

# Rural Roots

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God, apparently, saw things differently.

Only 13 years after that visit, not only did the Twin Cities become my home, but the 41st floor of the IDS Building became my place of work, as I began my career as a lawyer at Lindquist & Vennum, a 165 attorney Minneapolis-based law firm. I am a partner at the firm and co-chair our Financial Restructuring and Bankruptcy group

My wife Teresa and our family have now lived in the Twin Cities for 28 years—always in the suburbs with space to garden and views of nature. Our children grew up here and we're active members of our parish; we're firmly planted in this urban soil.

## A Plan to Return

But that wasn't always our plan. Originally, we came to the Twin Cities in the midst of the farm crisis in the 1980s. I intended to work at the firm for a couple of years, but always planned to return to the family farm near the Manitoba border.

There were a lot of reasons to go back. Most of my great grandparents homesteaded in that part of North Dakota at the turn of the 20th century, and my family's roots still ran deep in the community. It's a place where everybody knows your name (and your business).

I also loved the farm work, enjoying both grain farming and our registered Hereford cattle operation. I had been a leader in organizations like FFA and 4-H as a youth, and went on to study agricultural economics and animal sci-

career and a growing family.

After several years of discernment, Teresa and I decided in 1998 to make the Twin Cities our permanent home. Today my father and step-mother still live on the farm. My brother and his family are taking over the farm and my two sisters and their families make their homes nearby.

## Lessons Learned

While I am 550 miles from our family farm, the lessons I learned there prepared me for my legal career in the Twin Cities. Some of the farm work wasn't glamorous—such as dealing with itchy oat dust from the feed bin in 100-degree weather or cleaning out a years worth of manure from the lean-to by hand every summer. But, I also remember the sense of satisfaction when each of



Far left: Jim Lodoen sits with his cowboy boots kicked up at his desk at Lindquist & Vennum, LLP., in downtown Minneapolis, Minn. *Smpenz Photography*. This page: the Hereford cattle of the Lodoen family farm in Westhope, N.D. *Submitted Photo*

ence at North Dakota State University.

In fact, after I graduated from NDSU in 1982, I went to law school at the University of North Dakota as a way to keep my options open until the farm economy turned around. But the farm crisis was even worse when I left law school, and it didn't seem like a good time to start farming. So I took a job as a judicial clerk for the North Dakota bankruptcy judge for two years, working on many cases involving, ironically, farm bankruptcies.

With the farm economy slow to recover, I decided to get the best job possible in order to take care of my family, which then included my wife and a son. One thing led to another, and I soon found myself with a successful law

these projects was done. This taught me to never think I was above doing certain work.

I also remember the anxiety felt as I waited for needed rain or feared ominous clouds which sometimes caused the "white combine" to level a field with hail. I remember the joy of finding a newborn calf in a snowstorm and bringing it back to life in the basement or bathtub, and I also remember the sound of the last "bellar" of a little calf that died instead. These lessons taught me that so many things can be out of our control, and ups and downs are a part of life. You just have to keep pressing on and have faith in God's ultimate plan.

My time on the farm also fostered an appreciation for

**Right: Lodoen in his boots looks out from his office over Minneapolis.**  
*Smpenz Photography.*

**Below: Another view of the Lodoen family farm and home in Westhope, N.D.**  
*Submitted photo.*

the financial needs of a family. I remember the financial challenges my family experienced at various times—even after we had worked hard all year—because adverse weather, markets or interest rates prevailed. By comparison, while the practice of law is challenging, I can still generally count on a steady income, for which I am grateful.

My farm background also taught me the importance of managing time and responsibilities, and how to juggle many balls at the same time. And it also taught me the importance of excellence and attention to detail, which are key to succeeding as a farmer and as a lawyer.

Finally, my faith was formed during my days in North Dakota. I was raised Presbyterian in a wonderful rural congregation with many adults who encouraged my faith. I converted to Catholicism so that my wife-to-be and I would be “equally yoked.” I have since come to fully appreciate and treasure the richness and beauty of my Catholic faith.

### **Living in the City, but Affirming the Countryside**

Farming is a unique vocation that provides the opportunity to meld family, work and faith in a beautiful, holistic way. But rural life provides only the opportunity for this integrity of life; it's not a guarantee. It doesn't always happen, and I observe that many miss these opportunities presented by rural life. Secular culture and access to mainstream media challenge rural families in the same way they challenge those in the city, with a constant barrage of worldly and materialistic temptations. Rural families used to be somewhat removed from much of this, but sadly not anymore.

Life in the Twin Cities provides certain benefits for raising children. It is easy to find a dynamic faith community, including other families committed to the faith—which can sometimes be difficult in certain rural communities. And extensive educational opportunities exist in the cities.

On the other hand, it takes extra effort to find meaningful work for younger children in an urban or suburban context, so that they can learn the importance of work and responsibility that I learned on the farm. And it is difficult to find ways to work together with your children like my mom and dad did with me, where my character was formed and life lessons were learned.

One of my favorite memories of Westhope is the image of our local banker, Ray, and Jim, the custodian at the school, sitting at a table at the local café for morning coffee. In the rural communities, everyone of various faiths, ages and income levels interacted with one another. In the Twin Cities, that doesn't happen as much. Your career dictates your income, and your income often dictates the price you will pay for a house, and this in turn dictates the neighborhood where you live, shop, go to school and go to church. The banker and the custodian at the school aren't as apt to mix. That is unfortunate.

Economically and spiritually, strong rural communities are essential for those who live there. But it is also important for those of us who live in the urban areas to have strong rural areas so that the rural culture survives. We learn from each other, and share our life lessons. And we share our faith lessons. The Bible is filled with references and parables that use rural and agricultural lessons and images, lessons missed by those who do not understand farm life. I am glad I do.

