "freshen" again.

ELSIE: "Whenever we didn't have any butter or milk, which was in the late winter, we would substitute syrup to put on our bread. We would buy syrup in gallon pails!

Then one year the farmers got smart - they bred a cow so she would calve in the fall - and therefore milk would be available all year round.

We kept the female calves for dairy production and the males were sold as yearlings.

I remember mother used to save out enough milk for the family and when necessary, enough to feed the young calves. The remaining milk was stored in 5-gallon crocks in the basement. I don't recall the folks having an ice house.

Each day mother would skim the cream off of the top of the milk and store it in a separate 5-gallon crock.

The cream was sold in town and the money used to buy other groceries, such as salt, flour, sugar, and other staples."

The Larsons had chickens which provided eggs as well as meat. Eggs were sometimes sold, no doubt depending on how many hens were laying at the time.

They also raised pigs and therefore, had plenty of meat.

ELSIE: "We would butcher a hog in the fall and not a part of it was wasted - even the ears and tail were used. Mother would make different kinds of sausage - like liver sausage, and she would make the best head cheese! She would fry little sausages and put them in 2 quart cans, pour the grease over it and seal the cans. It was a real treat to have those sausages later on in the winter!

We had cattle, but I don't remember that we ever butchered a steer. I only remember that we used to keep the female cows for milk production and the males were sold."

Domestic and wild fruits contributed much to the Larson's food supply, year around.

ELSIE:

" The folks had quite a few different kinds of apple trees on the farm. I would help mother can applesauce until all of the 2 quart cans were full. Then we would peal and slice apples and lay the slices on pie tins for them to dry. Or, we would use cord or thread and run a string through the slices and hang them up to dry. When dry, they would be stored in bags, and put in tins, or somewhere so the mice wouldn't get into them. Later on in the year, we would take some of the dried slices and soak them in water - then make pie, applesauce, or whatever we wanted.

We used to do the same thing to patties of squash and pumpkins, too.

Mother worked hard, with our help, too, and put up a lot of food in the fall so that we would have a decent variety of foods to eat throughout the winter and spring.

I remember us kids would go berry picking in the summer. We would pick wild strawberries, huckleberries, raspberries, blueberries, and black thimbleberries. One time dad loaded us on the wagon with a big wooden barrel and we went up to Meredith and picked enough huckleberries to fill the wooden barrel half full! What a job it was to clean all of those!

We would use the berries to make pies, jelly, perserves, and of course we canned them to use later.

Mother could bake the best cookies - such as buttermilk, sour cream and molasses cookies, and good pies and cakes. She used to make the best mince meat - using real meat. She would can it and we would have it to eat throughout the year. She would make mince meat pie for dessert. I remember that we always had some kind of pie for Sunday dinner."

" At Christmas we would have a table loaded with good food, and at Easter, mother would have a big platter piled high with hard boiled eggs. We (the kids) would see how many of those eggs we could eat at breakfast. I think the boys used to eat 6 or 7 each!"

The folks worked hard to be sure we had decent food to eat year around. At dinner, Dad would say a blessing in Norweigan before we'd begin to eat. Sometimes he'd just say a short prayer, "Thank God for the food," which in his native tongue sounded something like "Taka Gud fer Motten".

Us kids had to clean up our plates - we didn't dare leave a crumb. Dad would say "Don't waste your food" - often he'd say it in Norweigan, and it sounded like, "Du mo entra cost taburt motten."

LOSS OF ELDEST SON

After the Larsons had lived in Michigan for five years, tragedy struck. Fourteen year old Ole drowned in the Tobacco River, June 11, 1904. Elsie who would have been between 5 and 6 years old, says that the only thing she remembers of her brother is the day of his funeral.

Elsie's mother later told her that Ole and a group of boys were by a local swimming hole on the Tobacco River, close to the farm of Thomas K. Bell (Earl Kaul's grandfather). Knowing Ole couldn't swim, the boys dared him to jump in the water. Ole took their dare and jumped in, and ended out drowning. We do not know why one of the boys did not jump into help. All we know is that one or more of them ran up to the Bells and found 24 year old John Bell in the barn, milking a cow. John quickly ran down to the river and jumped in, searching in the water and his hand suddenly came in contact with Ole's leg.

John Bell later told his nephew, Earl Kaul, that he just couldn't describe what it was like when his hand touched the boy's leg. For weeks after John had to sleep with a lantern lit at night.

The Larson family was grief stricken at the loss of Ole. In those days, the deceased laid in state in the family home. A local undertaker provided a frame covered with what looked to be unbleached cotton, that closed off the body from view. The body laid on what was like a cot. To view the deceased, one would pull back a curtain. Thus, young Ole laid in state at one end of the Larson's living room.

ELSIE: "Mother cried so. - She knelt down by the rocking chair near Ole's body, and rested her arms on the seat of the chair. She later told me that she 'prayed and prayed until I had my answer that my boy was in heaven.'"

Earl Kaul was seven years old when Ole Larson drowned. He recalls hearing about the boy's death.

EARL: "Mother and I had spent part of the day at Grandma and Grandpa Bell's. We had gone over there to pick up mother's younger sister, (Aunt) May.

We were heading home in the buggy, and were going down the hill, right past the river, when Deward (or Deuard) Robison came out to the road and said, "May, you won't see Ole anymore."

May replied, "Has Ole drowned?" She could tell by the look on Deward's face that he had.

Deward and his older brother, Earl, and several other boys had been with Ole at the swimming hole. Aunt May was their age and had gone to school with all of them. I believe she kind of liked Ole."

The Clare Sentinal carried this article on June 16, 1904:

DROWNING FATALITY

Fourteen Year Old Ole Larson Of Sheridan Drowned Sunday

(Colonville Correspondent)

A number of boys were swimming in the Tobacco River, not far from Supervisor Herrick's in Sheridan, last Sunday when Ole, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ole Larson, got into a deep hole and was drowned only a short distance away from his companions.

It is probable that the boy was taken with cramps. The young boys present were well nigh terror stricken and knew not what to do, but John Bell arrived on the scene and promtly recovered the body.

Deceased was born in Pennsylvania in 1890 and came with his parents to Michigan in 1900. For the last four years he has been a member of the Herrick school, and this spring took the state eighth grade examination.

The funeral took place from the Sheridan Baptist Church Tuesday, Reverend D.J. McTavish officiating, and the interment was made in the Clare Cherry Grove Cemetery. Besides his parents, four brothers and four sisters survive to mourn his departure.

The bereaved parents and family have the sympathy of the entire community in the loss of their eldest son.

Please note that this article was not exactly correct. Ole was born in Norway in 1899, not in Pennsylvania.

1889

ELSIE: "The newspaper said Ole's death was accidental drowning, but mother said that Ole did not know how to swim, and only jumped in at the dares of the other boys.

If the folks had had any money, I bet they could have prosecuted the other boys."

WE ALL HELPED

The loss of their eldest son was also a loss as far as the farm work was concerned. In 1904, the only other sons old enough to help with the heavy work was George, age 11; the next oldest boy was Joe, age 7.

The girls were depended upon to help with the farm work, and that they did. At that time 16 year old Martha was in school at the Mount Pleasant Normal, but Mary was 12 and Ruth was 8, and they helped with the outdoor chores.

From 1900 to 1906, the Larsons had 3 more children, Roy, Harold and Milly. When they were old enough, they helped with easy tasks around the farm, such as feeding chickens, gathering eggs, cleaning the barn, filling the woodbox and putting wood in the woodshed, located off of the kitchen, in case Andrine intended to do any baking the following day.

ELSIE: "All of the kids helped with the work. When the boys got big enough, they did the farm work - plow, plant and harvest the oats, wheat, potatoes, etc. The girls also helped with the planting and harvesting.

Usually one of the girls had to stay in the house and look after the three small ones, Roy, Harold and Milly. I remember carrying litte Harold around; he'd be so hungry. Mother would come in from working outside and her face would be as red as a beet. She would have to sit down and cool off before she could nurse him. I don't know how women ever stood it, having a baby every two years or so.

Ruth and I helped with the dishes when we were big enough. Mother would put the dish pans down on a chair so I could reach into them. One of us would wash the dishes and dip them in the rinse pan, and the other would dry them."

Ruth is 3 years older than me, and she had it worked out that she would wash dishes one night, then I'd wash them two! Washing is a much worse job than drying you know!

The nights during the week that dad was gone working, it was a real treat to sleep with mother. Of course Ruth had it worked out that she would sleep with her two nights to my one night!"

As they got older, Elsie and the other girls helped with other chores around the house.

ELSIE: "One of my jobs was to wash the kerosene lamp shades, fill the lamps with kerosene and trim the wicks. I did this once a week.

ELSIE: "I would have cleaned the upstairs, dusted and cleaned the living room and front bedroom and be working on the dining room when Ruth would come in and say: 'Why don't you get busy, I've been out working all morning!'

Mother would reply, 'You leave Elsie alone; she's the only little help I've got.'

Mother liked things nice and clean and so did I. It was a pleasure to help. I remember I used to get up, fix 4 lunches, get Milly and myself ready and walk a mile to school - and be there on time, too!

Elsie enjoyed helping her mother - she was always at her elbow asking what she could do next. And years later, in 1915, no one ever cried so hard as they did the day Elsie decided she had to leave home and go to Pontiac to work.

ELSIE: "Mother and I were in the living room, standing behind the heatstove. We held each other close and cried and cried. Mother was so sad to see me go because she always knew she had help; I was her helper."

On Sunday afternoons, Elsie would set the large boiler on top of the cookstove and fill it with water. She would carry the water into the house by the bucketfull, either from the pump by the windmill or from the rainbarrel beneath the rainspout of the eavestrough. This softer water was better to wash clothes in.

On Monday mornings Ole would rise at 5:00 a.m. to the chimes of the fine clock the Larsons had brought with them from Pennsylvania. He would start a fire in the cookstove and Elsie would get up early and carry the heated water out to the hand-operated washing machine in the woodshed, built onto the back of the kitchen. She would fill one tub for rinse water and another for the "suds water."

ELSIE: "I would have the first load of white clothes washed, 4 lunches put up, Milly and myself ready for school and still be to school on time."

In warmer weather, the clothes were hung on the line outside to dry, and also in the winter if it was pleasant out. The rest of the winter the clothes were hung on lines in the attic. The stove pipe from the heatstove provided enough heat to dry them in a day or two.

EXTRA WORK

When the Larson children were old enough, they would sometimes work for neighbors, doing farm work, etc. Elsie recalls the times she babysat for some neighbor children.

ELSIE: "The summer I was either 12 or 13, I worked for Hattie Livingstone whenever she needed to go into Clare. I worked hard all day doing housework and babysitting and would get paid only 40¢. I would only earn a dime for an afternoon's work. Hattie Livingstone was a stingy person.

I didn't want the other kids to find the money I'd earned, so I hid each hard-earned dime under the edge of the carpeting in the spare bedroom off of the living room.

I think I'd earned 4 dimes when I told mother I didn't know what to do with my money. She suggested I use it to buy material and she would make me a new dress. So, I did. Back then, a quarter would buy 2 yards of French gingham, the nicest gingham you could buy. I earned enough money that summer to buy material for 3 or 4 new dresses!"

EXTRA WORK

Elsie: "I recall a few other things about working for Hattie Livingstone. I'd work for her all day - carry that big, heavy baby around. He'd get so hungry. In those days not everyone had or used baby bottles. I never gave it a thought and she'd never say anything like, "Give him a drink of water if he gets hungry." So, he was just starved by the time she'd return from Clare.

Then, while she was feeding the baby, she'd tell me to start supper. When it came time to eat is when she'd tell me I could go home. By the time I'd get home, mother would be washing the supper dishes - supper was over. So, she'd make me something to eat. She just couldn't understand why I couldn't sit down and have something to eat at Livingstone's after working all afternoon and early evening - for a dime.

I worked for Hattie Livingstone on the day of her barnraising. Several other neighbor women helped, too. One was Mrs. Burton, whose farm bordered ours, and I believe the other woman was Mrs. Macklen. Quite a few men were there to help, I'd say 15, and their pay was supposed to be a good dinner at noon.

Mrs. Livingstone had been baking a great, big dish of beans - in which she hadn't bothered putting any meat in at all. Well, one of the other women must have known how stingy Mrs. Livingstone was, and decided to do something about it. So, everytime Mrs. Livingstone went outside for something, the other woman would run over to the stove and scoop in a couple spoonfuls of meat fryings from a large crock jar. She succeeded in stirring in quite a bit of meat fryings by dinnertime!

After the men had eaten dinner, the rest of us sat down outside to eat. Hattie bragged, "You see, I can bake beans without any meat!" Well, let me tell you, it was all we could do to keep from laughing!"

PLAYTIME

Life on the Larson farm was not all work and no play. Elsie has many remembrances of good times.

ELSIE: "Us kids had a lot of fun playing together. We would get to laughing so hard that we couldn't do anything. We had our moments and a lot of fun playing together. We'd play games out in the yard, like pom-pom pull away or hide and seek.

I remember playing pom-pom pull away. We would hide behind the house and someone would stand guard on each side - and peek to see which way the catcher was coming. The catcher would yell,'Pom-Pom Pull Away - Come Away or I'll Fetch You Away!' and then come around one side of the house or the other. Of course we would run in the opposite direction and run back around to the goal at the front of the house without getting caught.

Dad would get mad if we played in the haybarn because we'd break the hay all up. Back then hay was stored loose, not in bales. One time some of us were playing and my brother, Harold, was hiding in the hay, all covered up. Well, dad came up in the haybarn for some reason. He stepped right on Harold's head! As Harold told us later, 'I didn't dare holler!'

We used to climb the ladder at the end of the barn and grab on to the 'carriage rope' and swing out over the 'bay'[1/] - what fun that was, but now I can't believe we did such things and didn't get hurt!

1/ A track ran across the peak of the barn roof. On that track was a 'carriage' -a device that connected to a pulley. The ropes hanging down were called the carriage ropes. The purpose of all of this was to beable to lift large loads of hay, etc., on 'slings', pull the load over of top of the hayloft, trip the slings and dump the load. The purpose of the ladder was so someone could climb up to the top of the barn and grease the wheels of the carriage. The 'bay' was the area of the barn, usually in the middle of the barn. where a wagon could be driven in.

"We'd climb up the ladder to the peak or the perline plate, then come back down to the eaves and watch the sparrows or barn swallows come flying in, their beaks full of mud. We'd watch in fascination as they'd work on building their nests. Later, we'd climb back up there to spy little eggs in the nests. We'd watch those eggs, day by day, until the little birds were born!

Sunday afternoons were usually a time for some entertainment. Dinner would be over and dad would be taking a nap. Mother would sit and rock the baby for an hour. I remember when my brother, Joe, the cut-up of the family, would go upstairs and quickly come back down dressed in dad's swallowtail coat and plug hat.

He would stand on a chair and with the Norweigan Bible in his hands, say, "Now I'm going to read from the 'turd' chapter of 'Timot' (third chapter of Timothy). We'd all laugh, even mother. In fact, mother would laugh so hard that she couldn't talk. That was our Sunday afternoon entertainment.

Other Sunday afternoons the gril across the road, a cousin to Mrs. Clute, would come over and play. She had a crush on Joe, and vice versa.

So, we had our fun in our little way that didn't cost anything!"

SCHOOL DAYS

The Larson children attended the Herrick School on the Loomis Road, located on the Herrick farm, not far from Thomas K. Bell's farm (Earl's grandparents).

ELSIE: "Our school was also called the 'wildcat' school because there were real wildcats in the woods across from the school. We walked one mile to school. In the winter it was hard because we couldn't tell where the road was. We'd walk on top of the snowbanks that covered over the fences. The drifts were so hard that we usually wouldn't even sink through. When it was windy or a blizzard, we'd have to stop and turn around to catch our breath.

The school had a pot bellied stove in the middle of the room. On really cold days we would come up by the stove and sit on the two, long recitation benches. We would get our lessons and keep warm.

Our school had an artesian spring outside and in the winter we had a natural skating pond. Across the road and down a ways was the area on the Tobacco River where we had school picnics.

At the end of the school day another girl and I would go up to the balcony and play the organ for the students to march out of school by. I never had lessons, just learned to play by ear.

I liked school and in May, 1914 I took the eighth grade examinations, along with all of the other eligible students from Clare county. The two days of tests were held in Clare and we had to spend the night in town.

Later, when the scores were tallied, I had the score of 90%, the highest in Clare County! You'd better believe there was a few jealous people amongst my classmates. I remember by best friend's

mother stopped over to our house and asked my mother if she could see my report card. Perhaps she didn't believe that I had scored the highest."

The Clare Sentinel ran a lenghtly article on the eighth grade examinations and graduation. The front page of the June 5, 1914 paper contained such an article and it stated:

> "...Elise Larson of Sheridan Township earned an average of 90%, the highest in the county."

ELSIE: "My prize was the first years tuition for high school. There were two high schools, one in Clare and one in Mt. Pleasant. I attended the one in Mt. Pleasant and lived with my older sister, Mary, and her husband, Lute. I went for about 6 months then decided it would be best to quit school and get a job.

I wish now that I had continued school, but I do not regret what I did. I probably should have done what my friend Vivian Sowles did. She attended school in Clare and also worked part-time to pay for her room and board.

You see, the kids that lived in town had no problem going onto high school. But the country kids didn't have much of a chance."

See Exhibit "B" on page 35-A for a copy of Elsie's graduation announcement.

EXHIBIT B

The Graduates of

Sheridan Schools Nos. 1, 3 and 4

announce their

Commencement Exercises

Thursday, June 4, at eight o'clock

Sheridan Baptist Church

GRADUATES

No. 1 Norman Allen

C. D. Ritchie, Teacher

No. 3 Jennie McClung, Marie Davis

R. B. Williams, Teacher

No. 4 Elsie Larson, Vivian I. Sowle
J Lansing Degeer, Della Carr

Minerva Richmond, Teacher

CLASS MOTTO
"Success Awaits at Labor's Gate"

CLASS FLOWER
Roses

CLASS COLORS
Pink and White

PROGRAM

March	Mr. and Mrs. Sowle
Invocation	Rev. I. W. Knight
Duet Military Gallop Labitsky	Miss B. Langin and Mrs. Richmond
Oration	Miss Faye Thompson
Quartet	Mr. and Mrs. Langin and Mr. and Mrs. Sowle
Guitar Solo	Mr. N. D Gover
Address	Senator L. L. Kelley
Music	Selected
Presentation of Diplomas	A. H. Aldrich
Instrumental	Mr. and Mrs Sowle
Beneditcion	Rev. I. W. Knight

CHRISTMAS

The most eagerly awaited holiday for the Larson children was, of course, Christmas. They eagerly counted the days until they could go out to the little woods on their farm and cut a Christmas tree.

ELSIE: "Mother taught us how to cut paper and weave brightly colored baskets with a handle on them. These would be hung on the tree with candy in them. We also made colorful paperchains to decorate the tree.

Back then, all of the groceries were wrapped in pretty colored paper - pinks, greens, blues, reds, etc. The paper had a glazed finish that made it look shiny. It was lovely, and we'd save the paper for special things, especially for use over the holidays.

We also strung popcorn and would decorate the tree with oranges, if we were fortunate enough to have any.

Actually, our older sister, Martha, was the one who made Christmas for us - you know, money wise. She taught school in Vernon, which is southeast of Clare. She would come home for Christmas with some money to buy gifts. Martha would buy a gift or two for each of us children and for the folks; plus some candy, and perhaps some fruit and nuts.

She would put the candy, such as jelly beans, chocolates, etc., in the woven baskets we'd made. Then on Christmas Day each of us would get a basket of candy.

One year I remember receiving a doll with a real china head sewn onto a cloth body. The features of the doll were beautiful - it's face was delicately painted on. What a lovely doll and lovely dress!

Well, as children will, I fell with my doll and broke her face. I cried and cried - it broke my heart when I broke my dolly's head!

Christmas was a big celebration - and what a feast we had! Mother prepared the best meal - the dining room table was covered with delicious food. We would all gather around the table for a lovely dinner of roast chicken and all of the fixings.

Mother could bake the best cookies and pies, and of course, the best Christmas bread! We never lacked for good food, especially over the holidays!"

WINTER CLOTHING

Andrine was an excellent seamstress and she made all of the girls' woolen dresses. They always had a nice, dark colored wool dress for school and they would wear a clean apron to help keep the dress clean. When they got home from school, they would change into one of several other dresses or a skirt and blouse. To keep warm, they also wore long underwear and wool hose.

ELSIE: "I recall how one time mother took a blue, wool coat apart and made me a lovely, new dress out of it!"

Andrine knit the wool hose for the girls as well as wool socks for the boys. She made the boys wool, cordoroy and denim slacks to wear in the colder weather, as well as shirts of the same types of material.