

CHAPTER 4

Some of Jarjus' investments were not so profitable; for example, when he invested several hundred dollars in shares in a certain Rubber Plant in Omaha, Nebraska. After the plant had been in operation for about seven years, the Company found itself financially in trouble. All of the investors were asked to double their investments in order to keep the plant operating. Therefore, Jarjus and his wife doubled their shares in order to help them out. All went well for the Company for about three more years. Then, another plea came to double their investments. They did not think it was worth it and stopped investing in it. As a result, all of his investment was lost.

One day a salesman came to sell him shares in a Meat Packing Plant in Omaha, Nebraska. When Mathilda expressed her doubts in making such an investment, he said: "Mrs. Mittelstaedt, whatever I put my hand to buy in has to be safe. Since I invested in it, don't hesitate to invest your money in this." They were convinced and bought some shares in the Company. Alas, two years later, this Company went out of business! It went broke, leaving absolutely nothing for investors. The sad part of it was, when the Mittelstaedts tried to get their money returned, they found out that the salesman had died. So, that investment was lost.

It seems like Jarjus was a real target for stocks and shares. This time it was in a Gold Mine in Black Hill, South Dakota. Jarjus was picking out ears for their own seed corn. He asked the man: "Why should I buy stock in the mine. I have a gold mine right here. Look at this corn! This is the best gold mine in the world." After hearing the man's testimony that he had bought ten shares in it for each of his children. Jarjus bought ten shares for his wife and himself. It really wasn't a lot of money invested for a gold mine as it was not of rich ore. It required a lot of ore to make a small amount of gold. When World War I broke out, the mine was closed for the duration. Years later the mine was reopened and a request to all share owners was placed in the newspapers for them to send their claims for reimbursement in to the Mine Company. Jarjus missed the notice until it was too late. Again, that money was lost.

Jarjus trusted people and, in one case, was taken advantage of. A young Mr. Frank needed someone to sign a bank note for him. He had worked for Jarjus a long time and asked him to sign for him. Since the man seemed honest and trustworthy, he signed the note.



THE FIRST HOUSE OF JARJUS MITTELSTAEDT

It was located east of the present house. Jarjus gave this house to Arnold, since he served in the Army in World War I.



THE SECOND HOUSE, OUTBUILDINGS & ALL WOOD WINDMILL

Lumber for these buildings was brought up from Wisner, Nebraska by horse and wagon. The house was built in 1898, the year Erich was born.



WORK DAY IN THE EARLY 1900's.

(l-r) Arnold, Hugo, Walter, Helmuth, Erich and Otto Mittelstaedt.

A very short time later, an incident occurred which involved this Mr. Frank. A man was killed in a large city. Mr. Frank had been in a saloon when the shooting happened, and he was an eye witness. He had to appear in court as a witness in the trial. He told his lawyer that he would tell it as he saw it and not lie about it. About a week before the trial was due to be held, Mr. Frank disappeared. It was very strange that his family and relation never heard from him again nor found out what happened to him.

When the time came for the note to be paid, Jarjus had to pay a large sum of money. Having financial difficulties of his own, it was a terrible blow to him and caused him hardship. He persuaded the banker to make out a new note for payment to be made over a long period of time. He was forced to sell some of his choice cattle that he had wanted to keep for enlarging his heard. It took a long time to pay off the note. Some of his neighbors thought, for sure, that he would go bankrupt. But, he managed to keep his head above water, financially. The banker trusted him to pay the note. The only groceries bought at that time, were the bare necessities, such as flour and salt. Very little sugar was used. Clothes were mended, and stockings were knitted and darned. Chickens provided eggs and meat for all of the family. Mathilda was a thrifty cook. She needed very little in order to make a good meal. As mentioned before, she made cottage cheese for the table. Many times supper consisted of only bread and milk. Every year a large garden, located east of the house, supplied the family's needs. A large potato patch, out in the field, provided a goodly amount of potatoes for winter's use.

By the time Jarjus and Mathilda were married ten years, they were expecting their seventh child. The house they were presently living in was getting too small for the growing family. Because of that, a square, eight-room, two-story structure was built a distance west of it. A verandah, joined to the east side, and a small porch, added on to the south side by the kitchen, finished the outer part of the house.

The first floor consisted of four rooms, a pantry and a hallway. The second floor was comprised of four rooms, used for bedrooms. Each room had its own clothes closet. The attic was high enough for one to stand up in, but was unfinished. Three gables provided air passage for the attic.

The underground cellar covered half of the first floor on the east side. It was partitioned into two rooms; one used for stor-



NEW MITTELSTAEDT HOUSE BUILT IN 1898

(l-r) Arnold, Hugo, Helmuth, Grandpa Jarjus, Otto, Grandma Mathilda, Martin, Lillie, Erich, Walter, Grandpa Gottlieb Borchardt (on porch).
(notice outhouse in the back right side of house)

ing potatoes and other vegetables, and the other for storing meat and canned fruit.

Jarjus hired a Mr. Euckerman to sandpaper and varnish the woodwork. Both he and his wife lived with the family during the time. She helped with the housework while he did the finishing work inside of the new house.

A small rainwater cistern, dug just west of the south porch, stored the rainwater for the family washing and for watering the garden. An eaves trough was connected to the roof for catching the rainwater. The cistern had an overflow outlet in case it became full to overflowing. And, it did at times!

The Fourth of July celebrations were family gatherings at different farms. It all started when Antone Huebner said to his neighbors, "We all have rather large families (from babyhood to eighteen years of age), let's each family bring a picnic basket of food and eat together." The afternoons were spent in having races and games of all kinds. The children enjoyed potato and sack races as well as softball. Some of the women entered in with the games by playing ball or "chicken calling." The men's contest would be "hog calling." Winners received a prize. Everyone went home early to do evening chores, and returned for the evening's entertainment of fireworks.

In 1898-1899, the World's Fair, "Trans-Mississippi Exposition" was held in Omaha, Nebraska. Jarjus had a carload of cattle for shipping to Omaha. He remarked to his wife: "If I get a good price for them, we are going to the Fair." He was well-pleased with the price that the cattle brought. Off to the Fair they went by train! An elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Euckerman cooked and cared for the children during their parents' absence. Jarjus and his wife brought gifts along home for everyone. Mrs. Euckerman bragged on the children's good behavior during that time, although it wasn't exactly true. The gifts were silk handkerchiefs for the boys with their names embroidered on them. Clara received a green glass cup and saucer set with a gold name painted on the cup which included the date "1898-1899."

Another time Mr. and Mrs. Euckerman had the privilege of staying with the children. This time Jarjus and Mathilda visited the "St. Louis Exposition" in 1904. By that time there were nine children to buy gifts for. The gifts were neckties and necktie pins for the older boys, and a great big marble for the youngest, Martin. The marble measured five inches in circumference!

Jarjus enjoyed taking the family to the circus. Wild animals were a great attraction to them. One day the circus group had a delay of several hours in arriving due to a heavy rain washing out the railroad track. There was nothing for the group to do but wait for the railroad workers to fix the track temporarily for them to pass over it safely.

How exciting it was for the children to see the unloading of the circus cars! Usually the parade started from the circus tent, but not that day! It was set up directly from the train. The very first wagon was hitched up with six or more pairs of horses, tandem style; the team nearest the wagon were large Clydesdales; the team in front of them was a little smaller in size, and so on down to the small Shetland ponies. That was a sight to behold! The driver on the wagon seat held all the reins in his hand to drive the teams.

After the parade passed by, the family went to see the Big Top. Hundreds of folding chairs were being carried by boys. Jarjus' boys, Otto, Walter, Hugo and Arnold wanted to help too. So, they picked up two chairs apiece and walked in with the others. Inside the tent a man was passing out tickets to the helpers, and each one of the boys received a free ticket. Jarjus was pleasantly surprised that he didn't have to buy tickets for those four to get in to see the circus.

Coming inside the tent, the first thing they saw were the wild animals caged in at least twelve wagons. When the leader tapped the hippo on the nose with a stick, it opened its jaws real wide as if yawning. There was also a wagon with large snakes. Next, they followed the crowd into the three-ring tent. Seats had to be reserved. Jarjus bought seats for everyone in his family, including his friend, Mr. Euckerman and son. The man looked so surprised at such a large group, having quite a time seating them all together. Mr. Euckerman carried the smallest child, Martin. His son, Frank, carried Lillie, who was two and half years old. It was difficult for the little ones to walk in such a crowd of people. They all enjoyed the performance of the trapeze artist and the pranks of the clowns.

When the three-ring performance was finished, the tent side was opened for the people to exit. Such shoving and pushing! Everyone seemed to be in a hurry. Outside the tent, the family could not see Mr. Euckerman and his son with the two little ones anywhere. The parents decided to go to the Euckerman home where the horses and wagon were waiting. One had gotten there before them and the other soon came. Mrs. Euckerman invited the family to lunch with them. The lemonade was so refreshing! Then, came the dusty ride back home in the lumber wagon. The family, weary but happy, was glad to get back home. They all talked about that circus for a long time thereafter.

There was a large pond in the timber claim about a mile from the yard. The boys would go fishing any time they felt like it. They didn't go so often during the school term, only on Sundays. One time, Walter, aged twelve, caught something on his fishing line that looked like a snake. He was so excited! He wanted to show it to his father and find out just what it was. Having put the creature in his hat with water, he ran home as fast as he could. It was difficult to run very fast in grass that was about eighteen inches tall in the hay meadow, and he was almost exhausted when he got home. His father told him that it was an "eel", and that he was surprised that one would be in such a small pond. With such a catch, Walter had to keep it and show it to any visitors. The cattle watering tank was its home for a long time.

The largest fish that the boys ever caught in that pond was about three inches in length, hardly big enough to eat.

Jarjus went fishing quite often, but he only caught a few to bring home. Boastfully, Otto said: "I bet I could catch more fish than that." His friend, Mark Kimes, had been coaxing him to go

along fishing in the Elkhorn River, with spears, and he was thinking of going with him. There was a shallow place, filled with carp, where one could walk in with hip boots on. At that time, it was legal to spear fish. One day, when it was kind of rainy and too wet to work in the field, Otto said to himself; "To-day is a good day to go fishing." He took his hip boots and spear and he and Mark went fishing. Within two hours they had caught all the fish that they wanted. Proudly Otto came home with a wash tub full of fish. He said that there were so many fish that he and Mark did not have to walk very far to spear them. He had never had more fun catching fish!

The question came to Mathilda's mind, "How are we going to preserve them all?" She did not care to cook all of them. There was no refrigeration such as an icebox. Jarjus sent the boys after a block of ice in town, and after dressing the fish, he packed them in ice. The family enjoyed fried fish for supper. The next evening the menu was fish soup. Mathilda had a recipe for fish soup that was delicious. She flavored it with elderberry mousse, onion, bayleaf and other spices. It was considered a delicacy! One evening some of the neighbors were guests to her fish soup, and another evening other neighbors were guest to the same. For once the family had their fill of fish. She also canned several quarts of fish for later use.

A wintertime activity was sleigh riding. The boys made a large sleigh, large enough to hold three wagon-box seats. The entire family could ride in it at the same time. Straw, placed on the box floor, made it more comfortable for the children to ride. A blanket kept them nice and warm while riding. The sleigh was made with wooden runners covered with steel. It had a wagon tongue as it had to be pulled by a team of horses. To add to the attraction, the boys fastened a string of sleigh bells to the horse's harness. After a good snowfall, the family travelled in it, enjoying the jingling of the bells. It was a pleasure for everyone to go visiting the neighbors for it meant a ride in the sleigh. It was put to another use, hauling cut-up wood from the grove to the woodpile for stove fuel.

The young people enjoyed sled-riding parties. There usually was a group of them going to a tall hillside with their sleds and toboggans. What fun they had sliding down the long hill! Then there was the trudge back up the hill in order to have the thrill of going down it again.

There were the family accidents. When one of the neighbors had finished building his barn, he asked for help in shingling it. Jarjus went to help. He and three other men worked from a

scaffold. The nails apparently were not strong enough to hold their combined weight for it collapsed, hurtling the men to the ground. Jarjus was severely injured with a badly wrenched back, scratches and a cut on his neck. It forced him to bed for several days.

One Sunday when the boys were playing "hide and seek" with their dog, Teddy, they told him to stay by the tree. After hiding themselves they would cry out "Yoo-hoo!" Then the dog would try to find them. Walter hid himself in a double-box wagon. Jumping off the wagon to try scaring the dog, he fell with such force that he dislocated his left elbow. Needless to say, it was very painful! Jarjus knew a man by the name of "Voghts" living in nearby Hadar, that could help put the joint back in place. Another man came along to help. The one held Walter's shoulder while the other man pulled the arm with a jerk, setting the elbow in place. It scared the children to see how it was done. The arm was very sore, and had to be carried in a sling for some time.

It seemed as if Walter was always prone to freakish accidents. About a year later the boys, Hugo, Walter and Arnold, were picking up shell corn in the north end of the corncrib. A strong whirlwind came along and slammed the corncrib door, striking Walter on the ear. About one inch of his ear was hanging on! He ran to the house screaming. Mathilda could hear him coming and wondered what had happened. Frightened at the sight, she had the presence of mind to hold the ear in place with a wet towel to keep the blood from drying. Jarjus took him to Dr. Kiesaw in Norfolk to have it sewn back on. Nine miles by horse and buggy took quite some time and seemed endless to him. The Doctor had a Dentist brother, whose office was across the hall from his. He assisted, giving Walter chloroform while the ear was sewn in place. A large part of the lobe was missing. The Doctor did such a good job that when it was all healed, it was not noticeable.

There were many incidents of sicknesses and accidents which every family has.

Mathilda was not a graduate nurse but a self-educated one. The Doctor was always glad when she could go along and assist him with maternity cases. She also went to the homes during the flu epidemic to cook and care for the sick. One family had three beds in one room so that she didn't have to go upstairs in order to care for their needs.