

Edward & Florence Brinkert

Written and told by daughters: Margo Harms, Roxanne Williamson, & Shelley Hjelm

This presentation is about our parents – Ed & Florence Brinkert – long time Hartley residents and both business owners in Hartley.

Edward John Brinkert was born March 29, 1913 to parents Herman Henry Brinkert and Alvina Zinn Brinkert. He had 4 siblings – all sisters: Rose Brinkert Graen Green, Ella Brinkert Atkinson, Mae Brinkert Bojens, and Leone Brinkert Zaiser. Ed was born on a farm near Primghar. His family moved to Sheldon when he was a young boy and lived there for a few years. His family then moved to Hartley where Ed lived for the rest of his life.

Florence Esther Shatzer Brinkert was born Nov. 29, 1914 to parents Francis (Frank) Shatzer and Anna Gonnerman Shatzer. Her siblings were all sisters as well: Eva Shatzer Gilkerson, Lola Shatzer Dahnke, Mildred (Sis) Shatzer Weber, Frances (Fran) Shatzer Brugmann, and Helen Shatzer Stanley. Florence was born in Hartley and as a child lived on a farm NW of Hartley, which has been known as the Dan Shinkle farm and later the Kunkel farm. Florence lived her whole life in Hartley, except while at Beauty School.

Ed went to grade school in Sheldon and then in 5th grade went to country school near Hartley. Ed quit school in the 5th grade for many reasons. One of the reasons being that he had a hard time speaking English because they spoke German in their home, and so the other kids would tease him about that. Secondly, Ed's family was poor, and he thought that he could help the family more by quitting school and working. A story he told was that he liked to trap, and when he was in the 5th grade, he trapped a white mink and sold it for \$10. Ed decided that was a good reason to quit school and make money by trapping to help the family. Ed had no further formal education.

Florence went to school in Hartley and graduated from Hartley High School in 1933. Right after high school, Florence attended beautician school at the Madam Kennedy School of Beauty Culture in Des Moines.

Ed and Florence were married on Jan. 7, 1936 at the Methodist parsonage in Spencer, Iowa. Florence's sister, Francis Shatzer, and Calvin Gonnerman stood up for them at their wedding. Calvin Gonnerman was a cousin to Florence, but more like a brother to Florence's family, as he had been raised on the Frank & Anna Shatzer's farm as a boy. The reception dinner after the wedding was at Florence's parents farm near Hartley with many relatives present. The weather was very cold and they had lots of snow, so getting to Spencer and back to the farm was a challenge. In 1936 there was extreme weather in the US and the Midwest was hit with a drought and the "dust bowl" during the summer of 1936 and then they had extreme low temperatures and record amounts of snow that winter. Ed told of the snow being so high that when you stood on top of the drifts, you would be level with the electric lines.

Ed and Florence lived with her parents for the first few months of their marriage and then rented an apartment above the Knapp store in Hartley. Ed and Florence moved to a house at 40 West Maple Drive in Hartley in the late 1940's and they remodeled part of the house for Florence's Beauty Shop and that opened in her home in 1950.

Ed worked at many manual labor jobs as a boy and young man. Times were hard in those days – especially during the 30's and the depression, and it was especially hard for a young man with little education. Ed worked with his father on several jobs, as jobs were scarce and at some of the jobs, Ed's father was able to get the job because he had a young son who could help. In the 30's people would wait in line for a job and the government had public jobs offered paving roads. There was a quota of how many people they would hire each week and the names of the people hired were listed in the newspaper. (Newspaper clipping). Ed worked as a young man with his dad on the county maintainer, also worked building the railroad track in this area, and also worked as a farm hand for different people, including his

brother-in-law, Floyd Atkinson. A story that Ed told us girls, is that when he worked at building the railroad, he got paid \$5 per week and he wore out a pair of leather gloves every week and they cost him 50 cents.

In 1932 Ed and his father, Herman Henry, purchased a used portable grinder mounted on the back of a car for \$30. The new business venture was called Brinkert Custom Grinding and that was the beginning of Brinkert Feed Co. Ed and his father would take this portable grinder to farms and grind livestock feed right on the farms for the farmer. This went over so well, that Ed and his father then rebuilt another portable grinder on the back of an old Cadillac. They then each had a portable grinder to run. That grinding business continued to build clientele. Ed, in 1934, while working on one of the portable grinders at his father's home, had an accident and lost an eye. A wrench had fallen into the mixer and when the engine was started the wrench got chipped up and a piece of steel flew out of the mixer and into Ed's eye, cutting the pupil. Ed lost his sight in that eye, but they were able to save the eye itself. Ed was just 21 years old when he lost his sight in one eye.

Another story, told to us girls, is that our dad liked to gamble and play cards back when he was young. On one occasion, he went to Everly to play cards and he was out all night. When he came home, our mother was very mad and met him at the door. Our dad said, "Don't be mad, Mother," and started pulling money out of his socks and his underwear. He had won so much money playing cards that he stuck it out of sight in fear that someone would rob him. So, Lady Luck played a part in expanding Ed and Herman's grinding business, as that money was used to purchase a truck to build a bigger, better home-made, portable grinder. Ed and Herman built that grinder on that truck chassis. The grinding business kept Ed and Herman very busy. Ed's father, Herman, died in 1947 and Ed had to hire help to keep both grinders running and keep up with the demand. Up until this time, the grinding business was run out of Ed's parents' home and shed that was on their property. In 1949, Ed moved his grinding business to a barn in East Hartley near the present Roger Burley residence. He also started selling bagged feed at that location. In 1953, Ed purchased the former Bartelson Dodge=Plymouth dealership building at 30 3rd St. NE on Highway 18, where it was the home of Brinkert Feed Company for many years. That building later was home to Holco Agri-Products and is presently Kunkel Tire.

In the new location, Ed put in a stationary grinder and started to formulate and manufacture feed under his own label – a patented label Brinkert Booster Feed. Ed went to classes offered on animal nutrition and formulation in Mankato and Ames. He studied feed formulas and ingredients in order to manufacture quality feed for cattle, hogs, sheep, and chickens. Brinkert Feed Company manufactured bagged and bulk feed under their own label, but also sold brand name feeds as well, such as Kent and Golden Sun, mostly these would be "specialty" feeds, such as a special calf starter, for example.

In 1956, Ed purchased a brand new portable grinder and truck from Daffin Manufacturing in Pennsylvania. We remember taking him to the airport in Ft. Dodge to fly to Pennsylvania to take classes about the new mill and to pick the grinder up and drive it home. It was a big deal to fly anywhere in 1956, so that was quite memorable.

The portable grinding business did so well that a second Daffin portable grinder was purchased in 1958. The 2 portable grinders were very busy in the 1960's and 1970's, grinding fee for clients right on their farm.

Early employees at Brinker Feed Company included Elmo Morfitt, Leo Groen, Eddie Hilbert, Hugh Johnson and Harold (Shorty) Will, who all ran the portable grinders as well as working in the feed manufacturing plant. Other longtime truck drivers and plant workers at Brinkert Feed Co. were Mel Tuttle, Fritz Palmranke, Don Nelson, Ron Wohlert, Roy-Dick Peterson, Lynwood Mohni, and Jeffrey Commanada. Son-in-law, Rodney Harms, worked at Brinkert Feed Company during the summers while he was going to college, and in 1964 Rod was called back to Hartley from graduate school in Ft. Collins, CO, to help manage Brinkert Feed Co. Ed had suffered bleeding ulcers and needed help at the Feed Company. Ed told Rod that he would only have to help out for a short time, until the doctors gave Ed

the okay to go back working full time. That “short time” ended up to be 17 years, and Rodney worked at and eventually managed Brinkert Feed Co. until 1981.

Son-in-law, Gordon Williamson, also worked part time and for a few years, full time, at Brinkert Feed Co. until he started farming in 1964.

The secretary/bookkeeping position for Brinkert Feed Co. was always held by a Brinkert woman. In the early years, Florence took down grinding appointments and took feed orders, while running her own beauty shop. Florence also did the bookkeeping for the Feed Co. for many years. In the early 60's Roxie Brinkert Williamson started doing the bookkeeping for the Feed Co., and then in 1975 Shelley Brinkert Hjelm came to work full time at Brinkert Feed Co. as secretary and bookkeeper.

Brinkert Feed Co. sold many different farm/livestock products throughout the years, along with feed and grinding. Some of the things that were sold were baby chicks, hog feeders and waterers, sow farrowing crates, parts for feeders and waterers, fertilizer that could be applied by the farmer or by Brinkert (Ris-Van, MAN, that's fertilizer), and heavy-duty lawn mowers (that cut heavy brush and claimed to even cut small trees).

In 1958, Ed and Florence held a 25th Anniversary party for Brinkert Feed Co. and served a free, full ham dinner to their past & present customers, right at the Feed Mill. They had drawings & prizes along with the meal They had other customer appreciation dinners after the 25th Anniversary party as well.

In 1979, for the Hartley Centennial parade, Ed hired a man with an ox and a very old-style ox cart, made of sticks and solid wood wheels, to carry Ed & Florence and the Brinkert Feed Co. banner in the parade.

In approximately 1972, Brinkert Feed Co. started to manufacture premixes for another company, Holco Agri-Products, as well as manufacturing the Brinkert label. In 1981, Ed and Florence sold Brinkert Feed Co. to Holco Agri-Products of Spencer.

Ed was passionate about his business and us daughters can all remember him sitting at the kitchen table figuring feed formulas and pricing his feed, as well as writing ads for the newspaper. He came up with some pretty original ads. Some nights Ed would be up all night “figuring” and in the morning, the kitchen table would be full of papers with all his brain storms. Even though he only had a 5th grade education, Ed was very sharp at math and did all his calculating without the help of a calculator or computer back in the early years. Ed even at one time advertised his feed business on a Sioux City TV station.

Ed was a self-educated, self-made man, and a bit of an inventor. He was always trying to figure out how to make a given job easier, such as the building of the portable grinder as a young man. Ed also designed a patented foal feeder later in life that he, with the help of Florence, put together and packaged in their basement and shipped all over the country. Son-in-law, Gordon Williamson, did the welding for the foal feeders.

Florence went to Beautician School right after high school, and started working in Hartley as a beautician after she graduated from Beautician school. Florence's Beauty Shop was originally below the old post office, then moved to a room in the American Legion Hall in 1940, and in 1950 Florence moved her shop into her home on Maple Drive in Hartley. Florence did have other beauticians work with her at times, but mostly worked alone. When Ed & Florence built a new house on Hwy 18 in 1955, Florence did make a small area for a beauty shop in her basement and did some appointments for people who still insisted she do their hair, but she retired mostly at that time in 1955. During those years, Florence worked full time as a beautician, as well as raising 3 daughters and also taking feed orders for Ed's grinding and feed business, as well as doing the bookkeeping for Brinkert Feed Co.

Ed and Florence had 4 children:

Vance Edward Brinkert – a son born Aug. 4, 1937 and died at 6 weeks of age on Sept. 11, 1937 from an open spine, call spina bifida.

Margo Ann Brinkert Harms was born Aug. 13, 1939

Roxanne Rae Brinkert Williamson was born Jan. 6, 1945

Shelley Lou Brinkert Hjelm was born Oct. 17, 1949.

In 1955 Ed and Florence built a new house on Hwy 18 at 460 3rd St. NE. Ed had promised daughter, Shelley, that once they had more land at the new house that they would buy her a pony. A pony was purchased soon after moving and also a grade, albino mare was purchased for Ed and the older girls to ride. Ed and Florence were both animal lovers and we always had pets in the house, cats and/or dogs. Ed tried to save every animal in distress that he saw, so, at times, we had bunnies or birds in a cage being nursed back to health and once hatched out pheasant eggs because the mother pheasant had been killed while mowing hay in our field. Ed even raised King Homing Pigeons at one time at the new built house, and his sister, Mae Bojens, nicknamed our house, PIGEON POOP PALACE.

Daughter Shelley was the horse crazy child and was mesmerized by the thought of owning an Arabian horse after reading the popular children books, The Black Stallion and King of the Wind. Shelly talked Ed into breeding their grade mare to an Arabian stallion, and that was accomplished in 1957. Ed became very interested in the Arabian horses and in 1959 the family vacation was spent driving around the country and visiting some famous Arabian horse farms. In the fall of 1959, Ed purchased his first Arabian horses, a mare with a foal at side and a stallion, from Daniel C Gainey of Owatonna, MN (who was the owner of Josten Class Rings). Ed and Florence paid \$5,000 for the 3 horses and Ed told us girls to absolutely NOT tell anyone in Hartley what we paid for those horses, because everyone would think he was Nuts for paying that much for horses.

The breeding of Arabian horses became a passion for Ed, and the family bred, raised, trained, showed and sold Arabian horses for the rest of Ed's life. Ed and Florence named their Arabian horse farm MaRoSh Arabians after their 3 daughters – MArgo, ROxie, and SHelley.

Ed and Florence were one of the earliest breeders of Arabian horses in Iowa and also one of the largest breeders of Arabian horses in the Midwest during the 70's and 80's, having at one time as many as 60 horses. The horses were all housed on 24 acres and 2 barns that were built behind the house on Hwy. 18. In the 70's, 80's and 90's, our family showed horses all over the country and went as far as Calgary, Canada, Scottsdale, AZ., and Louisville, Kentucky to show horses. Ed also sold horses all over the country, including some foreign countries. Ed was active in the International Arabian Horse Association and was a board member of the Iowa Arabian Horse Association.

Ed and Florence enjoyed traveling and after selling the Feed Co., they did more traveling and would spend winter months in Florida and Arizona, and flew to Hawaii 3 different times. Ed particularly loved staying in Scottsdale, Arizona, in the winter, because of the huge Arabian horse show and because Scottsdale became a hub for Arabian horse farms.

Ed and Florence were long time members of the St. Paul's Lutheran Church where Florence was well known for making food for every occasion at the church.

Ed was a member of the Hartley Chamber of Commerce, the International Arabian Horse Association, served on the board of the Iowa Arabian Horse Association, and was a founding member of the Feed Grinding Association that was formed by area operators.

Florence was famous in Hartley for being a great cook and she would make food for everything and anything that went on in Hartley.

Florence enjoyed playing cards and belonged to a couple of card clubs. She also belonged to the Friday Club, a social group. She was a girl scout leader when us girls were young, and, also was a volunteer to deliver Meals on Wheels.

Ed and Florence were both workaholics and even with limited education and starting out with nothing, they made a good life for themselves, simply from hard work, determination, and passion.

Ed suffered from ulcers during his life and as a young man had 18 inches of his intestines removed. He was sick on a couple of occasions because of bleeding ulcers. Both Ed and Florence were heavy smokers, as many people were in those days. Ed stopped smoking at the doctors' insistence first and Florence stopped when Ed was hospitalized because of heart surgery. Ed and Florence both had open heart surgery in later life. Florence had asthma and suffered from COPD in later life.

Ed died on Jan. 1, 1997 at the age of 83 years from an ulcerated esophagus. He bled internally from his esophagus and died in the ambulance on the way to the Spencer Hospital.

Florence died on March 4, 2002 at the age of 88 years after being hospitalized from having pneumonia and suffering a stroke and breaking her hip in the hospital.