

Buffalo Tales

July/August 2012

***Lifelines* (pt. III)**

By Nathan Piper



Sinkler met his future wife on his first furlough to Nebraska in November 1942. Evelyn Burson at the time was a twenty-year-old woman living on her family's farm near Litchfield, Nebraska. Robert and Evelyn's first meeting was arranged by Sinkler's cousins, the "Jackson girls," who were neighbors to the Burson family. They believed that Robert and Evelyn would "hit it off." In Sinkler's first ever letter to Evelyn Burson, dated November 25, 1942, his interest in Evelyn appears immediate and obvious:

Well here I am back in camp doing the same old things, after a glorious time at home. First of all, I'd like to talk about us a little, just a few things we should have talked over, had we been alone long enough to talk. I want to tell you that I think more of you than you probably realize, please believe me Evelyn. You have been on my mind ever since I left you and I've been kicking myself ever since for not telling you all that was on my mind. It's probably just as well for both of us though, because things just won't work out with this war going on, and I wouldn't want to hurt you anyway.

This letter represented for the soldier from rural Nebraska an attempt to begin and sustain a relationship with letters—a relationship that he recognized would be inherently difficult to maintain. Lack of intimate familiarity, substantial geographic distance, and war all threatened to be deterrents to this courtship. Perhaps his first letter demonstrates Sinkler's innate, pioneer, Nebraska spirit of perseverance—an attitude that convinced him he could sustain this sort of courtship. And so, combined with his immediate affections for Evelyn, Sinkler continued to pursue his relationship with the Nebraska woman through words. It may also be, however, that Sinkler had discovered a lifeline home—an important way of staying connected to what Sinkler had left behind. Like many soldiers serving in World War II, Sinkler was willing his written words to reach across the space that separated him from those who they had left behind and hoped to see again. During World War II, all manner of relationships, like Robert and Evelyn's, were forcibly condensed into written words found in government-censored letters. And it is under these circumstances that Sinkler continued to write to Evelyn.

Correspondence was often, however, greatly complicated by the conditions of war. During World War II, censorship, a

necessary part of war correspondence, became something to be considered by every soldier writing home. Though officers were allowed to censor their own letters, enlisted men had their letters read by superiors intent on eliminating any information that would jeopardize the war movement. In a letter from a Nebraska soldier to his wife living in Craig, Nebraska, one lonely husband sends word of his desire to end the "cold, hard" experiences of World War II and return to Nebraska to be with his wife and family. The letter also illustrates the awareness soldiers had that those in charge of censorship would eliminate items such as locations or military movements:

My Darling Wife and Sweet Baby, it's so close to Christmas and I feel so alone. I can't tell you just where I am, it would be censored anyway. All I can say I'm writing, down in a trench and it's so cold, hard to see, and all the noise of planes and other warfare all around me is deafening. I love the outline from paper of our baby you sent so I can see how she has grown. I carry it and your beautiful pictures in my shirt, close to my heart. I can't get all the love I feel for you both in this V-mail letter, it is too small. She was just two weeks old when I had to leave you both. I'm praying soon I can hold you both in my arms. All my love and kisses, Your Loving Husband.

Soldiers, such as the soldier from Craig, were forced to choose their words carefully while trying to maintain their relationships in spite of censorship. As men hoped daily to survive their immediate, physical experiences in war, so, too, did they hope their letters sent home would allow their relationships to survive. It was not only husbands and sweethearts, however, who struggled to fill voids in their lives with written words. Soldiers reached out to other family members and friends as well. In a letter written by Nebraskan Captain Clarence Brott to his daughter, Kathryn, the voice of an absent father writing home to his child is clearly heard. Brott, who had served as a surgeon on the front lines of Anzio, Salerno, and Omaha Beach, was also among the first units to enter the concentration camp at Buechenwald. And in this letter to his daughter, Brott's wills words to bridge a gap nearly three years in the making:

Dear Kathryn, at this time your father is many miles away, yes, even a thousand or more away and I believe you might appreciate a few lines for future reference in case I should not return. It is my most sincere prayer that such a thing shall not happen, but one must always be prepared for the unpredictable . . . I am sending this letter to your mother who shall keep it until you are old enough to realize and appreciate its meaning . . . May God bless you all! With love, Your Father.

Clarence Brott did survive his service in the European Theatre. He returned home and became a physician in Beatrice, Nebraska. And today, Brott's daughter, Kathryn, who is "old enough to realize and appreciate" the significance of her father's letter, struggles to share such important correspondence: "Strangers cannot truly understand or know the depth of this special human being. Words can never say or do enough for this special man, my dear father."

World War II veteran Homer Farley, who lives today in Stromsburg, Nebraska, is also among the many Nebraska soldiers who preserved their relationships with correspondence. Farley was drafted in the months following Pearl Harbor and was inducted into the Army Air Corps. Having survived numerous military encounters spanning from North Africa to Palermo, Sicily, Farley attributes his frequent letters to his future wife, Virginia, living at home in Nebraska, as the only way in which his relationship with her survived the war. Prior to his military service, Farley had been actively pursuing his relationship with Virginia, who was from near York, Nebraska.

After being drafted and trained at Kearns, Utah, Farley was sent "zig-zagging" across the Atlantic (a technique, Farley explained, meant to avoid attacks from German U-boats) to Casablanca, North Africa. During his more than three years of active duty, Farley maintained intimate and frequent correspondence with Virginia. And upon returning from active duty in September of 1945—Farley had been en route to attack Japan when peace was declared—Homer and Virginia were married. Today, Virginia claims that she still retains possession of the very letters that sustained a relationship that celebrates its 65th year of marriage in November of 2010, although she confesses she does not remember where they are.

Christmas, 1943 . . . I hope this reaches you before next X-mas, darling. I am sending this gift with all my love, hoping you like it and that you are thinking of me. To a darling sweetheart, from the one who cares. Merry X-mas. I love you, Bob.

Resources

- Anonymous Soldier, Ninth Army Air Force, 409 Service Group, European Theater. Letter to his wife living in Craig, Nebraska. December 20, 1943. "War Letters." http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/stories/war_letters/wlintro.html (accessed November, 2010).
- Brott, Clarence, Captain. Letter to his daughter, Kathryn. March 4, 1943. "War Letters." http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/stories/war_letters/wlintro.html (accessed November, 2010).
- Farley, Homer. Interview by author. October 3, 2010. Stromsburg, NE.
- Higgins, Kathryn Brott. Interview by NET. "War Letters." http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/stories/war_letters/wlintro.html (accessed November, 2010).

Piper, Connie M. Sinkler. Interview by author. October and November, 2010. Burwell, NE.

Sinkler, Robert J. Christmas card to Evelyn Burson, December, 1943.

---. Letters to wife, Evelyn (Burson) Sinkler. November 1942 to November 1945. Greeley, NE.

---. Military Record. Personal notes. 1970.

“The War: Nebraska Stories.” <http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/frameset.html> (accessed November, 2010).

Journey Stories

Plan on joining us June 1st– July 15th for *Journey Stories*, a Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit, that shows stories of Americans as they traveled West! This exhibit is brought to the Trails & Rails Museum by the Nebraska Humanities Council and Museums on Main Street.

Ghost Hunting with MPI

The next night for Ghost Hunting is August 31st and is SOLD OUT!!! There are still spots open for the September 28th Hunt. To pre-register, contact the Trails & Rails Museum or MPI at midwestparanormalinvestigators.com. Cost is \$40/person or \$75/ couple.

Come Ghost Hunting for Halloween, too!!!

Special October dates that still have openings are October 12th and 13th! Cost is \$49/person or \$89/couple.

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Katherine Wielechowski, Editor

2012 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

Individual.....	\$35.00
Family.....	\$40.00
Institutional Membership.....	\$50.00
Supporting Membership.....	\$75.00

We have replaced the word 'Basic' to 'Family'.

Directors

Term expiring June 1, 2013: Vicki Bissell, Chad Henning, Lynn Rauner, Lance Hehner

Term expiring June 1, 2014: Mary Beth Lowe, Sharon Martin, Duane Muhlbach, Mike Peak

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Secretary..... Sharon Martin

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2012 Calendar of Events

June 1 through July 15: 'Journey Stories'- a Smithsonian traveling exhibit brought to you by the Nebraska Humanities Council and Museums on Main Street-on display in the church building at the Trails & Rails Museum

Tuesday, August 7th from 6-9:30pm: 6th Annual Trivia Contest & Dinner-*Cancelled*

Saturday, Oct. 27 (time TBD): 2nd Annual Old-fashioned Halloween Party

All of November: Christmas Decorating (during regular business hours)

Saturday, December 1st from 12-1pm: Members Only Preview of the 25th Annual Christmas Tree Walk

First two weekends in Dec. (1st/2nd & 8th/9th) from 1-5 pm: Open to the public: 25th Annual Christmas Tree Walk

Education notes:

Wild Science Thursdays will return in the summer!

Ghost Hunting classes with the Midwest Paranormal Investigators-check web site for more info.!

Fabulous Fridays will continue to be held on the 2nd Friday of each month. Check web for topics.

Kearney Public Schools have the museum reserved for two weeks in May 2012!!

Volunteers, chairpersons, and sponsors are still needed. Please contact the office for more information on supporting your Buffalo County Historical Society!

PO Box 523, 710 W. 11th St., Kearney, NE 68848

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We hope you enjoy these stories about Buffalo County. We would love to have a stock pile of Buffalo Tales ready so they can go out in a more timely manner. Please submit your memories and stories to us by e-mailing them to bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com or sending them to the post office box: BCHS, PO Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848.

We appreciate your support!

Director's Report

-Sally Hale e-mailed me and asked if we would be interested in letting Phi Alpha Theta promote Trails & Rails Museum at their table during Blue and Gold Community Day on Aug. 17th. This is a wonderful partnership and we are lucky to have someone ask to promote us to college students and their families.

-The Children's Museum wants to partner with us to bring in a traveling exhibit about the Blizzard of '88. We will be discussing this soon.

-T & R did have a 28% increase over last year's attendance numbers. I am excited for this, because rumor has it most museums' attendance numbers were down this year. I think the special events and educational programming are what really helped!

Be sure to join the Buffalo County Historical Society group or the Buffalo County Historical Society/Trails & Rails Museum fan page on Facebook!



Trails & Rails Museum

**Buffalo County Historical Society
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