

JPV PRESS

# Lena's Boys

Adventures on the County Line Road



Frank Yoder

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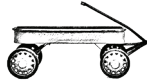
Dedicated to my three older brothers,  
Paul, David, and Edwin,  
who helped me through life.

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# Contents

Introduction .....	i
1 Life Was Different Then .....	1
2 Family History .....	7
3 Back in the '30s.....	13
4 The Family Reunion.....	19
5 Confessions and Corrections.....	23
6 Aunt Lizzie.....	27
7 The Rabbit Hunt.....	33
8 Our Neighbors.....	39
9 Chicken Chores .....	47
10 A Trip to Town .....	53
11 The Need For New Cotter Pins.....	59
12 Da Blint Shep.....	63
13 Four Boys and the Doctor's Office .....	67
14 A Small Boy's Perspective on Church.....	73
15 Nicknames .....	79
16 Chopped Corn and a Cut Finger .....	85
17 Freddie's Frog .....	91
18 The Dumbwaiter Game .....	95
19 The Homemade Boat.....	99
20 The Day Old Bess Balked .....	103
21 From the Sermon on Sunday.....	109
22 Our Horses.....	113

23	Newspapers and the Comics .....	119
24	Old Time Games and Such Stuff .....	123
25	So Viel Deutche Wadda .....	131
26	Old Catalogs.....	137
27	A Very Special Christmas.....	141
28	The Second World War .....	147
29	A Trip to the Washington County Hospital.....	153
30	Herdin' Cows .....	159
31	The Day I Gave Up Chewing Tobacco .....	163
32	The Dangers of Walking to School.....	169
33	Sunday Dinner at the Neighbors.....	173
34	Homemade Ice Cream .....	177
35	The Old Shotgun .....	181
36	Ol' Tramps and Trains.....	185
37	The Shenanigans of the Hired Men.....	189
38	The Hired Girl and the Electric Fence .....	195
39	Cutting Oats and Threshing.....	199
40	Evergreen School.....	205
41	Schoolhouse Stories .....	211
42	The Report Card.....	215
43	Big Kites/Little Kites.....	219
44	The High Fly Ball.....	223
45	Butcher House Memories .....	229
46	The Great Butcher House Debates .....	235
47	The Old Goat.....	239
	Epilogue .....	243
	Frank's Photos.....	244



## Introduction

Years ago I was asked to write a collection of memories of life in the '30s and '40s.

These stories were originally written for a column in the local newspaper. The first part was the easiest. The name; *On the County Line Road*. Why the county line road? That's where we lived; my widowed mother, my three brothers, and myself.

The stories of life on the county line road have been compiled into the book, *Lena's Boys*, you now hold in your hands. I'll take you back to the years before electric lines came to every home in the county, to the time when you could set your clock to the 8:30 am school bell.

I'll teach you the homemade games we used to play, like Fig Mill.

The grammar part of writing this book was harder. You see, I was well along on my road to education before someone explained that the "F" on my report card did not mean "Fine."

Now please understand that I have three older brothers. Their memories may be a bit different, and they may not agree on the finer points. Over the years, it's been hard for them to agree on many things. But I am the youngest; therefore, my 86-year-old mind is some better.

I hope that as you read my story, you will understand how God provided for our family; a young widow and her four boys. I'm not sure I would have written this book if my wife, sons, and grandchildren had not encouraged me to share the memories of my growing-up years.

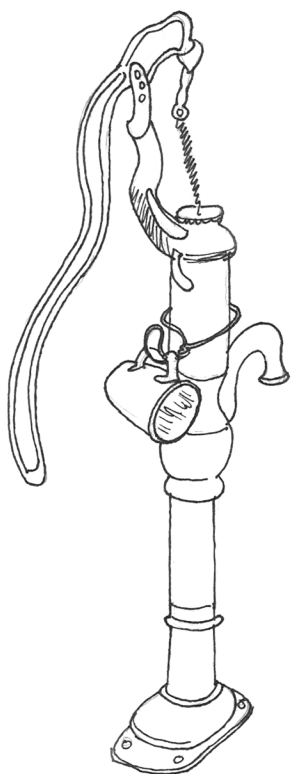
As you read my story, if you find mistakes, just take a pencil, mark them out, and make corrections.

I hope I will be able to convey my deep respect for my Amish upbringing—in no way is this book to be interpreted to make light of

anyone, even though people and situations are sometimes funny.

I am deeply indebted to my mother, who taught me so much, and our neighbors, who helped along the way. Uncles, aunts, school-teachers, and my brothers have also helped me to remember.







## Life Was Different Then

*A*s a boy, I lived with my mother, Lena, and three brothers, Paul, David, and Edwin, on a farm that was on the Johnson/Washington county line road, three-and-one-half miles northeast of Kalona, IA.

Our house had no electricity and no refrigeration, only an icebox that needed to be refilled at least once a week, or whenever the “ice man” came. There was no indoor plumbing. Rather than being a hardship, life was, for the most part, a pleasant experience.

There was always plenty of food on the table. Some of my favorites were fried chicken, green peas, cornbread, banana pudding, and pies and cakes right from the oven.

My mother was an excellent cook, and a delicious aroma arose from the pots and cast iron skillets that were always on her wood-burning stove. The house was filled with tantalizing smells.

Can you explain to me how those old-time cooks could judge the temperatures of the ovens in those old wood-and-corn-cob-fired ranges? True, some stoves had temperature gauges in the oven door, but ours didn't. I remember well how my mother would open the oven door and put in her hand, to the count of three. Close the door, lift the lid over the firebox, add some cobs or wood, wait a few minutes, check the temperature again. She would pop the rolls and bread into the oven, close the door, and check the clock. She would know just how soon things would be ready to take out. That was something she had learned from her mother. I never tired of watching the process, or figured out how she did that.

How I enjoyed a fresh, cool drink from the old hand pump at the well, drinking water from the tin cup that hung on a hook fashioned from wire. At night, when a storm came up, you could hear the cup clattering against the pump as the wind blew it back and forth. We hoped it would not blow away. That only made the water taste even better. I'm sorry, Mr. Pepsi, nothing you can put in a can will ever satisfy like a drink from that old hand-pumped well and that weathered cup.



Did you ever make a frog house? The dirt on the shoulder of the road that ran by our farm was often damp enough for this purpose. Walking barefoot to school, I would often shove my foot into the soft shoulder of the road, then pile more dirt on top and pack it down hard. When I pulled my foot out, there was a nice hole just right for a frog. A finishing touch was to add a bit of moss. What frog wouldn't like a home like that?

At night, the tall glass globes of the kerosene lights shimmered and surrounded us with

a warm glow. I actually looked forward to going to bed, where the deep feather mattress would swallow me up in its comfortable softness.

I'd fall asleep listening to crickets and frogs, then awaken in the morning to the crowing of the roosters. Sunlight poured through the windows, and I could smell the sweetness of a new day. To this little Amish boy, the farm was a wonderful place to grow up.

Did a frog ever move into that dirt house along the road, you ask? Well, not that I know of, but how can you tell?