



# P.C.H.S

Volume 2005

Pennington County Historical Society

Number 2

The April newsletter began a research series on the history of the Thief River Falls Police Department, including interviews with retired policemen. In this issue three more officers share their experiences, commenting on the strain that police work had on their families and crediting their wives with being supportive while they worked nights, weekends, and holidays in their early careers.

Besides providing information about their personal histories and police department employment records, the three men were asked to respond to the following questions:

- What is the most dangerous task in police work?
- When were you the most afraid?
- Did you ever draw or fire your weapon?
- What do you feel were the best and worst of times?

While much historical information has already been gathered about the police department, the Pennington County Sheriff's Department also needs to be researched and documented. As a bridge to the coming year's history search, this issue includes an interview with Lylia Richards, the wife of former County Sheriff Charles Richards. Future newsletters will contain interviews with other people in the area of law enforcement.

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### *Interviews*

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### **MEMBERSHIP**

A list of current members through August 19, 2005, is included in this newsletter (page 14). If your name is not on that list, it should be. Each person who receives the newsletter has been a member of the Historical Society at some time in the past. If you have forgotten to renew your membership, it is not too late. The Historical Society always needs funds to keep up the Village, even when it is not open. The preservation of the history of the county is continued through research and through the scanning of pictures and documents that will be lost in time.

## Personally Speaking

In 2003 Arcadia Publishing contacted me after seeing our website. They suggested that the Society publish a book of “vintage” postcards. Arcadia is not a vanity press. No financing is required from the organization. The production, sales, publicity, and distribution are organized by Arcadia at their expense. The Society will receive a royalty of eight percent on the sale price, which will probably be \$20 per book. Arcadia markets its titles to chain bookstores, including Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Waldenbooks.

After a great deal of thought, I decided to write a book proposal for the postcards of Pennington County. The proposal for *Thief River Falls and Pennington County in Vintage Postcards* was accepted by Arcadia, and I signed the contract which they offered. I have now selected about 200 cards that were either the current property of the Society or were loaned to us for this project. These cards will be sent to the publisher, scanned, and enhanced. Then they will be returned. My advisory council has gone through the cards, identified those selected, and supplied information for the captions. Diane Drake has agreed to write the introduction, and I will write the final captions and acknowledgments to donors and contributors.

If you would like to view the cards that are candidates for publication, they are available on our website ([www.pvillage.org](http://www.pvillage.org)). Select “Other Features” along the left side of the opening page, then select the “Postcard Tour,” and continue through the cards. The local library has computers that you can use to view the website, and there is help available to get you started.

Currently I have one card from Goodridge, three from Hazel, and one from Mavie. I also have over 40 postcards from St. Hilaire and approximately 150 from Thief River Falls. I am seeking additional postcards from Pennington County that do not duplicate those I already have. I would also welcome cards picturing people or scenes, **but only if the people and locations are identified**. If you have postcards that you are willing to share and would allow me to send them to the publisher, please contact me. My personal deadline is November of 2005, so I will be working on this project as soon as the Village closes for the season.



### CHARGES FOR ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Over the past few years the amount of time spent by the Village staff in pursuit of requested information has increased exponentially. The Society Board of Directors has approved a fee structure for research in our archival and computer files. Research will be done by a staff person on Monday through Friday between 10 a.m. and noon. Once a task has been defined, the cost of the research will be \$15 per hour. Five photocopies will be included in any fee of \$15 or more. Photographic inkjet prints on photo-quality paper will be provided upon request for \$2 per print. Society members will receive a 10% discount on all fees charged.

# Jim Fulton

Jim Fulton graduated from International Falls High School in 1968. He then attended junior college for one year, transferred to the Alexandria vocational school, and completed their law enforcement program in May 1972. After working for the Douglas County Sheriff's Department for a couple of summers as a water patrol deputy, he took a job in a little town called Holdingford. There he met his future wife, Deborah Aune, who was teaching in the local school. A year later he decided that he did not want to live in a small town, so he went back to International Falls and worked in the paper mill. He had told Deborah that they would get married when he found employment in the St. Cloud area. Eventually he was hired by a plumbing contractor, and the couple was married in November 1974. They have two sons, Adam and Brent. Adam is a Minnesota State Trooper, and Brent will graduate this December from Bemidji State University in the criminal justice program. Both followed in their father's footsteps.

While working in St. Cloud, Jim heard about a law enforcement position available in a small farming community called Albany. He applied for that job, was hired, and worked there for about six years. Then he decided that he wanted to move to a bigger police department. Applying throughout the state, he ended up getting a job in Thief River Falls. In July 1981 he began work as a patrolman and remained in that position until his

retirement in January 2003. Ken Froschheiser was the Chief of Police during most of Jim's career, but he also worked with Jim Haugen for a short time.

When asked what he considered to be the riskiest part of a policeman's job, Jim replied, "Both a domestic call and a traffic stop can be very dangerous and explosive in a matter of minutes. Things can change in the blink of an eye. Once while I was working with Sergeant Harvey Tower

***"I have been on many domestics where things can turn bad very fast."***

on a traffic stop, he noticed that I had my flashlight in my left hand. When I came back to the car, he asked, 'What hand are you?' I answered that I was left-handed. He inquired, 'How would you protect yourself if you got into a shooting situation?'

When I said that I would use my gun, he asked how I could do that with a flashlight in my hand. It is just the little things that make you think. This man certainly taught me a lot that will sit with me for the rest of my life. I thanked him for it.

"I have been on many domestics where things can turn bad very fast. I have had things thrown at me and have been involved in downright physical fights. I came out of them unscathed and felt pretty lucky. In the old days if we came on a domestic where there was any evidence of physical violence or threats, it was more or less a counseling situation where we would take one of the persons out of the house and take them to a friend. However, new laws and policies required us to make an arrest under these circumstances. I think the newer policy is much better, and it is less dangerous.



The Endowment Fund was established to secure the future of the Peder Engelstad Pioneer Village. Only the interest from this fund can be spent. The current balance in this account is \$7,600. Please consider the Historical Society in your memorials, charitable giving, and estate planning. The Society is a non-profit institution, so all donations are tax-deductible.

*Since the inception of the endowment fund, donations have been made to the fund in memory of the following:*

Russell Williams	Mike Frankenberg	Bernard Myers
Hazel DuChamp	Helen Nomeland	Roger P. Mickelson
Jan Haider	Madelyn Robarge	Ruby Huseth
Glenn Carlson	Phyllis Caldis Gustafson	Lois (Klennert) Jung
Katherine Strong	Knute Larson	Millard Nelson
Kermit Finstad	Constance Hicks Rossman	Bertha Schlenker
Marion Hoglo	Rose Needham	Clifton Mattson
Torjus and Sophie Larson	Hannah Hornseth	Cliff, Margaret, & Dick Bjorkman
Kevin Swanson	Millie (Pederson) Olson	Marion (Geving) Adolphson
Val Chommie	Gote Anderson	Kenneth Pearson
Marian Williams	Opal Bjerken	Bob Bredeson
Junes Race	Jerry Fessler	Marion Cork
Lucille Spyhalski	Genevieve Ring	Marcella Hanson
Dr. John Beebe	Orlene Reed	Helen Beebe
Myrtle (Jensen) Johnson	Lloyd VeVe	Melva Lee
Alice Lendobeja	Edla Holmberg	Rebecca Berg Grayson
Randall Noper	Oscar Odegaard	Betty Dow
Earl Engelstad	Ralph Engelstad	Pearl Wold
Peter Stensgaard	Inga Geving	Woodrow Craik
Perry Borgie	Cora Alvina Olson	Bob Bergan
Bill, Sadie, and Jerry Bugge	Robert Looker	Carrie Lunke
Carol Ann Huber	David Kringsberg	Verna Myhrer Ehrle
Marge Swenson	James Engelstad	Caroline Brunelle
Dorothy (Jansen) Johnson	Clarence O. Swanson	Lloyd Hogenson
Celeste Gerardy	Earl Halvorson	Alice Brubakken
Marie Larson Vevea	Marlene Johnson	Milton Davidson
Petra Larson Nigl	Myrtle (Bugge) Nelson	Paul Kayser
James Wells	Peter Hess	Ernest Helgenset
Russ Molldrem	Douglas Stewart	Lester Muzzy
Gertie Joppru Johnson	Avis Hoium	LeRoy Bugge
Lenore Lieberman	Joseph Armstrong	Gini Engelstad
Lloyd Nereson	Rolland Sande	Orin Green
Leona Peterson	Mary Thompson	Harold Burrell
Luella Holen	Irene Ellingson	Orville & Gay Johnson
Erland Anderson	Mel Carlson	Elsie Johnson
N. Erwin Muzzy	Patricia Henning	Leonard Furuseth
Curdis Nelson	Sophie Marie (Jensen) Sevre &	Darlene Forsberg
Bernard J. Wold	Donald I. Sevre	Richard Mosbeck
		Albert Koop

“Jim Fulton” continued from page 3...

“Silent alarms are always an unknown. I remember one time that I went out on a silent alarm to the old Ekeren Drug. The person who locked the door that night had not locked it right. The door opened up, and there was a woman inside. She had been sent over to the pharmacy by a doctor to pick up a prescription, and the alarm had gone off when she went in. It scared her, and it scared me. In about ninety percent of the alarms that we get no one is there, but this time there was. That one time can be dangerous.

“In the course of my career I have pulled my gun five or six different times. Probably the most dangerous experience that I ever had was a call where there were guns involved. We had a convicted felon who had been released from prison. It was reported that he had a weapon. We all knew the individual, and it became a regular old dogfight where we had to wrestle him and take him down. After we got him out of the house, we found no gun. Thank God no one was hurt. I have never fired my weapon in the line of duty other than in target practice or when qualifying to maintain my license.”

One of the worst experiences of his career resulted in a fatality. He recalled, “I was once called to a bad accident, and an individual ended up dying as a result of what happened. You think of safety first and protecting the public, but when

things are beyond your control you can’t always determine the outcome. I regret that, but there was nothing that I could do to change it. I will probably remember that accident for the rest of my life.”

Summing up his career as a policeman, Jim pointed out some positive aspects of the job. “I always enjoyed helping people. This is not a large community, so you came to know people on a first-name basis. I was part of the chaplaincy program which was initiated under Ken Froschheiser. I felt proud that he asked me to belong to it. We got that rolling with the pastors in town, and when there was a serious situation we could call upon them to help with the people involved.”

***“It became a regular old dogfight where we had to wrestle him and take him down.”***

Jim also acknowledged that there were drawbacks. “The hours that I worked were hard on my family. I was often gone on weekends, nights, and holidays. Many times my wife had to take the boys to family get-togethers without me, but she was very understanding. Some nights when I came home after having been in a tough situation I couldn’t sleep, but she was always willing to listen to me. Thank God I had someone that I could just talk to and air the problems that I had faced during the day. It was a personal and private time for us. Our marriage has survived. We are at 31 years and counting.”■

# Lylian Richards

(Transcribed and edited from an interview)

I was born in Pennington County at my family home in Sanders Township. My parents were George and Katherine Swanson. I grew up on the farm and attended a little country school that was about three miles from our home. I can still remember many of my teachers. When I went to Lincoln, I had to walk a mile and a half to catch the bus. The bus route covered about sixty miles. During my junior year in high school I moved into Thief River Falls to live on north Arnold Avenue with my sister, who had already graduated. I had a very small bedroom in what was the Werner home. I also worked at Woolworth's Dime Store (where Poppler's is now) while I was going to school. After graduating in 1949 I went to work at Elofson's Jewelry Store and never left there. It became the Jewel Box when Phil Hess bought it. I now help out at Diamonds and Designs which is located in what was the Bjorkman Building.

In about 1949 or 1950, Charles Richards came into the jewelry store on the pretense of buying his parents an anniversary gift, but actually he had seen me and wanted to meet me. Chuck (as we called him) was working with the Corps of Engineers at that time. We were married in 1951 while he was in the army. After the service he went to work at Pure Oil, which was right on Main Avenue where Pennington Lube is now. His dad, who was a life insurance salesman, wanted Chuck to go into the business. Although he did give it a try, Chuck

hated it.

After that, Art Rambeck, who was the county sheriff, asked Chuck to come to work for him. Although Chuck had no experience in that area, he really enjoyed it. After he had worked there for about a year, Art retired and Chuck was appointed county sheriff for the next three years. In 1958 he ran for the position and was elected. From then until he retired in 1986, he ran for office every three years but found each election to be very stressful.

He worked day and night at his job, was involved in every aspect of the community, and seemed to enjoy every bit of it. There were times when he was working at night, "copping a dance" as they called working at the dances in town. There were also calls that he had to take. Some of those that he went out on were quite worrisome--domestic calls in particular--but he seldom talked about his work at home. I did most of the housework at night and seemed to need very little sleep. We socialized with other law enforcement people, and those relationships allowed some levity that was helpful.

One of the toughest times for Chuck was when Don Meyers was shot. I will never forget that night. It was like the end of the world. He came home and was absolutely beside himself over the death of his friend. The other tragedy that affected him was the death of Art Rambeck in that plane crash. Chuck was the sheriff then, and it was a very difficult time.

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Pennington County Historical Society  
2005 Business Memberships

# THANK YOU

**Ace Hardware Company**

**American Legion Post  
117, Inc.**

**Bredeson Office Supply**

**Jim Dagg Insurance  
Agency, Inc.**

**Diamonds & Designs**

**Thomas P. Dimich,  
D.D.S., P.A.**

**Tony Dorn, Inc.**

**ElectraCity USA**

**Electronics Plus of TRF,  
Inc.**

**Falls Decorators**

**Si & Marge Hanson (The  
Shed)**

**Hasnedl Farms**

**Hugos #7**

**Home Lumber Company  
of TRF, Inc.**

**I.T.S. Auto Center**

**Kays, Benton, Safran-  
ski & Co. LLP**

**Kezar Music Co.**

**Lee Plumbing & Heat-  
ing**

**Inez Mostue's Maurtua**

**Narverud Cleaners**

**Nelson Insurance  
Agency, Inc**

**Nelson's Commercial  
Refrigeration & Air  
Conditioning**

**Northwest Beverage,  
Inc.**

**Peterson Lumber Co.**

**Quick Print Center,  
Inc.**

**Sather Law Office**

**Gale E. Schmitz, LTD**

**Thoele Photography**

**TR Jobbing, Inc.**

**Westside Motors**

We ask you to support these businesses.  
They support us!

*“Lyllian Richards” continued from page 6...*

After he retired, Chuck went to work at Artco. When the people there started calling him “Artco Charlie,” he became “Charlie” to all of us. He enjoyed working at Artco and did some traveling for them. I used the time when he was gone to catch up at home. I guess I am a little compulsive. I stayed up ironing clothes and other things and went to work the next day.

We have four children—one boy and three girls. Kelsy (Mike) Blowers is the oldest, our sec-

ond daughter is Karyn (Tim) Lutz, then there is Charles Ross (Susan), and the youngest is Kristie (Jeff) Hensel. Our children are very proud of their dad and our family. We also have eight grandchildren, but only one of them lives in Thief River Falls. They did not know Charlie as Sheriff, but only as Grandpa. We would have been married forty-nine years in June 2000, the year that he died. When I look back, I feel that it was a good life. I would not have changed anything. ■

## Vern Cleven

Vern Cleven was born in Thief River Falls, grew up in Grygla, and graduated from Goodridge High School in 1964. After high school he attended the area vocational school in Thief River and received a diploma in the auto body program. In 1966 he married Evonne Nelson, a Thief River Falls native, and the couple recently celebrated their 39<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

Over the years he worked at several different businesses (Forsberg’s, Border Drug, Hartz Warehouse, Arctic Cat), drove a school bus and a semi, and did both carpentry and mechanical work. Even while holding a full-time position, he sometimes worked part-time at other jobs. “I did not get into law enforcement until I was thirty years old,” he stated. “I was interested for awhile, took the civil service test, and was hired after a few years. In 1976 I began on the force as a patrolman and worked the morning shift. Al Melbye will tell you that all that the morning shift does is sit around and

drink coffee, but we cleaned up what the night crew did not take care of on their shift.”

When asked what he considered to be the most dangerous type of police work, Vern had mixed feelings. “I would not know which order to put a traffic stop or a domestic call as far as the danger involved. With the traffic stop, you have no idea what you may encounter. The domestic call usually starts out as a battle between two partners who may turn on the officer during the encounter. Both types are dangerous for the patrolman. Sometimes a burglary call can turn out to be dangerous. When an alarm goes off at night and you do a building search, it’s hard to know what you may come across. One incident that a partner and I encountered during the day shift was at about four or five in the afternoon. An alarm went off, my partner and I went to the building, and we began a search. It was a warehouse setting. I heard my partner yell very loudly, ‘Drop It!’ As I came around the corner

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“Vern Cleven” continued from page 8...

of the shelving, a twelve-year-old boy was laying a BB pistol on the window ledge. If he had turned that gun towards my partner, my partner would have shot him, thinking that the gun was real. That was a very scary incident.”

Another time that he was afraid was on a murder case some years ago. “Al Melbye and I were first on the scene,” he recalled. “We did not know where the perpetrator was, so we did a search of the mobile home. Searching those dark areas with a flashlight was very scary. I did the back rooms by myself. The body was lying in the kitchen area. Even though I learned later that someone else had already searched the area, it was still scary. I remember getting home late that night, grabbing a quick snack, and sleeping quite soundly. It doesn’t hit until later.

“We had another mobile home incident where someone had barricaded himself, and he said there were guns. Of course we were trying to talk this person out, but after about an hour we decided to go in and take the case. We knocked down the door and found him lying on the bed with no gun. We got the job done, but it was stressful. I have

drawn my gun, but I have never fired it and am very thankful for that.”

Reflecting upon his career as a policeman, Vern stated, “Police work is hard on a marriage. My wife raised our kids. Our daughter Leah is a registered nurse in Mankato, and our son Ross manages a video store in Seattle. When you begin the job, you work nights, weekends, holidays, and you need to sleep during the days. It was hard on the family. My wife used to take the kids out so it would be quiet for me. I missed a lot of things.”

His colleagues were a positive influence. “Duane Holland was a guy that I always looked up to,” Vern remembers, “and Al Melbye was so very knowledgeable. There were so many different people with different methods, and they all helped you find your own method of doing things.”

The years he has spent on the police force (1976 to 2002) have had a lasting impact on his life. “I can still see some things that happened many years ago,” Vern said. One, especially, involved an accident where a little girl was killed. I can remember carrying her in my arms. The memories are still there just as vivid as if they had just happened.”■

### ONE-ROOM SCHOOL REUNION

On July 16, 2005, the Little Oak School reunion at the Pennington County Historical Society’s Peder Engelstad Pioneer Village drew past teachers and students from throughout Minnesota as well as Wisconsin and Washington. Little Oak School was built in the county’s Hickory Township in 1908 and closed in 1964. The Little Oak building also served as a house of worship for the Little Oak congregation. Several reunion attendees were baptized there. Following the closure, the building was moved to the Engelstad Pioneer Village. The reunion was covered extensively the following weekend in the *Northern Watch*.



**THE HILL**

Marion Prichard continues to work on “the hill,” as it has come to be called. The hill has been tiered with rock, creating many levels of planting space. Marion is removing weeds and rearranging plants so that the shorter plants are not blocked from view by taller growth. She is often out there digging most of the day, leaving only to eat lunch. Recently she stated that she finally feels as though she is getting someplace.

**THE NEW VILLAGE FLAGPOLE AND SCANNERS**

Matt Langland contributed his 2005 graduation gifts to the Village. He chose to spend his gift for a new flagpole and flag and a large scanner. Mrs. Ralph (Betty) Engelstad added enough money to Matt’s gift to buy a new scanner that can copy large documents, negatives, and pictures. The flagpole is now in front of the Geving Museum, and the scanner has been purchased. Andy Filer contributed a scanner with a document feeder so that multiple documents can also be scanned and searched. The first collection to be scanned was Gretchen Beito’s “Prairie Ramblings.”

**FLOWER IDENTIFICATION**

As part of “Barn Again! An American Icon” events at the Village this summer, Linda Helgeland led a group of gardeners to label all the varieties of flowers and plants in the Village. Linda, a Master Gardener, was assisted in identification by Joan Nelson, Carol Hammer, and Beattie Mickelson. The local Master Gardeners paid for the holders and labels as a part of the education portion of their mission. One of the indications of the success of the project is the number of people who have identified plants in their own gardens after seeing a labeled plant in the Village.

**THE PIT**

In 1976 the city of Thief River Falls deeded the Sewage Treatment Plant, built in 1939, and the acres of land around it on Oakland Park Road to the Pennington County Historical Society. Included in the complex of buildings was the “slurry pit,” which became the resting place for many pieces of donated farm machinery. Because the pit had a floor of drain tiles, it held water and the old machinery was rusting away. Inga Geving asked Ralph Engelstad to build a roof over the pit, but he built the Engelstad display building instead. The machinery in the pit continued to rust, and the area became a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Numerous ideas were suggested over the years, but none seemed feasible. Bud Enge, who worked at the original plant, discovered that the drain on the south side of the pit was not open. A manhole located between the pit and the south ditch, which drains into the river, was indicated on the original blueprint. Bud found that it had been filled with dirt.

In 2004 John Bornholdt looked at the problem and

decided that if the north drain had a culvert leading to the north line of the property, the natural slope of the land would drain the water toward the west into the existing state ditch. When the county engineer, Mike Flaagen, came out and surveyed the slope of the area, he agreed with what John proposed. The Historical Society voted to have the county install the culvert and authorized the Village director to dispose of all but a few of the rusted pieces of machinery in the pit. A few items of machinery, the wooden wheeled wagons, and the steel wheels were put on display in the Village. Vince Miramontes then came and cut up the remaining pieces for scrap iron.

In 2005 John Bornholdt called the Village director about the upcoming road construction on Barzen Avenue. He felt it would be a good idea to add dirt from the project to the pit so that water at the bottom would drain completely after each rain. John borrowed a caterpillar from Duane Thygeson, agreeing to refill the fuel tank.

On July 5th trucks started to move the dirt into the Village. With John's direction, the trucks drove through the gate and emptied their loads where he indicated. After each truck left, John moved the dirt around so that future loads could be dumped around the large circular area. The pit is approximately 150 feet in diameter, with a low cement column in the center. As the day progressed, John walked around the edge of the pit and marked each wall, one foot down from the top, with a splash of spray paint. John called Sorvig Oil, Inc., to refuel the caterpillar. When the bill arrived, it was marked "no charge."

With the help of a couple of teenagers who were assigned community service, John got the edges of the pit smoothed out in preparation for seeding. The next week he came to the Village with Dan Helle, who brought his seeder, four-wheeler, and drag. Forty pounds of grass seed and fifty pounds of oat seed were planted on the July 14. Over the weekend the pit was watered, and the oats have begun sprouting. As Mike Flaagen said in summarizing the project, "This is the way things are supposed to work." John already has the next project on his schedule. He intends to see that the Village sawmill is put into the pit and hopes to have it up and sawing lumber in the future.

## Allen Melbye

(Transcribed from an interview and edited by Al Melbye)

Allen Melbye was born July 1950 in Crookston, Minnesota. After graduating from Crookston Central High School in 1968, he attended what is now the University of Minnesota Crookston. He also worked at some part-time jobs. Deciding that college wasn't for him, he went into the military in 1969 and was sent to Vietnam in 1970. As part of a company responsible for battalion security, he worked a lot with MPs. Returning home a year later, he went back to college and took courses in hotel/motel management; but again he felt that it wasn't the place for him.

"One of the reasons that I got into law enforcement," Al recalls, "was because of my military experience. I had the opportunity of meeting Pat (Thompson) Dorn, who was the secretary for the Thief River Falls Police Department, and she encouraged me to apply for a position in law enforcement. I took a number of civil service exams in the area, and Thief River Law Enforcement was

the first to call with an opening. In 1973 I was interviewed and hired to start with the police department early in May, but I asked if I could postpone it a couple of weeks because I was getting married that weekend. The first year was interesting because I served with three different chiefs. Roland Waller was Chief of Police when I was hired, but he was just getting ready to retire. Roy Pederson became the next chief, but was tragically killed in a plane accident in 1974. Ken Froschheiser was appointed chief after that, and I worked with him for the next 25 years or so until he retired.

"I was a patrolman for five years and then was promoted to sergeant, which was a supervisory position. I was the night shift commander and also served on a number of boards. The department was expanding, and things changed very much during the time I was there. I retired in 2003 after a little over thirty years in the department.

"I never did get my degree from Crooks-

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*“Allen Melbye” continued from page 11...*

ton, but I earned a degree at Northland Community College and then got my bachelor’s degree in 1983 from Bemidji State University. I always joke that I crammed my four-year-degree into ten years. One of the most important forms of law enforcement education that I had was with the FBI National Academy at Quantico, Virginia, which is about an hour or so south of Washington, D.C. This is an administrative school, not the FBI agent school. It was quite a feat to be accepted for their eleven week program. The waiting time to be accepted into this program used to be a couple of years, but I understand that it is now close to five years. After becoming a sergeant I was able to apply, and consider that was probably the best education in law enforcement that I have ever gotten.”

When asked about the dangers of police work, Al stated, “I believe that the most potentially serious thing a patrolman does is to respond to a domestic dispute. You never know what you will find when you enter a home where a volatile situation already exists. Many times there are children present. Sometimes you have been there before, but you still don’t know what you are facing. In this area of the country everyone has guns—usually rifles or shotguns—and there are always knives. No matter how bad the situation is, when it comes down to arresting one of the parties involved, the other person may turn on you. There is a huge amount of potential danger in that kind of situation.

“One thing that helps an officer now is mandatory arrest in domestic disputes. If there is prob-

able cause that someone has violated the law, we have to arrest them. In the old days, we had to witness the violation to make an arrest. Although we spent a lot more time back then trying to be peacemakers, sometimes we ended up aggravating the situation. Now if we have probable cause, we can make the arrest and be out of the situation. The new law helps somewhat, but even the simplest task can potentially become very dangerous. We always had to be ready for it because we never knew what could happen.”

“One time when I can recall being quite nervous was a county call. Two brothers were fighting, and one of them was acting irrational. The call was for a deputy, who was way down by the county line. He called and asked us to handle it. One man had been heard kicking in the door and supposedly had a gun and a knife with which he was going to kill his brother. We went part of the way out to the scene and received word that one brother had left. I was waiting at the edge of town for him to come when there was another call, telling us that he was back and we were needed at the original scene. I went out there, and it seemed to me that this was going to turn into a disaster. I was alone and extremely tense. The fear factor had definitely kicked in by that time. It is funny because usually I never seem to get afraid until after it is over. I got there, ordered the man to put his hands up, and he did. The incident ended. The potential was there, however, because there were two weapons involved. I have drawn my gun a number of times but have never had to fire it. I

*Continued on page 13...*

“Allen Melbye” continued from page 12...

came very close three or four times, but I was lucky and am very glad that I never fired it.”

Not all police work is this hazardous, however. Al told about arriving first at the scene of a car-bike accident. “When I got there, I learned that it was not an accident between the car and the bicycle. A little girl had fallen with her bike and had somehow gotten her leg caught between the frame and the spokes of the wheel. The driver of the car had pulled up behind the little girl to protect her so that she would not get run over. I could not get the foot out at all. I got a wire cutter and told the little girl that there would be some noise. I snapped the first wire, and she screamed. I tried to tell her that we were just about done, but when I snapped the second one, she screamed again. I couldn’t understand why she was screaming because what I was doing should have relieved the pressure. I said, ‘Just a couple more,’ snapped another one, and she screamed again. I could see that her foot was free, so I asked if I was hurting her. She answered, ‘No, you’re hurting my bike.’”

Reflecting upon his long career in law enforcement, Al shared some thoughts:

“After something has happened and you are done with it, you sit down and think about it. You are always second-guessing yourself like a Monday morning quarterback. Maybe if you had done something differently, it would have turned out differently, but you make split-second decisions with which you may live or die.

*“Even the simplest task can potentially become very dangerous.”*

“You want to solve every crime, prevent every accident, and save the life of every person in a medical emergency. You want everything to turn out for the best, but it doesn’t always turn out that way. There are people in this field who have a tough time dealing with that, and eventually they get out of the job because they just cannot handle it. You have to learn coping skills because you cannot let it eat you up. You have to move on.”

“On occasion my wife listened to my ventilations. She was willing to listen, and it was always good to get some of it off my chest. My wife, Fern, and I have been married for over thirty years. We have one son, Chris, who is the news director at Thief River Falls Radio. His wife, ADawn, is the Agriculture instructor at the Lincoln High School. In December we became grandparents. Our grandson, Blake, is doing just fine. I am now doing occasional ‘Grandpa Day Care,’ as they call it.

“Today law enforcement is a young person’s field. Most of the officers that I worked with were hired about the same time. Some of us—Jim Haugen, Mark Haugen, and I—always brag that surviving the job is what makes us proud. Looking at the larger picture, we were able to accomplish some things here in the department. We moved into the next century and were able to maintain and train new officers. We saved some people. We prevented some crimes. When I look back, I wasn’t always the greatest, but I got the job done.”■

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