

THE EMPTY NEST NEWSLETTER

VOLUME XV, NUMBER 2, FALL '96

"Rara avis in terra"

("A rare bird in the land") -- Javéna

Well, ... imagine we here!
I'll certainly miss all those
who still to do... and see...
and read... and tell...
and share... and
all of you... and...

The Empty Chez Nous Nest



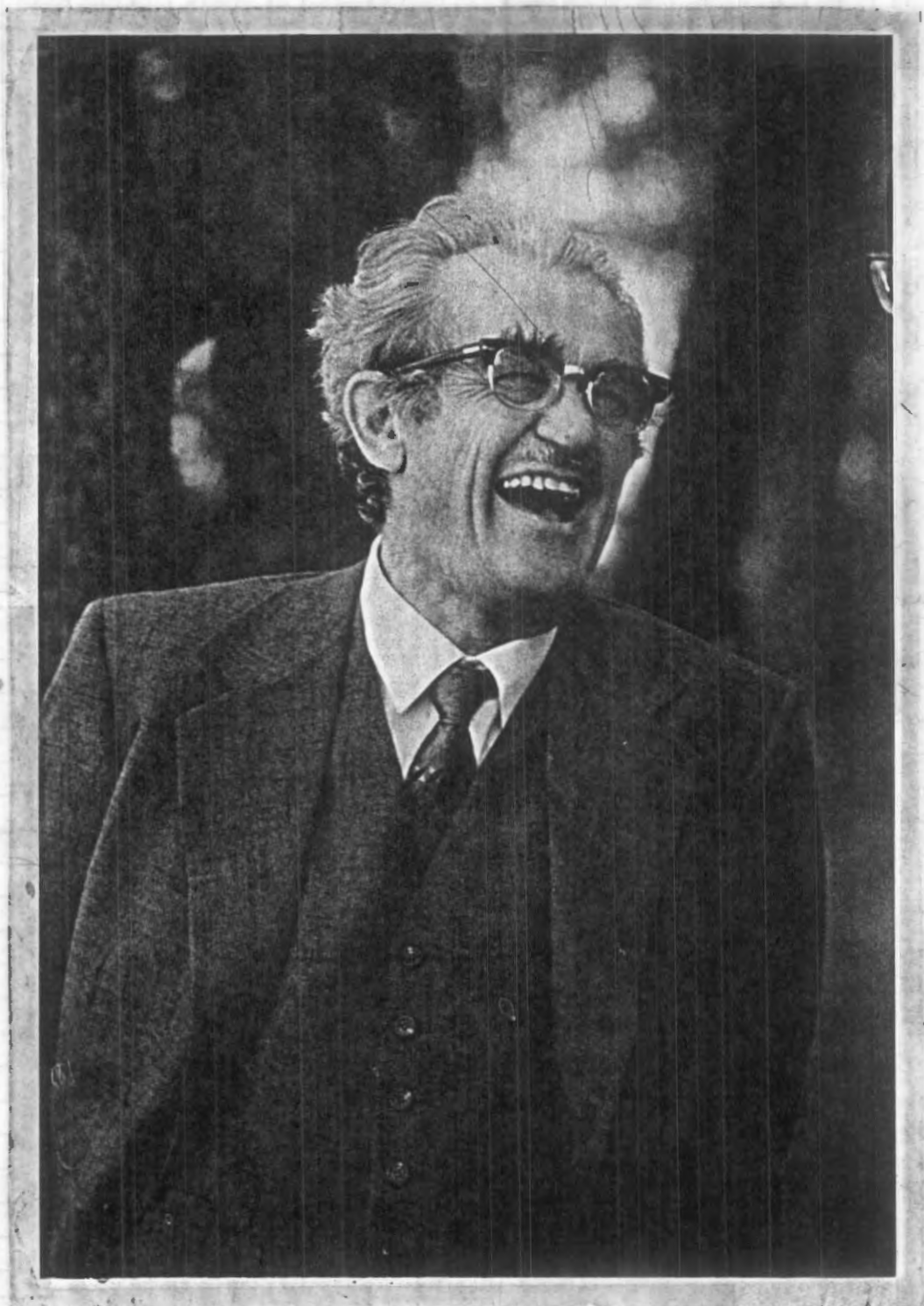
Still, if there's a
heaven... and if I'm
allowed in... I'll get
to see Mommy... and
Grandpa... and
Darwin...
and...

HE WAS A GRAND OLD BIRD

AND HOW WE ARE ALL MISSING HIM!

RONALD ARTHUR DOUGAN

MAY 20, 1902 - MARCH 12, 1996



Ron Dougan — A good life well-lived

HE REVERED LIFE in all its forms. His faith in God was strong. His love of family and friends was boundless. He had healthy respect for the land and the sun and the rains that nurture life.

He was a man of dignity, wit, warmth and wisdom. He had an appreciation for art in all its forms, and for nature's limitless bounty and beauty.

First and always, Ron Dougan was a farmer. Long before most men of the soil gave much thought to such things, Ron recognized the role of science and research in making the land more productive; in coaxing more and better meat and milk from the herds.

RON LOVED LITTLE kids and wildflowers and sunsets. On Monday of last week he sat in his big chair in the parlor of the big house of Hill Farm along Colley Road east of Beloit. He and his wife Vera, who passed away in 1988, had named the place Chez Nous — "our home."

There were no little kids to enjoy that day, but Ron watched the birds outside his window and talked softly to the cats that were his constant companions. A day earlier, he'd spent an enjoyable time with his granddaughter, Elle, who made her home with him. That Saturday, good friend Erv Fonda had paid him a visit. A year ago he'd been hospitalized with pneumonia and then spent some time in a nursing home. But he'd been able to return to his own home. He was content.

Monday night, as his homemaker helper prepared supper, Ron became ill. Paramedics were called and he was rushed to Beloit Memorial Hospital with an aneurysm that doctors tried to fix but couldn't. At 10 o'clock Tuesday morning, nearing his 94th birthday, Ron passed away. His daughter Jackie and two granddaughters were with him.

"I VISITED WITH RON last Saturday," says Fonda, a longtime friend, neighbor and former employee. He was in good spirits; a bit tired and forgetful maybe, but happy. He was where he wanted to be.

Next Friday, his ashes are to be buried alongside the grave of his beloved wife of 64 years, Vera, in Oakwood Cemetery.

Ron had told his family, "When I die just dig a post hole and drop me in it." That is to be done; his ashes enclosed in one of the amber-colored



William D. Behling

milk bottles that were a trademark of the Dougan Dairy.

This remembrance of Ronald Arthur Dougan is written by one who was privileged to have had Ron's friendship for many years. There isn't space to recount the good memories, nor to list the ways in which Ron Dougan earned the friendship, admiration and respect of so many over his long lifetime. It's enough to say he was one of Beloit's finest.

SOME 40 YEARS AGO, as a farm writer for the Daily News, I found Ron Dougan to be a source of good, interesting stories. His Dougan Dairy had been a community asset for many years. The cream-colored delivery trucks proclaimed Dougan's to be "the babies' milkman." School kids by the hundreds visited the farm to see the Guernseys in the landmark Dougan round barn, to be taken on hayrack rides through the fields, and to listen to Ron as he told and showed them exciting things about other animals and crops and dairying.

Ron and his father, a Methodist preacher-turned-farmer, believed in innovation and in the use of scientific research to improve farming practices. They pioneered in the breeding and feeding of more productive cows. In 1949, Ron became a founder of the Rock County Breeders Co-op, one of the first to employ artificial insemination using semen from proven bulls to sire high-producing offspring. Later, Dougan was a supporter of genetic research that led to the first successful embryo transplant in dairy animals.

Meanwhile, the Dougans began experimenting with cross pollination to produce hardier, higher-yielding hybrid corn. Dougan Hybrid seed gained a fine reputation in the Midwest for some 40 years.

W.J. DOUGAN DIED in 1949; Ron oversaw the dairying and seed corn business until disposing the dairy in 1967 and the seed business

in 1970.

Throughout his active lifetime, from becoming his father's farming partner in 1925 until retiring in 1970, Ron was involved not only in the businesses of Dougan Farms but in the life of the Beloit-Turtle Township community. He served on numerous state and national agricultural-research boards, was an active member and past president of Beloit Rotary, and a leading patron of the YMCA and other organizations.

Ron also took a genuine interest in the pursuits of his wife Vera, who was a leader in women's clubs and particularly in music. Vera Dougan was president of the National Federation of Music Clubs, was fine arts chairman for the Wisconsin Centennial in 1948, and was primarily responsible for nurturing the community's appreciation for string music. Her efforts were key to the formation of the Beloit Symphony Orchestra, now the Beloit Janesville Symphony.

IN 1987, BELOIT Rotarians honored Ron for his 60 years' membership in the club. At the time, this column quoted from notes he had made long ago when he and his father were building their business. Samplings:

"Farming is a way of life. One doesn't farm eight or 10 hours a day and then forget it. Farming is to take your son over to the back pasture early in the spring, looking for morels.

"Farming is knowing that every cow is quietly working for you, every pig is growing for you, and every blade of grass is strengthening in the sun so when winter comes, man and beast can be fed and warm.

"Farming is having your children grow up around you, knowing their father's work and loving their home. Farming is having a family center to come to as the children get their schooling.

"Farming is living close to the elemental things — to birth and growth; to life and death.

"FINALLY, FARMING, I think, brings man closer to God than most professions. In all the days of his life he sees God in the fields, in the sky, in the life cycle. He knows Him in the life-giving sunshine and is close to Him in the sweep of the storm.

"In all humility, a farmer has a



BON file photo

Ronald Arthur Dougan

chance to live greatly and to know himself to be a part of God's great plan for the universe."

Clearly, had he not been a fine farmer, Ron Dougan could have been a writer, a teacher, a philosopher, a preacher, or all of the above.

The great round barn that "Daddy" Dougan built in 1911, and in which generations of dairy cattle produced the milk that nourished generations of Beloiters, still stands. But barely. Ron's daughter, Jackie Jackson, would like to see it preserved and used as a visitor center and dairying museum. But interest hasn't been great. Meanwhile, the structure deteriorates.

THE BARN IS the centerpiece for stories and reminiscences that Jackie is weaving into a soon-to-be-published book, "The Round Barn." The old building is built around a silo. Many years ago, "Daddy" Dougan lettered on the silo a five-line credo. It reflects the philosophy that has guided the Dougans' lives and inspired those who worked there, or visited. Here it is:

1. Good crops.
2. Proper storage.
3. Profitable livestock.
4. A stable market.
5. Life as well as a living.

The last, I think, is the best. Those of us who knew Ron Dougan are comforted at his passing by the knowledge that his was the good life, well-lived.

William D. Behling is Editor Emeritus of the Beloit Daily News.

Ronald



Eunice

Ronald

Trever



Dougan, Ronald Arthur

BELOIT—Ronald Arthur Dougan, age 93, died ~~Tues~~ March 12, 1996, of an aortic aneurism. He was living at his farm home, 3949 E. Colley Rd., at the time of his death. He was born May 20, 1902, in Oregon, WI. The family moved to Beloit in 1906, when his father left the Methodist ministry because of failing hearing, and started a dairy. Ron was a contented resident of Turtle Township for 90 years.



His parents, Wesson and Eunice, died before him; a brother, Trevor; a sister, Esther Peters Cox; and his wife, Vera Wardner Dougan (1988). His genes flourish on in his four children: Joan (Karl) Schmidt of Madison, Patricia (Lewis) Dalvit of Johnson City, TN, Jacqueline Jackson of Springfield, IL, and Craig (Barbara) of Beaver Creek, OR; and in 18 grandchildren and (to date) 29 great-grands. He found his progeny a continual astonishment and blessing, commenting on one photo-Christmas card, "What hath God wrought?"

He attended the District 12 Dougan School on the edge of the farm and taught there himself when he was 17 years old. He and Vera have donated this school building to Beloit's Bartlett Museum. He was the smallest of the class at Beloit High, but grew to six feet during college at Northwestern. After his junior year, he went to France to help rebuild French communities devastated by World War I. At Chateau Thierry, he did social and cultural work; his special charge was scouting and recreational work with boys left fatherless. While there he met and married a fellow worker, Vera Wardner of Chicago, who was teaching English, dance and physical education. The couple returned to Beloit, where Ronald took his senior year at Beloit College, graduating cum laude in 1924 with a B.S. in chemistry, then went into business with his father. The Dougan trucks with their slogan, "The Babies' Milkman," were a familiar sight on Beloit streets, and the round barn his father built in 1911 was a familiar landmark. On the silo W. J. Dougan had printed, "The Aims of This Farm", and the fifth aim, "Life as Well as a Living," exemplified in W.J.'s life, was also exemplified in the life of his son.

Starting in 1950 until his retirement from dairying in 1967, Ron personally hosted an unforgettable farm visit for each first grade in town. The kids eyeballed cows, had milk direct from a tit squirted in their mouths, watched milking and bottling, rode a calf, put a chicken to sleep, had a hayride, drank lots of chocolate milk, and one occasionally fell into a cow pie. He reserved two weeks every spring and fall for these outings.

Always at the forefront in agriculture, Ron was a pioneer in hybrid seed corn, raising experimental fields for the University of Wisconsin, as well as having his own business, Dougan's Hybrids. He retired from the seed corn business in 1971. He was on the founding board of the Rock County Artificial Breeding Co-op, the second in the U.S. He served as secretary until 1967. He was one of four members on the founding Board of Directors of the Wisconsin Scientific Breeding Institute, which later became American Breeders Service. He was secretary on the board of the American Foundation for the Study of Genetics. He was a supporter of conservation work in the state - his own land was contour plowed and had a farm pond. The farm, along with the adjacent Lang farm, hosted Wisconsin's 1961 Farm Progress Days, which 150,000 people attended. He was a lifetime Rotarian, a member of First United Methodist Church, an enthusiastic member of the Ned Hollister Bird Club, Chess Club (where he once beat Judge Luebke), a patron of the Beloit-Janesville Symphony, a member of Treble Clef Music Club, and a supporter of his wife in all her local, state, and national musical activities.

Ron was a great raconteur, whose motto was never to spoil a good story with the facts. He used colorful, earthy similes in his ordinary speech. ("As noisy as a raccoon in a garbage can," "He walks like a constipated meadow lark.") He was a generous man, who always threw in the tail with the hide, although he once said, "Mommy is the generous one - I squeeze a buffalo nickel till the buffalo doesn't need Metamucil for two weeks." He hired the halt, the lame, and the blind. Most kids in the Beloit area detasselled in the Dougan fields as teenagers. He'd deliver milk at 11 p.m. to a mother who'd run short. He was as at-home in a tuxedo as inside the barn or running a milk route (or under the bottle washer, which continually needed repairs). There are so many stories concerning Ron Dougan that one could write a book about him, and, in fact, one has. Many Beloiters read "Tales from the Round Barn" in the Beloit Daily News in the early eighties. These, and many, many more, are in the progress of publication. The Round Barn, by Northwestern University Press, available sometime next year.

Honoring his oft-repeated wish, "Remember, when I die, just dig a post hole and drop me in," Ron will be buried in an amber Dougan milk bottle at the bottom of a fence post hole in Oakwood Cemetery, beside his wife and parents. A grandchild once said, "Head first or feet first, Grandpa?" and he replied, "It depends on which direction you think I'm going."

A memorial funeral service will be held at 1:00 p.m. Fri., March 22, at FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, 511 Public, Beloit, with Rev. Jean Gray Ehnert officiating. Following the service, a luncheon and time for visiting and remembrance will be held in the church hall. In lieu of other expressions of sympathy, please make donations in Ronald Dougan's name to The Nature Conservancy, or to Beloit College for the maintenance of the Newark Road Prairie. DALEY-MURPHY-WISCH AND ASSOCIATES are the funeral directors.

Ron was much loved. We were lucky to have him so long. Father, Grandpa, friend, we're going to sorely miss you, and we're placing the bottle right-side-up.

Ron in France



coming home from France



Ron and Vera Dougan's Family

Married May 3, 1924, Chateau Thierry, France

Children:

Joan Schmidt, Patricia Dalvit, Jacqueline Jackson, Craig Dougan

Grandchildren:

Peter Schmidt, Jeremy Schmidt, Katie Yde, Dan Schmidt, Tom Schmidt
Jackie Jo Guthrie, Stephanie McPhillips
Damaris Jackson, Megan Ryan, Gillian Jackson, Elle Jackson
Ricky Dougan, Bart Dougan, Cindy Mueller, Trevor Dougan, David Dougan, Lisa McDonald, Dana Wood

Great Grandchildren:

Jenny Schmidt, Matthew Schmidt, Dylan Schmidt
Kestrel Schmidt
Sonja Yde, Josh Yde, Ben Yde
Karl Andrew Schmidt, Sarah Joen Schmidt, Megan Schmidt
Kyla Schmidt, Patrick Schmidt
Annie Guthrie, David Guthrie
Sean McPhillips, Kristen McPhillips, Kyle McPhillips
Mark Ryan, Andy Ryan, Joy Ryan
Cressida Broten
Adam Dougan, Enoch Dougan, Jared Dougan
Jennifer Dougan, Leah Dougan
Annette Wood, Stephen Wood
Carson Dougan, Elliott Dougan

Great Hayloft-in-the-Sky

(From The Round Barn by Jacqueline Dougan Jackson; read at Ron Dougan's funeral)

Daddy has a health scare when he's 57 or so. He goes breakfastless to the dentist; emerging from the office he lights a cigarette. He gets dizzy, blacks out and collapses in the hall. At the hospital he undergoes tests. His doctor tells him he's had a very small stroke, his arteries are vulnerable and that he must never smoke another cigarette. Daddy quits smoking.

A new American Breeders Service vet, Les Larson, has been coming down to the farm about once a month to work with Daddy on infertility problems in the Dougan herd. Les has devised a little plywood shelf that he can move from windowsill to windowsill in the round barn as he works along behind the cows. It holds the paperwork on each animal.

Daddy leans on the little shelf, telling Les a story. A prop slips and the shelf tips. Daddy crashes to the floor. He's greatly relieved when he learns it isn't dizziness that causes his tumble.

"I thought this was it," he confides to Les. "I thought I was looking over Jordan--but it was only the manure trough."

Later he expands to Mother on the Great-Hayloft-in-the-Sky. "I rather hope it's like that," he says. "I'd feel at home. The pearly gates will be stanchions--a little easier to squeeze through than a needle's eye, though I don't have to worry about being a rich man. . . . Angels. They're obvious, with their big eyes and long lashes and soft breath and sweet voices continually mooing and humming before the throne. But where is the throne? It'd have to be at the top of the silo, up there with the pigeons. The only thing I'd not care about would be swimming that river. Do you suppose it's narrow enough to step across?"

"Maybe you're not destined for heaven," Mother says. "What do you see as the other place? A pig sty?"

Daddy is shocked. "Oh, no! There's a place for them there, too. One of the many mansions. Why, heaven might be all one big wallow. Maybe there's no space for us there, at all. I can't for the life of me see why God would want humans . . . except Gramp, of course. . . . What is God, anyway? The Great I-Am."

Mother quotes Popeye: "I yam what I yam."

"God as sweet potato," Daddy muses. "That opens a whole new realm. I wonder where among the Dominions and Powers the rutabegies rank?"

Many years later, Daddy comes back from being a pallbearer at a funeral. He's depressed by the whole event. At the table he announces gloomily, "When I die, just dig a posthole and drop me in."

"Head first or feet first?" a granddaughter asks.

"It depends what direction you think I'm going," Ron Dougan replies.

This is one of my favorite pictures of Dad. He's at Pat's house in his cabin on the Bay of Fundy, where he is always - thank you - every summer for a week. He's sitting at the table, in



the evening, talking, and great granddaughter Ann Guthrie is snuggled up beside him. She's not demanding attention, she's just there, with him. It's priceless.

My cat died in the night,
curled up beside me as she often does.
I knew she had died even in my sleep
for in my sleep I am always conscious
of her moving, of her getting up to leave
near dawn.

She lay relaxed; she had been frantic for a moment, last night, wild eyed,
trying to scale the blanket and I'd had to help her onto the bed.

I had stroked her as we both settled down. Earlier, she had purred twice.
It was her twenty-first birthday; she weighed less than three pounds.



My father died last week; he would have been ninety-four next month. My last words to him, on the day before he died, were, see you Thursday, and his last words were to my daughter, my cat's owner since she was ten, twenty-one years ago, who accompanied my father into surgery, asking him to try to be comfortable on the gurney, and he responding, "That's easier to say than do!" When she called me, she said, "Mom, he wasn't suffering, and he wasn't afraid--not like last time." Last time, after she and I and her oldest sister had saved him from cardiac arrest, we'd held him down for four hours after the operation till it was safe to give him a sedative; it took all our combined strength. Then, his eyes had been like a wild animal's in a trap.

We gave Dad five more years of a good life.

I like to think my care gave Mighty Mouse, that feisty, loving cat that ruled this house, five more years of her cat-life than she would have had, otherwise. I dug a hole just now on the spot by the tulips where she lay in the sun, yesterday afternoon, and I laid her in, still relaxed, with no shroud, only earth above and below. I covered her with black prairie earth.

Dad, I kissed his swiftly cooling hands goodbye, after I pulled the plug, because I couldn't kiss his face--it was so unDadlike, swollen from the fluids his kidneys could not express. His body went to ashes, and some of them flew in the wind over the edge of Beloit, those that didn't make it into the posthole he'd asked to be buried in. Some of them flew onto his children and grandchildren, but I was not downwind. The video will tell us who was blessed with his dust. Afterwards, we troweled in black dirt from the farm, Carrington loam over gravel, the best farmland in the world, to fill his post hole.

I have not yet had time to grieve for my father, death keeps one so busy--while life does not relax its demands to let you care for the dead, to give you grieving time. Weddings have honeymoons; why isn't there a grief moon for the living?

And how can I weep for my cat when I have not yet wept for my father?

I am weeping for you both, Dad and Mighty Mouse, and for myself, and for all those to whom I have given the awefull gift of life, and those from whom I have taken this gift, and for all the hopes and dreams that have been fulfilled, and for all the hopes and dreams that haven't.



THE FUNERAL WAS A CELEBRATION!

Dad's funeral was wonderful. Both Pat and Jo played beautifully at the start of the service, Pat on viola, Jo, violin. Bach. The opening hymn was "Marching to Zion," for when the minister asked me what were Dad's favorite hymns, I said all I'd ever heard him sing was "Marching to Zion," when up at Pleasant Lake, of an evening, he'd line up the grandchildren behind him and they'd all march to the tavern over the hill, banging on pots and pans and singing lustily, "We're marching to Zion!" Grandpa would then get them all root beers. So the minister told that story, and we sang, clapping instead of pots and pans. The other hymns were Vaughn Williams' "For All the Saints," and "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," the latter commemorating the Turtle Township non-denominational church services that used to be held in the Hill Farm woods, twice a year, and everyone would hold hands at the end and sing that.

Gene Shepherd has farmed the Chez Nous land and processed seed there for 20 years. He and his wife Cheryl sang "Seeds", with a special verse for Ron, and it was beautiful and touching.

The minister, who didn't know him (though I'd tried to convey his character), eulogized Dad with heavy emphasis on his beautiful faith. Dad was always a skeptic, but said he'd be glad enough if the stories were true; he'd certainly like to see Grandpa and Vera again! But he'd have said what he did to Barbara Dougan at the 60th wedding celebration, when someone was carrying on about him: He nudged her in the ribs and whispered, "Who's that Ron Dougan they're talking about?"

Tom Schmidt read the scriptures. Karl Schmidt read three stories from Jackie's Round Barn: The Cemetery Tomato, The Great Hayloft-in-the-Sky, and a speech Dad gave once on farming. Then a few people came to the mike and

told good stories about Dad, but these were cut off, supposedly to resume again at refreshment time, except they didn't get the mike into the hall so we missed the rest of stories people might have told. A number of former employees were there, such as Russ Ullius and Harlan Whitmore, and many friends, so there would have been some good ones.

Many people went to the cemetery. The post-hole had been dug on the gravesite right next to Mother's. Craig carried the ashes; he first poured a boxful into the posthole and then lowered down the amber milk bottle containing the rest. We had a bucket of Dougan farm soil there, and a trowel, and most everyone troweled some black earth into the hole. It was touching and beautiful and funny, and I figure Dad was there somewhere (like the Cheshire Cat), enjoying it all.

Back at the church the Methodist women put on a good spread, and we had a display of pictures of Dad from babyhood to old age, some with Mother, and various Dougan memorabilia--i.e., amber milk bottles, Dougan Seed Corn bags.

The night before the funeral we had a delicious catered dinner for the family. Dad's caretakers Bonnie Knoll and Betty Vance helped, but were also part of the family. (Lems were en route from Florida.) Those of us there: Jo and Karl Schmidt; the Ydes; Wendy Baylor and Kestrel (Jeremy was in Outer Mongolia); the Dan Schmidts; Tom Schmidt; Pat Dalvit; Jackie Guthrie; Stephanie McPhillips; Jackie Jackson; Damaris Jackson; Megan and Michael Ryan and the three boys (they flew in Michael's plane to the Beloit airport across the field); Gillian Jackson and Cress Broten; Elle Jackson and Royce DeBow; Craig and Barbara Dougan; Rick Dougan; cousins Paul Campagna; Jerry and Debbie Dougan; Dorothy Lueken; Polly Mersky. Also friend, Liz Weir. And three cats who'd snuggled w/ Gramp.

Deep sea fishing in Florida



Craig with a roke
Andrew the squirrel



THE EMPTY NEST NEWSLETTER VOL XV NO2 P7

Well, I'm having a hard time with this issue for I find I'm doing my long-postponed grieving. Missing Dad a whole lot. I miss his humor and his outrageousness, and his lovingness (he became more able to tell us how he cared for us, the older he got), and yes, his maddening ways. And how interested he was in everything and how he found life so very interesting, in its largest and smallest aspects. I miss not being able to call him up every couple days to tell him what discoveries I've made, share new writing, hear ab't deer on the lawn. I miss running up there every few weeks. I missed Mom a lot, too, but there was still Dad, and the farm, and the book. And before long, Elle was living at the farm, too, and it meant a three-unit family when I'd go up. There's still the book

and Elle's in the vicinity. I expect it'll really hit me when we sell the farm and I no longer have a base in Turtle Township. Of course it had to happen, though Dad (and Jo) used to say they planned to live forever. And when someone's been around almost 94 years, you almost figure they're going on forever, though I never left the farm without thinking how fragile life was. Dad was funny to the end--a few weeks before he died, he asked me to hand him "that Kleenex." "That one's used," I said. "Not on both sides," said Dad. My book is full of the funny things he said, and his quirky view of life, but not all I've recorded has been incorporated yet, tho I'm trying. Meanwhile there is the book, it will be published, and as Dad said more than once, "it will tell people more about Ron Dougan than they'll ever care to know!"



Wedding in France



The Seed barn mural



in front of Chez Nous



Rick & Bart in Cornfield



Ron w/ Bob the dog, & calf



Ron with Jo

Ron w/ young customer.



Grandpa and Dewi at the Lang pig roast.

Grandpa & Dewi watching a wedding



From Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*, when Reuven, 15 or so, asks his father what is the use of life: "Human beings do not live for ever. We live less than the time it takes to blink an eye, if we measure our lives against eternity. So it may be asked what value there is to a human life. There is so much pain in the world. What does it mean to have to suffer so much if our lives are nothing more than the blink of an eye? I learned a long time ago that a blink of an eye in itself is nothing. But the eye that blinks, that is something. A span of life is nothing. But the man who lives that span, he is something. He can fill that tiny span with meaning, so its quality is immeasurable though its quantity may be insignificant. Do you understand what I am saying? A man must fill his life with meaning, meaning is not automatically given to life. It is hard work to fill one's life with meaning. A life filled with meaning is worthy of rest. I want to be worthy of rest when I am no longer here."

Bonnie Knoll, one of Dad's caretakers who's lived on or near Colley Rd all her life, provided the old-fashioned post-hole digger to dig Dad's grave. She also planted a tomato plant on the grave, and it is bearing tomatoes!