

Story #22.

Nicholas Returns North (written Jan. 3, 1938)

Sent to:	Date	Returned
Story	Jan. 6, 1938.	Jan. 24 - NOTE.
Catamount	Jan. 24, '38.	Letter - Mar. 10, 1938.
Hinterland	NOTE. Mar. 19, 1938.	Apr. 4, 1938. NOTE.
Kenyon Riv.	May 10, 1940.	June 17. Note.



First Draft / January 3, 1938. (First three pages)  
Old Nick takes a Bath.

~~all of which should save plenty of description and plenty of~~  
<sup>reading.</sup>

My father was a tall Dutchman with a bad temper and hands like Thomas Wolfe's old mans. <sup>(That should save all plenty of speculation, plenty of)</sup> He was born on the shores of Lake Superior before they found the <sup>copper and iron</sup> mines, and he learned to <sup>swear in</sup> speak the language of the Chippewa Indians before he could curse in English. Not that a late start in the latter ever cramped his style.

His <sup>big</sup> hands were like <sup>his own</sup> father's, too, but there the resemblance stopped. My grandfather was a short, broad German, ~~very stout~~ with close cropped ~~hair~~ and a ~~small~~ <sup>thick</sup> lot of whiskers, and a ~~small~~ <sup>the</sup> disposition of ~~an~~ a bewildered angel. My old man father got his temper from grandma, ~~whom grandpa~~ encountered ~~as he was~~ <sup>coming over on the ship from the</sup>

But poor old grandpa didn't escape ~~much~~ <sup>much</sup>, ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~she~~ <sup>she</sup> ~~had~~ <sup>had</sup> the temper of seventeen she wildcats in heat. Fighting <sup>like</sup> the Franco-Prussian war would have been <sup>like</sup> playing with children's mudpies compared with living with <sup>seventeen</sup> ~~is a lot of~~ wildcats. I have a <sup>of</sup> grandma and grandpa

Leather-bound album, <sup>and</sup> ~~there~~ <sup>there</sup> are <sup>pictures</sup> ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> grandma and grandpa. <sup>He is standing, very tall, dressed in black, with a white lace cap,</sup> <sup>and</sup> ~~there~~ <sup>there</sup> are <sup>pictures</sup> ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> her <sup>with</sup> ~~her~~ <sup>her</sup> ~~eyes~~ <sup>eyes</sup> and a broad <sup>with</sup> ~~her~~ <sup>her</sup> ~~forehead~~ <sup>forehead</sup> and her closed fist <sup>is resting there</sup> on grandpa's shoulder, <sup>Grandpa</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~her~~ <sup>her</sup> ~~closed~~ <sup>closed</sup> ~~eyes~~ <sup>eyes</sup> ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> ~~obsured~~ <sup>obsured</sup> by his whiskers and grandma's feet.

<sup>with his big hands open like hers, little towards</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~got~~ <sup>got</sup> ~~by~~ <sup>by</sup> ~~train~~ <sup>train</sup> to Sault St. Marie, ~~Mich~~ <sup>Mich</sup>, and ~~there~~ <sup>there</sup> ~~started~~ <sup>started</sup> across the <sup>of</sup> ~~Upper~~ <sup>Upper</sup> ~~upper~~ <sup>upper</sup> peninsula in a great wooden <sup>of</sup> ~~cart~~ <sup>cart</sup> drawn <sup>by</sup> ~~open~~ <sup>open</sup> after ~~two~~ <sup>more than</sup> two hundred miles of jolting, the jolting got worse, and grandma called

more open and more capacious  
with  
with  
with

more than  
more than  
more than







→ She didn't trust <sup>any of</sup> the young Germans. She called them "lazy, slothful, wat heads."

She ~~Grandma~~ now devoted all of her time to religion. <sup>Grandma</sup> She got a distant relative called Schmidt

up from Milwaukee to come off and run the brewery. She went to church all the time. She gave lots of money for <sup>masses for grandpa</sup> <sup>my father</sup> ~~But~~ she one day shipped off Nicholas, who was

only fourteen, and looked twenty, to South Bend, Indiana,

to learn to be a priest. They used to train priests there. <sup>There was no foothold there, then.</sup>

~~And~~ <sup>This was no foothold there, then.</sup> Irishman called Father ~~Driffin~~ Dunleavy

one ~~day~~ <sup>night at supper</sup> undertook to <sup>a father superior for</sup> install <sup>my father</sup> a god in Nicholas with

the aid of a buggy whip. <sup>My father was eating bread during the prayer.</sup> My father took the

buggy whip away from Father Dunleavy, and beat

him until he <sup>fell down and lay stiff.</sup> ~~the drove out of town.~~ They even gave <sup>7 P.M.</sup> extreme

unction, it was so bad. So a <sup>little later</sup> bunch of the ~~three~~ <sup>three</sup>

~~other~~ <sup>stoutly</sup> priests came up and took <sup>a from</sup> hold of my father

and told him he was a sinner to beat <sup>poor</sup> Father Dunleavy.

My father got <sup>dancing</sup> lights in his eyes and ~~the~~

grandma's vein stood out on his forehead and he shouted, "I am

no sinner, <sup>I was right.</sup> <sup>by the roarin' Jesus,</sup> I do it again!" ~~And he~~

<sup>I don't give a rat's tail for the whole bunch of you."</sup> ~~And he~~

~~And he swore~~ <sup>more</sup> ~~more~~, and he knew how, <sup>It was like the crack of a</sup> ~~buggy~~ <sup>whip.</sup>

The priests held their ears and then they held

my father again, and tried to pull him down to pray for

but he was suspicious <sup>of their motives,</sup> ~~again~~ I guess, and started to ~~run~~

throw them around like beer kegs, until they didn't

roll any more. He didn't wait to see if they were

administered ~~the~~ extreme unction, but ~~somehow~~ he

concluded <sup>that maybe</sup> he wasn't cut out to be a priest, so he grabbed

a loaf of bread off the table, before <sup>horrified</sup> the <sup>young</sup> ~~transfigured~~ Novitates,

and ran out into the rainy night. <sup>It was dark and</sup> He walked and walked

toward Chicago, <sup>and finally</sup> he slept in a watermelon patch, <sup>by the chance on</sup>

and the next morning <sup>it was Sunday and</sup> he caught a ride to Chicago on

a brewery wagon, a watermelon under each arm of

the muddy black gown he was wearing.

In Chicago he walked up on North Clark

street, <sup>Near where the Red Standard now stands,</sup> to a German called Herman Pomper, who

<sup>ran a</sup> <sup>store</sup> <sup>and also</sup> sold brewery supplies to <sup>and knew him</sup> my grandfather, and ~~from~~

~~old Herman~~ borrowed enough money to buy <sup>some</sup> clothes and get <sup>up</sup> ~~to work~~

my father helped at the brewery. Recalling days of his movement. He was only fourteen, and already so strong as if he were a grown man.

The whip was kept from

being used to chase away flies.

grandma's vein stood out on his forehead and he shouted, "I am no sinner, I do it again!" And he swore more and more, and he knew how, it was like the crack of a buggy whip.

frantically, they said, and

WITNESSING THEIR FIRST MIRACLE,

along the muddy

old Herman



~~Nicholas~~  
~~My Father Later Kept a Saloon.~~

2nd &  
Final  
draft

Returns  
Nicholas ~~to~~ North

My father was a tall Dutchman with a bad temper and hands like Thomas Wolfe's old man's. He was born on the shores of Lake Superior before they found the copper and iron mines, and he learned to swear in Chippewa Indian before he could curse in English. Not that a late start in the latter ever really cramped his style.

His big <sup>strong</sup> hands were like his own father's, too, but there the resemblance stopped. My grandfather was a short, broad German, with close cropped hair, lots of whiskers, and the disposition of a bewildered angel. My father got his temper straight from Grandma, who Grandpa encountered <sup>as he was</sup> coming over on the ship from Germany, patriotically seeking to escape military service. But poor old Grandpa didn't escape much, I guess, because Grandma was very tall and military-looking herself, and deeply religious, and old residents avow that she possessed the temper of seventeen she wildcats in heat. Fighting, nay, dying, in the Franco-Prussian war, they said, would have been like playing <sup>at</sup> ~~with~~ children's mudpies compared with living with Grandma. Seventeen is a lot of wildcats.

I have a picture of <sup>Grandma and Grandpa</sup> them in the old leather-bound album. She is standing, very tall, dressed in yards of black, with a white lace cap, and there are strange lights in her eyes and a broad vein writhing along her forehead, and her closed fist is resting <sup>surely</sup> there on Grandpa's <sup>square</sup> broad shoulder. Grandpa sits transfixed, listing a little towards Grandma, his big hands over his knees, ~~his~~ face ~~is~~ pretty well obscured by his whiskers and by Grandma's fist.

The ship landed and Grandma and Grandpa got married <sup>by a priest called Father Schilling</sup> in New York. They rode by train and boat to Sault St. Marie, which is in Michigan,



(Insert)

9. There followed days and weeks of fording streams and rivers, penetrating mosquito-laden swamps, then good stretches ~~under the~~ over ~~the~~

century-old carpets of needles under the great

sighing  
spreading

roof

of ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> white pines.

That was before the lumber barons,

a <sup>quaint</sup> synonym for <sup>theirs and</sup> pirates, <sup>especially popular with family biographers,</sup> came and took the roofway

and left the carpets in great disorder. ~~But~~ There were

few trails, and they were poor, <sup>and this didn't help Grandma's temper,</sup> and sometimes Grandpa

must have wondered whether the life of a soldier was so

bad, after all.



There ~~here~~, they stayed <sup>but</sup> a few months, outfitting for their trek across the peninsula, <sup>upon discovering that they found</sup> because there was already a brewery in the Sault. One <sup>bright</sup> morning they started on their long journey <sup>westward</sup> across the long northern peninsula of Michigan, in a great wooden cart drawn by oxen. More oxen and more carts followed behind Grandma and Grandpa, loaded with young Germans Grandpa had recruited, and <sup>groaning</sup> with ~~the~~ supplies for the new brewery.

9. After more than two hundred miles of jolting, the jolting <sup>very white, suddenly</sup> stopped <sup>up</sup> ~~in~~ her cart and got worse, and Grandma called a halt. The oxen rolled their eyes and blew and dropped to their knees. Before they started again there was the crying of a baby, a new baby, my father, called Nicholas after Grandma's father. So Grandpa and all the young Germans got down on their knees and prayed with the oxen.

A day after the birth of my father Nicholas, just before sundown, they the oxen wallowed out of a swamp and onto the old military road running North from Green Bay, one branch of which ran <sup>off northwesterly</sup> up to Fort Snelling, and the other straight up to Fort Wilkins. The way was much better, and Grandma, holding her new baby, was elated that they had almost finished their journey with only the loss of two oxen and one German. The young German had got very homesick for the old country, military service and all, and then he had got a touch of sunstroke, and ran off into a deep swamp, and when they found him he was dead, mosquito-swollen as big as a field marshal, ~~one large mosquito~~ ~~side~~.

Grandpa camped that evening near the forks of the military road. Grandpa wanted to take the Fort Snelling route. He took this up with Grandma. Grandpa took the Fort Wilkins route. History does not record this surrender of Fort Snelling. 9 That night the young Germans were glad and sang half the night, accompanied by their zithers and accordions, and the angry tears of little Nicholas, in his first temper.



In two days they tried open sank on their knees on a high hill near the end of the Keweenaw Peninsula, and Lake Superior was on both sides, and <sup>colored by the sunset.</sup> Things soon were soon brewing at Fort Wilkins, for Grandma - I mean <sup>the name of the brewer</sup> Grandpa - started <sup>his</sup> up the new <sup>The government had ordained that a soldier must walk a mile for beer. This made them thirsty.</sup> brewery within a mile of the Fort. Evidently the soldiers or the Indians or the French-Canadian trappers, or perhaps all of these, were always inordinately thirsty, because Grandpa began to make lots of money. As time <sup>went</sup> ~~was~~ on he finally put up a big brownstone building in which he housed the brewery and a new saloon as well, while he and Grandma and Nicholas and now also little Jacob and Joseph, <sup>named for Grandma's brothers,</sup> lived upstairs. A lot of people began coming to Copper Harbor, and soon ~~soon~~ some of the young Germans got married. And mostly all of them drank Grandpa's beer.

The more money Grandpa made the more religious Grandma became. And the more religious she became the worse her temper grew. As he had once escaped military service in Germany, so, one day, he finally escaped God and Grandma in America - he died. Grandma piled on more black <sup>silky</sup> ~~clothes~~ and ordered a tremendous monument shipped over from Germany. Thirteen open wore out their feet and died, dragging it up from Green Bay. It still stands on the bleak, windswept shores of Lake Superior, the <sup>pretty somewhat</sup> angels storm worn but still flying <sup>a</sup> proud monument to the ~~potency of Grandpa's beer and~~ <sup>power of</sup> thirteen deceased open, and the potency of Grandpa's beer.

Grandma got a distant relative called Schmidt to come up from Milwaukee to run the brewery. She didn't trust any of the aging young Germans - they weren't from her province. She called them all "lazy, stoopit rat heads" - and went off to Mass. She now devoted all of her time - and most of Grandpa's money -



to religion. She said she didn't want to let poor Grandpa <sup>up in Heaven</sup> alone. There was no word from Grandpa on the subject. Nicholas

My father now helped August Schmidt at the brewery, loading kegs of beer. He was only sixteen and already as strong as a big man ~~or~~ or a small pony, <sup>or possibly both.</sup> He didn't like to go to church. When he wasnt tossing beer kegs <sup>around</sup> he wanted to fish and hunt and run <sup>off</sup> with the young Indian bucks. <sup>He hadn't started on the squares yet.</sup> ~~One~~ day Grandma caught him in a mood of maternal respect and shipped him off to a school in Indiana to learn to be a priest. They used to train priests at this school. There was no football there, then.

An Irishman called Father Dunleavy one night at supper undertook to instill God in my father Nicholas with the aid of a buggy whip. My father, <sup>who had a good appetite,</sup> <sup>swallowing big lumps of</sup> ~~was suspiciously~~ eating bread during the evening prayer. The whip caught my father over the back. <sup>Father Dunleavy didn't know my father.</sup> My father got up with a funny smile and took the buggy whip away from Father Dunleavy. He broke it and threw it away. Then he turned to Father Dunleavy and beat him until he <sup>fell</sup> ~~lay~~ down and lay still. They even gave Father Dunleavy extreme unction, it was so bad. A little later three stout priests came into the dining <sup>hall,</sup> room, where my father had resumed eating bread, and came up and took hold of my father and told him he was an unrepentant sinner to beat poor Father Dunleavy. be good never seen Grandpa

My father got dancing lights in his eyes and Grandma's vein stood out on his forehead, and he shouted, "I am no sinner! I was hungry. ~~I was right!~~ By the roarin' Jesus, I'd do it again! I don't give a rattlin' god damn for the hull bunch of you. Let me go!" And he swore some more, too, both in ~~English~~ Chippewa and in English, and he had mastered both. It was like the crack of a buggy whip.

The priests held their ears and then they held my father again, and tried to pull him down, to pray for forgiveness, they said. But he was suspiciously suspicious



of their motives, I guess, and <sup>he</sup> started to toss and throw them around like beer kegs, until they didn't roll any more. He didn't wait to see if they were administered extreme unction, but he grabbed a loaf of bread off the long table, before the horrified young novitiate~~s~~ novitiate, witnessing their first miracle, and ran out into the rainy darkness. ~~He wait~~

He walked and walked along the muddy road toward Chicago, and finally ~~at~~ slept in a log-cribbed roothouse in a watermelon patch. The next morning it was sunny and he got a ride to Chicago on a brewery wagon, a watermelon under each arm of the muddy black gown he was wearing.

In Chicago that night he walked up North Clark Street with only one watermelon. Near where the Red Star Inn now stands he came to a German's, called Herman Pomper, who ran a saloon there and <sup>had</sup> sold brewery supplies to my grandfather and knew him in the old country.

From Herman Pomper my father Nicholas borrowed <sup>some</sup> ~~enough~~ money, and the next night he started <sup>for the</sup> North and home.

Later my father <sup>Nicholas</sup> started a saloon and had the longest bar in the peninsula. He also had six sons, none of whom <sup>ever</sup> went into the clergy.



Written by:  
John Voelker  
Ishpeming, Michigan

## NICHOLAS RETURNS NORTH

by  
Robert Traver

My father was a tall Dutchman with a bad temper and hands like Thomas Wolfe's old man's. He was born on the shores of Lake Superior before they found the copper and iron mines, and he learned to swear in Chippewa Indian before he could curse in English. Not that a late start in the latter ever really cramped his style.

His big hands were like his own father's, too, but there the resemblance stopped. My grandfather was a short, broad German, with close cropped hair, lots of whiskers, and the disposition of a bewildered angel. My father got his temper straight from Grandma, whom Grandpa encountered as he was coming over on the ship from Germany, patriotically seeking to escape military service. But poor old Grandpa didn't escape much, I guess, because Grandma was very tall and military-looking herself, and deeply religious, and old residents avow that she possessed the temper of seventeen she wildcats in heat. Fighting, nay, dying, in the Franco-Prussian war, they said, would have been like playing at children's mudpies compared with living with Grandma. Seventeen is a lot of wildcats.

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The ship landed and Grandma and Grandpa got married by a priest called Father Schilling in New York. They rode by train and boat to Sault Ste. Marie, which is in Michigan. There they stayed but a few months, outfitting for their trek across the peninsula, upon discovering that there was already a brewery in the Sault. One bright morning they started on their journey westward across the long northern peninsula of Michigan, in a great wooden cart drawn by oxen. More oxen and more carts followed behind Grandma and Grandpa, loaded with young Germans Grandpa had recruited, and groaning with supplies for the new brewery.

There followed days and weeks of fording streams and rivers, penetrating mosquito-laden swamps, then good stretches over century-old carpets of needles under the great sighing roofs of the white pines. That was before the lumber barons, a quaint synonym for thieves and pirates especially popular with certain ~~family~~ biographers, came and took the roofs away and left the carpets in great disorder. There were few trails, and they were poor, and this didn't help Grandma's temper, and sometimes Grandpa must have wondered whether the life of a soldier was so bad, after all.

After more than two hundred miles of jolting, the jolting got worse, and Grandma, very white, suddenly stood up in her cart and called a halt. The oxen rolled their eyes and blew and dropped to their knees. Before they started again there was the crying of a baby, a new baby, my father, called Nicholas after Grandma's father. So Grandpa and all the young Germans got down on their knees and prayed with the oxen.

A day after the birth of my father Nicholas, just before sundown, the oxen wallowed out of a swamp and unto the old military road running North from Green Bay, one branch of which ran off northwesterly up to Fort Snelling, and the other straight up to Fort Wilkins. The way was much better, and Grandma, holding



her new baby, was elated that they had almost finished their journey with only the loss of two oxen and one German. The young German had got very homesick for the old country, military service and all, and then he had got a touch of sunstroke, and run off into a deep swamp, and when they found him he was dead, mosquito-swollen as big as a field marshall.

Grandpa camped that evening near the forks of the military road. Grandpa wanted to take the Fort Snelling route. He took this up with Grandma. Grandpa took the Fort Wilkins route. History does not record this surrender of Fort Snelling.

That night the young Germans were glad and sang half the night, accompanied by their zithers and accordions -- and the angry tears of little Nicholas, in his first temper.

In two days the tired oxen sank on their knees on a high hill near the end of the Keweenaw Peninsula, and Lake Superior was on both sides, and colored by the sunset. Things were soon brewing at Fort Wilkins, for Grandma -- I mean, Grandpa -- started up the new brewery within a mile of the Fort. The government had ordained that a soldier must walk a mile for his beer. This made them thirsty. Evidently the soldiers or the Indians or the French-Canadian trappers, or perhaps all of these, were always inordinately thirsty, because Grandpa began to make lots of money. As time went on he finally put up a big brownstone building in which he housed the brewery and a new saloon as well, while he and Grandma and Nicholas and now also little Jacob and Joseph, named for Grandma's brothers, lived upstairs. A lot of people began coming to Copper Harbor, and soon some of the young Germans got married. And mostly all of them drank Grandpa's beer.

The more money Grandpa made the more religious Grandma became. And the more religious she became the worse her temper grew. As he had once escaped military service in Germany, so, one day, he finally escaped God and Grandma in America -- he died.



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He walked and walked along the muddy road toward Chicago, and finally slept in a log-cribbed roothouse in a watermelon patch. The next morning it was sunny and he got a ride to Chicago on a brewery wagon, a watermelon under each arm of the muddy black gown he was wearing.

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From Herman Pomper my father Nicholas borrowed some money, and the next night he started for the North -- and home.

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Grandpa camped that evening near the forks of the military road, <sup>and the swamp</sup> Grandpa wanted to <sup>go south and pick up</sup> ~~take~~ the Fort Snelling route. He took this up with Grandma. Grandpa took the Fort Wilkins route, <sup>and went north</sup> History does not record this surrender of Fort Snelling.

That night the young Germans were glad and sang half the night, accompanied by their zithers and accordions -- and the angry tears of little Nicholas in his first temper.

In two days the tired oxen sank on their knees on a high hill near the <sup>tip</sup> end of the Keweenaw Peninsula, and Lake Superior was on both sides, and colored by the sunset. Things were soon brewing at Fort Wilkins, for Grandma -- I mean, Grandpa -- started up the new brewery within a mile of the Fort. The government had ordained that a soldier must walk a mile for his beer. This made them thirsty. Evidently the soldiers or the Indians or the French-Canadian trappers, or perhaps all of these, were always inordinate-ly thirsty, because Grandpa began to make lots of money. As time went on he finally put up a big brownstone building in which he housed the brewery and a new saloon as well, while he and Grandma and Nicholas and now also little Jacob and Joseph, named for Grandma's brothers, lived upstairs. A lot of people began coming to Copper Harbor, and soon some of the young Germans got married. And mostly all of them drank Grandpa's beer.

The more money Grandpa made the more religious Grandma became. And the more religious she became the worse her temper grew. As he had once escaped military service in Germany, so, one day, he finally escaped God and Grandma in America -- he died.



Grandma piled on more black silk and ordered a tremendous monument shipped over from Germany. Thirteen oxen wore out their feet and died, dragging it up from Green Bay. It still stands on the bleak, windswept shores of Lake Superior, the angels pretty storm worn but still flying -- a proud monument to the power of thirteen deceased oxen, and the potency of Grandpa's beer.

Grandma got a distant relative called Schmidt to come up from Milwaukee to run the brewery. She didn't trust any of the aging young Germans -- they weren't from her province. She called them all "lazy, stoopit vat headts" -- and went off to Mass. She now devoted all of her time -- and most of Grandpa's money -- to religion. She said she didn't want to let poor Grandpa alone. There was no word from Grandpa on the subject.

My father Nicholas now helped August Schmidt at the brewery, loading kegs of beer. He was only sixteen and already as strong as a big man or a small pony, or possibly both. He didn't like to go to church. When he wasn't tossing beer kegs around he wanted to fish and hunt and run off with the young Indian bucks. He hadn't started on the squaws yet. Then one day Grandma caught him in a mood of maternal respect and shipped him off to a school in Indiana to learn to be a priest. They used to train priests at this school. There was no football there, then.

An Irishman called Father Dunleavy one night at supper undertook to instill God in my father Nicholas with the aid of a buggy whip. My father, who had a good appetite, was swallowing big lumps of bread during the prayer. The whip caught my father over the back. Father Dunleavy didn't know my father. And he had never seen Grandma. My father got up with a funny smile and took the buggy whip away from Father Dunleavy. He broke it and threw it away. Then he turned to Father Dunleavy and beat him until he fell down and lay still. They even gave Father Dunleavy extreme unction, it was so bad. A little later three stout priests came into the dining hall, where my father had resumed eating bread,



and came up and took hold of my father and told him he was an unrepentant sinner to beat poor Father Dunleavy.

My father got dancing lights in his eyes and Grandma's vein stood out on his forehead, and he shouted, "I am no sinner! I was hungry. By the roarin' Jesus, I'd do it again! I don't give a rattlin' god damn for the hull bunch of you. Let me go!" And he swore some more, too, both in Chippewa and in English, and he had mastered both. It was like the crack of a buggy whip.

The priests held their ears and then they held my father again, and tried to pull him down, to pray for forgiveness, they said. But he was impiously suspicious of their motives, I guess, ~~and~~ <sup>for</sup> he started to toss and throw them around like beer kegs, until they didn't roll any more. He didn't wait to see if they were administered extreme unction, but he grabbed a loaf of bread off the long table, before the horrified young novitiates, witnessing their first miracle, and ran out into the rainy darkness.

He walked and walked along the muddy road toward Chicago, and finally slept in a log-cribbed roothouse in a watermelon patch. The next morning it was sunny and he got a ride to Chicago on a brewery wagon, a watermelon under each arm of the muddy black gown he was wearing.

In Chicago that night he walked up North Clark Street with only one watermelon. Near where the Red Star Inn now stands he came to a German's, called Herman Pomper, who ran a saloon there and had sold brewery supplies to my grandfather and knew him in the old country.

From Herman Pomper my father Nicholas borrowed some money, and the next night he started for the North -- and home.

Later my father Nicholas started a saloon and had the longest bar in the peninsula. He also had six sons, none of whom ever went into the clergy.



Written by:  
John Voelker  
Ishpeming, Michigan

## NICHOLAS RETURNS NORTH

by  
Robert Traver

My father was a tall <sup>German</sup> ~~Dutchman~~ with a bad temper and hands like Thomas Wolfe's old man's. <sup>That saves a lot of describing.</sup> He was born on the shores of Lake Superior before they found the copper and iron mines, and he learned to swear in Chippewa Indian before he could curse in English. Not that a late start in the latter ever really cramped his style.

His big hands were like his own father's, too, but there the resemblance stopped. My grandfather was a short, broad German, with close cropped hair, lots of whiskers, and the disposition of a bewildered angel. My father got his temper straight from Grandma, whom Grandpa encountered as he was coming over on the ship from Germany, patriotically seeking to escape military service. But poor old Grandpa didn't escape much, I guess, because Grandma was very tall and military-looking herself, and deeply religious, and old residents avow that she possessed the temper of seventeen she wildcats in heat. Fighting, nay, dying, in the Franco-Prussian war, they said, would have been like playing at children's mudpies compared with living with Grandma. Seventeen is a lot of wildcats.

I have a picture of Grandma and Grandpa in the old leather-bound album. She is standing, very tall, dressed in yards of black, with a white lace cap, and there are strange lights in her eyes and a broad vein writhing along her forehead, and her closed fist is resting surely there on Grandpa's square shoulder. Grandpa sits transfixed, listing a little toward Grandma, his big hands over his knees, his face pretty well obscured by his whiskers and by Grandma's fist.

The ship landed and Grandma and Grandpa got married by a priest called Father Schilling in New York. They rode by train



and boat to Sault Ste. Marie, which is in Michigan. There they stayed but a few months, outfitting for their trek across the peninsula, upon discovering that there was already a brewery in the Sault. One bright morning they started on their journey westward across the long northern peninsula of Michigan, in a great wooden cart drawn by oxen. More oxen and more carts followed behind Grandma and Grandpa, loaded with young Germans Grandpa had recruited, and groaning with supplies for the new brewery.

There followed days and weeks of fording streams and rivers, penetrating mosquito-laden swamps, then good stretches over century-old carpets of needles under the great sighing roofs of the white pines. That was before the lumber barons came and took the roofs away and left the carpets in great disorder. There were few trails, and they were poor, and this didn't help Grandma's temper, and sometimes Grandpa must have wondered whether the life of a soldier was so bad, after all.

After more than two hundred miles of jolting, the jolting got worse, and Grandma, very white, suddenly stood up in her cart and called a halt. The oxen rolled their eyes and blew and dropped to their knees. Before they started again there was the crying of a baby, a new baby, my father, called Nicholas after Grandma's father. So Grandpa and all the young Germans got down on their knees and prayed with the oxen.

A day after the birth of my father Nicholas, just before sundown, the oxen walled out of a swamp and onto the old military road running north from Green Bay, one branch of which ran off southwesterly to pick up the Fort Snelling road, and the other straight up to Fort Wilkins. Grandma, holding her new baby, was elated that they had almost finished their journey with only the loss of two oxen and one German. The young German had got very homesick for the old country, military service and all, and then



he had got a touch of sunstroke, and run off into a deep swamp, and when they found him he was dead, mosquito-swollen as big as a field marshall.

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