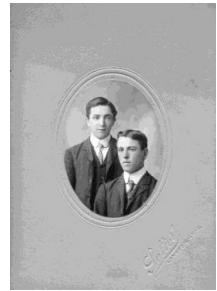


### Chapter Three: Evangeline Marie Bechtel

*Canada, North Dakota and two men who will return*

Grandpa Levi and his two sons, my father Cy and our uncle Walter, went back-and-forth across the U.S.-Canadian border for nearly a decade at the turn of the 20th Century. They shuttled between homesteads and farms on both sides of the border in Saskatchewan and North Dakota.



*Cyrus (l.) and  
Walter  
Bechtel (r.)  
circa 1900,  
Salter  
Photography,  
Langdon,  
North Dakota*



*Cyrus and Anna  
Bechtel, circa  
1913*

Our folks, Cyrus Edward Bechtel and Anna Veronica McElguun Bechtel, were married, in 1912, in Saskatchewan. Some people call Mother “Ann,” others say “Anna,” but most call her Anne. Everyone calls Father “Cy,” except Mother when she is cross with him:

then he is “Cyrus Edward.” Although Mother was born in Minnesota, her father, John McElguun, maintained a homestead and wheat farm in Saskatchewan. Father’s homestead in Swift Current was about 35 miles

from the McElgunn’s Gull Lake farm.



*J. McElguun’s Wheat Farm, 1910  
Gull Lake Saskatchewan (Hoyt’s  
Photo)*

My three older siblings and I were born in Gull

Lake. Older brothers John Edward—everyone called

him Jack— was born in 1913 and Joe came along in 1917. My only sister, Veronica, was born between the boys, August 22, 1915. I was born, in Gull Lake, on Friday the 13th of June, 1919.

Older relatives told me there was a full “honey moon” the night I was born and that those don’t happen very often and are especially rare on a Friday the 13th. Some people say that Friday the 13th is unlucky; I don’t think so.

Although Uncle Walter’s farm in Canada and Grandpa Levis’ in North Dakota did just fine, Father’s ill health, especially his awful stomach trouble, kept him from successful farming. Cy and Anne decided to give up farming and leave Gull Lake. First, we visited Grandpa and Grandma’s farm in Cavalier North Dakota, then moved away from midwest family, taking the train west before crossing the water to Victoria Island, British Columbia. Mother’s sister, our aunt Lizzie, lived there with her family. The trip from North Dakota to British Columbia, on the Canadian Pacific Railway line, was my first train ride. Of course, I don’t remember anything thing about it: I was a baby when we headed west.

A year-and-a-half in British Columbia brought Father little solid work so he re-entered the U.S. in December 1920. The immigration records for our passage show that Father went ahead of us, then Mother brought Jack, Joe, Veronica, and me across to join Father in Port Angeles, Washington. I never asked our folks why we crossed separately. Maybe Father went ahead to look for work, or to take a job, or to find a place to live. Mother was expecting a baby at the time.

In August of 1921, just after we moved to the U.S. and Port Angeles, our younger brother Lawrence Gerald—everyone called him Gerry—joined our growing family.



*Evangeline, Jack, Joe,  
Veronica and Anna Bechtel,  
Port Angeles, WA. Anna is  
pregnant with Gerry, circa  
1921*

In 1922, we moved to North Dakota to help Grandpa Levi on the Bechtel farm in Cavalier. I don't recall much of the return trip either; I wasn't quite three when we headed back to North Dakota. Grandpa was sick so we lived there and pitched-in for a few years. It was a lot of hard work for Father, Mother, and Jack. But Joe, Veronica and I mostly had lots of fun living on the farm.

We helped out with the many chores but Mother made the little things that we did seem like games or adventures. I swear that I do not remember doing any work, but I do remember reporting, with as much diligence as I could muster at pre-school age, that I had collected "at least as many henhouse eggs as Veronica and Joe both got." "Oh NO she didn't." "Oh YES I did!" And so it went.

We raced across Grandpa and Grandma's large yard to see who could pick or pick up the finest apples from the orchard out back; we shooed chickens around the side-yard and into their coop. Once-in-awhile we even got into the pig pen out back to look for small piglets to pet. We got in a LOT of trouble for doing that; it's the only time I remember Grandma Joanne raising her voice at us kids. She was worried that the mother sow would come after us. Plus, a trip into the pig pen meant that all of our clothes had to be washed and dried, that our shoes had to be cleaned, and those jobs made extra work—extra work was never appreciated.

By the time we moved from Cavalier, I was almost seven and had often walked into town with my older siblings. Grandpa and Grandma's house had a big yard that was half-way between town and the fields that Grandpa owned and farmed. Cavalier was always a very small town: There was a general store, a post office, two churches, a small school, two cemeteries at the edge of town, two roads crossing near the middle of town then heading off in four directions, and a

rail line with a stop at the grain elevator. It couldn't have been two blocks from the house to town and it was about the same distance out to the very large acreage that Grandpa farmed with hired-hands. While Grandpa was sick and recovering, Father and Jack worked with the hired-hands; long days that started out in the fields before dawn often stretched to sundown. Grandpa and Grandma's neighbors, the Thompsons, also worked their land by combining their sons with hired-hands.

Grandpa Levi recovered his health and strength by 1926, so Father and Mother moved us to Munich, a small town on the west end of Cavalier County, about 60 miles west of Cavalier, 40 miles north of Devils Lake, and 60 miles northeast of Minnewaukan. Father took a variety of jobs including bill collector and auto/farm equipment parts deliveryman. Mother started a beauty shop in our house in Munich. Little Dickie joined the family in 1927 and two years later our family was completed when baby Donnie came along.

***Corner of 4th and Main Streets, Munich  
North Dakota, August 1927***

"Bless us O Lord and these thy gifts—which

we are about to receive—from thy bounty through Christ our Lord amen. Now pass the plate of bread around the table children."

"Yes Father."

"Mrs. Zimmer is coming by for a perm and wave tomorrow. She may need a cut too. She said that she would bring eggs to trade. So we'll be enjoying fresh eggs at the table tomorrow night. In the mean-time we'll just make do. Now I'm going to go get my feet up



*Anna Bechtel, in Munich, with Jack, Joe, Veronica across the back; Gerry and Evangeline in front, circa 1925. Clothing and background suggest difficult circumstances. Smiling faces neither notice nor care*

and feed baby Dickie—you start without me and I'll be back in a few minutes.”

“Ok Mother.”

“Joe, you save some of that chocolate sauce for Gerry and your sisters. They need extra energy for all the running around they do”!

“Yes Father.”

“Jack—save a plate with bread and chocolate on it for when your mother gets back. And girls you get the table cleaned-up after dinner so your mother can rest after she's eaten. I'm turning in early tonight. I have to take parts over to Calio for the Pung's store before dawn tomorrow. They can't use their delivery truck until it gets repaired and they can't fix it without the parts. They'll want an early start on their deliveries so I need to get over there long before they open the store in the morning.”

“Yes Father.”

“Calio is pretty close. Do you think you can get back in time to drop by early fall practice? Coach says he's going to put in a couple plays for me tomorrow!”

“I'll be up early in the morning Jack. But besides the Calio stop I need to drop some equipment off at the police station in Devils Lake too. I'll be gone most of the day. I'll try to get back in time to catch some of the practice but I can't promise I'll make it. You hear that Veronica and Joe? You help your mother out with the baby and the two little ones while I'm gone and while Jack is off to practice.”

“Sure Father—we don't have special plans tomorrow. We'll beat up Gerry and Vange and leave baby Dickie to Mother.”

“Enough you smart alecks! I’ll be checking on you when I get back tomorrow night. Make sure things you do your chores and help your mother. And no fussing with each other!”

“Oh Father you know we will be fine”

***In front of the grain elevator/train stop, kitty-corner across the street from our house, Munich North Dakota, winter 1927***

Except for the ones toward the front, most of the big, metal, bins behind the engine are empty when the freight train pulls up to our grain elevator in Munich. Father says that the train makes its first pickups up in Pembina County around Cavalier and then works its way toward us before it continues south through Devils Lake on the way further west.

The wheels make a scratchy–squealy sound on the tracks when the train pulls up, but after our elevator fills two train bins with grain, the squealy part goes away a little.

I’ve never been to the places that this train is going and there aren’t any seats for people anyway, other than the engineer and the man who helps load the grain. My oldest brother, Jack, says that sometimes down-and-out hobos jump into one of the empty bins, toward the back of the train, to move on to the next stop without having to walk or hitch-hike.

I’d like to see the places the train is going. I sure wish I lived someplace where there was a train for people to sit and look out the windows and watch the prairie roll by and see the sunset in the West. I’d like to be one of those people and see where the train takes me.

***Minnewaukan North Dakota, April 1932***

They say that the squat-frame-house in Minnewaukan, that we moved to from Munich, had once been white. Years of dry, drought-driven dust turned every board two shades past greyish-brown. Four steps lead up to the porch where earlier in the afternoon Mother rocked Donnie, now three,

for a nap in her arms while Dickie (he's two years older) played in a fort made with an old blanket and sheet. That porch serves as a thin boarder between the grassless yard, the parched road across the street from the courthouse and the welcoming sounds and smells beckoning inside the weathered wooden door.

The steaming soup on the wood stove fills the Minnewaukan evening air with a thick home-grown aroma. The warm oil lamp glow peeks through the long thin curtains waving in the breeze over open windows and mixes with the sounds of our family—two young children, two teenagers, three young adults, and our parents—talking all at once after our prayer ends and supper begins, calling for bread and soup and spoons and water.

Father surveys the table while Mother and my older sister Veronica deliver the steaming pot from the kitchen. He looks up at the sound of the horse and buggy out front.

“Sounds like there's someone stopped on the road in front of the house. One of you kids see who's here. We're not expecting anyone.”

Gerry, his dark black hair with a curly wisp over one eye barely masking his excitement over an unexpected late afternoon visit from, well, anyone, jumps up to the recently cleaned but already gritty front window.

“It's the Belcher's dairy cart.”

“Come back and sit-down Gerald! We didn't order any dairy. For goodness sake you know we can only afford fresh dairy every other week and this isn't our week. Veronica go check on that street noise.”

“Yes Mother. You know—we should just send Gerry out the way he's grown. Eleven years old and he's as tall as I am! Hey—Evangeline—you'd better get over here and look

out this window. It's Noel and he's loaded down with milk, cheese, and eggs. Gosh he is a tall drink of water. And look at the ears on that Swede! Whew!"

"Get out of my way sis so I can get the darned door open. It's too dusty for him to be standing and waiting around out there in the wind." "Hello Noel. For goodness sakes come on in. It looks like you need to catch your breath."

"Ah I'd like to come in Vangie but I can't—gotta' keep pushing along. Mrs. Stein is down in Rochester at the clinic and they forgot to cancel their order before they left town. We won't charge 'em for it but I can't leave it at their house. I'm at the end of the route and it's been out so long that I can't take it back to the store either so thought you folks would like a little fill-in. You might as well get it into your coldest storage and enjoy it. We'd just have to throw it out by the time I can get back. Gotta' run now before it gets any darker. Say Vange—can I pick you up on my motorcycle and drive you over to the dance this weekend?"

"Oh Noel you know I love riding on your motorbike. But I'm not sure my folks will let me go. Tell you what—I'll see if Veronica is going and that way I'd be watched over. If my folks say "yes" you can pick me up and when we get there Veronica will dance with you too. I'll let her squeeze in as often as she wants! Thanks so much for the cheese and the milk and eggs. You're a real champ! I'll call and let you know. Hope to see you then."

"Evangeline!"

"Yes Mother?"

"You tell Noel Ravneberg that we'll not be accepting the kindness of friends at someone else's expense."



“He’s already left mother. He said that they’d have to throw the food away if he didn’t deliver it to somebody and that they won’t charge the Steins. Maybe you can do Mrs. Steins’ hair for free next time she comes over. But we’ll remind Noel when we see him again too. You’ll remind him, won’t you Veronica?”

“I won’t be the one riding behind him on that motorbike little sister. I’m thinking that any messages to Noel are best carried by the pigeon closest to the roost.”

“Oh Veronica. You make me laugh. When he gives me rides on that motorcycle of his the lake-bed and roads are so bumpy that riding with him is almost like being the rug after a good beating. It’s really fun and he’s a wonderful guy. He may be two years younger than you but I bet you wouldn’t mind a few dances with him anyway.”

“Come on sis—bring that food over here. Let’s see what there is. Please Father can we have some cheese! Mother can you cook the eggs?”

“We will eat some cheese now with our bread and soup, Joe, and you can all have a nice glass of milk. I’ll make eggs in the morning so you can have a meal that sticks to your ribs all day long. Now quiet down. Your father is going to lead us in another blessing. We must be sure that the Good Lord knows how very grateful we are for this extra bounty.

### ***American Legion Memorial Hall, Minnewaukan, June 1932***

“Look at those Bechtel girls go will ya’ Ole! I tell you, those two are best darned dancers in the state of North Dakota”!

“Vernon I don’t think they’d agree about that so easy over in Grand Forks but it sure seems like they are the best around these parts.”

“That Ravneberg fellow isn’t much on his feet though—he sort’a slows ‘em both down.”

PAGE EIGHT THE BENSON COUNTY FARMERS PRESS

# LEGION DANCE MINNEWAUKAN June 28

In the Memorial Hall Friday

Who Gets The New Ford V8 ?? Two Floors - Two Orchestras A Big Time for Everybody



*Basement, Memorial Legion Hall, Minnewaukan North Dakota. Benson County Farmer's Union, week of June 23, 1930, page 8*

“Yeah and ya’ know Vern ya’ can’t tell which of them sisters he’s sweetest on. I suppose he can’t miss either way!”

“Seems like the younger one pays him more attention.”

“Could be she’s just extra happy to be here among the older kids. She’s about the youngest one in the crowd.”

“She’s sticking pretty close to her older sister—they look to be having a grand time”!

“Good evening men. I’ve got a delivery out back for the Legion Hall. Can you gentlemen accept it and show me where to store it?”

“My goodness son it’s late for deliveries. What’s the deal?”

“Well, I’m helping out my dad and brother this summer. They got tied up in each of their stores today so I’m pitching in to help them so they aren’t so far behind tomorrow.

Roman Pung's the name."

"Oh, Roman. My goodness you've grown up since last I laid eyes on you over at Pung's in Calio. Your pop still run that store?"

"Yep, my dad still has the store in Calio and my brother Al has opened up another store in Bisbee. Say, that's an active bunch of teenagers you got here. Looks like some of them are quite the movers and shakers. Are those the Bechtel girls carrying on toward the middle there?"

"Yep sure is. You know 'em?"

"Well not really. I remember they used to come into our store before I went to college. Haven't seen either of them in about eight years. They've both changed a lot—they were little then. Still thin, but now they're awful pretty. Think I'll go over and say 'hello' before I head back."

"Let's get those beverages loaded into the store-room before you go off chasing around with the high school girls Roman. Probably don't want to be doing too much of that anyway you hear."

"Yes sir. No problem there. I've got fish my own age to fry in Grand Forks. Way too busy working on my boxing footwork to try to put any moves on high school girls. Don't you worry about that! And thanks for the hand with the crates."

### ***Minnewaukan North Dakota, Fall 1932***

When we lived in Munich and just after our move to Minnewaukan, Father collected unpaid bills for a doctor and dentist and sold and delivered automobile and farm equipment parts. In both

small towns (Munich's population did not exceed 250 in those years and Minnewaukan claimed fewer than 500) Mother maintained her beauty shop out of our home.

Our older brothers, Jack and Joe, were stellar athletes at Minnewaukan High School. Jack excelled at basketball and football and accepted an athletic scholarship at the University of Jamestown. Joe ran track and played basketball and baseball. A fierce competitor, Joe qualified for the state high school track meet. Unfortunately, no funds were available to send him to the state meet in Bismarck some one-hundred-and-sixty miles from Minnewaukan. Stubborn and self-assured, Joe hitchhiked round trip, arriving in Bismarck Saturday morning of the meet after thumbing all day Friday. Regardless, Minnewaukan's finest won the javelin, finished 2nd in the pole vault, 4th in the 220 hurdles, and 3rd in the 440 dash, before hitchhiking and walking most of the way home. We Bechtels are a hearty bunch and all five boys excelled at sports and physical activities.

After graduating from Minnewaukan High in 1931, Jack studied at Jamestown for two years before marriage and family drew him away from school. A 1935 high school graduate, Joe enlisted in the Army and sent cards and pictures from the war in Europe while serving with troops led by Generals Clark and Patton.

Veronica graduated from high school in 1932 and started working at the Benson County Court house as a secretary in an abstract & title business. Eventually, she went to Bismarck for business school and on to Rugby, the Pierce County seat, working for the Resettlement Administration providing land relief for farmers suffering through and after the Dust Bowl and Depression.

In January 1937, Veronica moved to Grafton where she, first, continued working with the Resettlement Administration then, later, went to work in the abstract and title business. There she met the man she would soon marry. James Francis (Jim) O'Brien was born and raised in Grafton. They met when Jim was home during school breaks from the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks.



*Veronica Bechtel (later,  
Mrs. James F.  
O'Brien) 1932*

In the years before moving the family to Minnewaukan, Father became friends with the local County Sheriff. Eventually, after doing odd jobs and errands in service to the county, Father was offered a position on the Sheriff's force so, in 1933, Father applied for re-naturalization as a U.S. citizen; by 1934, Mother joined him in repatriation. Four of us kids—Jack, Veronica, Joe, and me—were born in Canada and entered the country with temporary status. The youngest three of us were naturalized with our parents in 1934; Jack became a citizen on his own, later, as he was over twenty-one by 1934 and the re-naturalization did not apply to him. Gerry, Dickie, and Donnie were stateside-born US citizens through and through.

During high school, I kept very busy helping take care of Gerry, Dickie, and Donnie at home. I also sang with the "Minnewaukan Girls' Quartet." We were good enough to make the state semi-finals (16th out of 72) in 1935. I sometimes sang solo on the Devils Lake radio station during amateur-hour broadcasts and taught weekly tap-dance lessons, priced \$2.00 for ten, one-hour lessons. No wonder I wasn't able to keep weight on.

In November 1936, Mother moved her home-based beauty shop from Minnewaukan to downtown Devils Lake. At first, she shared space with the Chapman Barber Shop in the old

Grand Theatre building; she also took an apartment in the Grand. Father, Gerry, Dickie, Donnie, and I stayed in Minnewaukan until the start of the school term in January 1937, when they joined Mother in Devils Lake. I stayed behind in order to finish high school. After graduation, I joined the family in Devils Lake, mid-July 1937, moving—a year later—to Grafton to live with Veronica.



*Evangeline Marie  
Bechtel  
(later Lamoureux  
Ravneberg) 1937*

Veronica and Jim became close friends with Grafton natives Arnie Kunkel and his wife, Rhoda. Arnie, Rhoda, and Jim shared Grafton as hometown; the Kunkels lived there even during Arnie's employment as a teacher at Starkweather High School, seventy miles to the west. In fall 1937, when Arnie took the lead job in the newly created Department of Agriculture at Devils Lake High School, the Kunkels moved to Devils Lake.

I was re-acquainted with Roman Pung while living in Grafton. I remembered seeing him at his family's store in Calio when we lived in Munich when I was a little girl. Roman was a college classmate of Arnie Kunkel's in agricultural science.

Born and raised in Calio, Roman followed Arnie as the agriculture teacher in Starkweather after Arnie took the Devils Lake High job. By early 1939, Roman left teaching for the job in the office where Veronica first worked in Grafton: The Farm Security Board, the governmental successor to the Resettlement Administration.



*Roman Pung, circa  
1935*

In Grafton, Roman and I spent a lot of time together, with Veronica and Jim close by as chaperones. Sometimes, when Roman

conducted business in Devils Lake, I visited Father, Mother and the boys so that Roman and I could go see a movie or shop in Devils Lake.

Other times, when I went to Devils Lake to see the family, Roman visited and stayed in town with the Kunkels.

*Devils Lake Journal*, "Personal and Social, Devils Lake and Vicinity," January 7, 1939.

"Mr. Roman Pung of Grafton came to Devils Lake for a district meeting of the Farm Security Board, yesterday and today." "Evangeline Bechtel, of Grafton, visited her folks, Mr. and Mrs. Circa. E. Bechtel, here this weekend."

*Devils Lake Journal*, "Personal and Social, Devils Lake and Vicinity," January 28, 1939.

"Mr. Roman Pung of Grafton is the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Kunkel this weekend in this town." "Evangeline Bechtel who has been working in Grafton will come this evening and spend the weekend here with her folks Mr. and Mrs. Circa. E. Bechtel."

In May 1939, Veronica brought me "home" to Devils Lake to live with Dad, Mom and the three boys so that she and Jim could "have some time to themselves." Before long, they married in a sparse, Catholic, ceremony at a church a couple of towns from Devils Lake, on a Sunday afternoon in 1939. I transferred from the AAA office in Grafton to the one in Devils Lake. After that, Roman and I saw quite a bit of each other in Devils Lake.

*Devils Lake World*, "Personal and Social, Devils Lake and Vicinity," September 7, 1939.

"Mr. Roman Pung was a holiday guest at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Arnie Kunkel.

Given Dad's checkered employment history, it's a good thing that Mom operated the beauty shop; first in the Grand Building and then in Kelly's Store in Devils Lake. The Grand was a theatre-converted-to-apartments-and-shops Devils Lake mainstay that featured residences on the 2nd and 3rd floor. We



*Roman Pung, circa 1941*

lived in an apartment in the Grand and Mom used to have her beauty shop there. After the American Legion purchased the building, she was forced to move her shop around the block to the 2nd floor veranda of Kelly's Fashions Store. Due to a housing shortage, building residents were allowed to remain in the Grand so we stayed there, even taking in a boarder, Ruth Kalinowsky, to help pay the bills.

By the time of the 1940 census, as a twenty-one-year-old high school graduate with a couple of AAA-sponsored office procedures courses under my belt, I earned half as much in 6 weeks of work at a county agency in Devils Lake (\$400.00) as did Dad from forty-eight long, hard, weeks of bill-collecting and parts-delivering.



*1940 Census for 310 5th Street, #8 (in the Grand), Devils Lake. Cy E., Anne, Evangeline, Richard, Donald Bechtel and a “lodger,” Ruth Kalinowsky. Cy is in the “Collector Professions,” Anne is a self-employed “Beautician,” Evangeline is a Stenographer for the AAA (Ramsey County Agents of the Agricultural Assistance Act)*



*Richard (Dickie), Anne, Evangeline, Donald (Donnie) and Cyrus Bechtel, Devils Lake, circa 1940*



About the only good side of Dad's thankless jobs as a Depression-era bill collector/deliveryman was that across years of hard struggle, he kept in the view and good graces of town officials who eventually asked him, first, to spend two years as a deputy sheriff in Ramsey County and then to join the Devils Lake police department. Eventually, father was named Chief of Police in Devils Lake. Clearly, a man who was stout enough to collect bills, in upper-eastern North Dakota in the 20s and 30s, was sufficiently sturdy to defend law and order after the Depression.



*Cy Bechtel,  
policeman  
in Devils Lake  
North  
Dakota, circa 1940*

Since rejoining the family in Devils Lake in May 1939, I sometimes run into Noel Ravneberg. Noel, who is three years older than me, was born and raised in Devils Lake. We first met at joint high school dances and ball games. Noel was a senior at Devils Lake High when I was a freshman at Minnewaukan High. After high school, Noel worked at a number of jobs around town, kept the company of a girlfriend named Doris, and spent many nights bowling for teams in the “Commercial Loop” (one of the 4 men’s bowling leagues in Devils Lake).



Starting around the middle of 1940, Roman visited Devils Lake less often. In June 1940, Arnie and Rhoda Kunkel moved to Minnesota so Roman no longer had an easy place to stay

*Noel Marvin Ravneberg (2nd from left) on winning commercial league bowling team in Devils Lake. Devils Lake Journal, April 22, 1939*

when he visited me. Then, in February 1941, he enlisted in the Grafton National Guard. Because he was older than 28, he was released in November. But as the war approached, Roman became eligible for active duty as an officer.

The military also took Noel Ravneberg away from Devils Lake. His draft number was pulled in the very first round of the new draft in 1940, so Noel was off to Fargo for a year of Army service. Noel left February 4, 1941 and was assigned to the 194th Tank Battalion, first in the motorcycle pool then in half-tank reconnaissance units. Eventually his outfit will be shipped overseas.



*Roman &  
Vange,  
circa 1942*

Seeing Roman, Noel, and my brother Joe go off as soldiers sent chills up and down my spine. With others, I prayed that the “The Great War” would be the “war to end all wars.”