

# Blaming the Victim

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May 7, 2022

Lyman, South Dakota

Two weeks ago, I had never heard of Lyman, South Dakota, or Elna F. Bekker. Today we are walking in Elna's footsteps in the tiny town where she was born.

Elna was a distant relative (my father's, mother's, uncle's, daughter, if you can wrap your head around that). She was brought to my attention by a fellow family ancestry researcher, Marie Adams. Marie gave me a few tidbits of information about Elna and suggested we see what history we can uncover during the South Dakota leg of our journey.



We found this lovely old “fixer-upper” in Lyman. I have no idea who lived here, but let's assume it was the Bekker's, just for fun.

Based upon the information Marie gave me, data from the Bekker Ancestry site, and a smattering of embellishment, here is Elna's story:

Elna Bekker was born in Lyman in 1909, to Bendix and Marie Bekker. She was the eldest of four siblings. Her brother Dewey was born in the same calendar year as Elna, 11 months apart.

The family moved from South Dakota to Saskatchewan in 1911, when Elna was a toddler.

Elna's father died when she was 11, her youngest sister was only 3. Elna's mother, Marie Anne Bekker, raised the four children on her own. At some point Marie married again, to a man we know little about.

A pivotal event in Elna's life occurred when she was 16 or 17. Elna and her new stepfather had a romantic entanglement. Her mother kept the wayward husband and sent Elna to Nebraska, to work as a cook on an uncle's ranch. This would have been about 1926.



Elna worked at the uncle's ranch for more than a decade. She married a man named Gus Allison in 1937, while working there.

We don't know much about Gus, but it isn't a stretch to presume that he was a cowboy working on the ranch where Elna did the cooking.

Gus was 14 years older than Elna - I don't read too much into this, but 28 to 42 is a significant age differential.

The couple moved to Alliance, Box Butte County, Nebraska and lived there until Gus died in 1957.

He was 61. Elna would have been a young widow, at 47. The couple was childless.

Elna married a neighbour in 1960, Gerald Coady, a man her own age. I know nothing of Gerald's story. I don't know if he was single, divorced or widowed himself. The couple lived in Alliance the rest of their lives.

Elna died in 1969 at 60 years of age. She is buried in Alliance, Nebraska cemetery.

Standing here in *downtown* Lyman I can picture a little girl born at a tumultuous time. She hasn't had her first birthday yet and a brother is born.

More upheaval occurs as the family moves to Canada to take up a homestead before Elna is 3 years old. By the time Elna is 8 there are two more siblings, and the family is living in pioneer conditions near Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan.



Lyman General Store

I imagine that Elna felt overlooked as a child, having a baby brother robbing her of attention before her first birthday. Then, two more babies came along, while the family scratched out a homestead on the treeless Saskatchewan plains. When her father died so young and left the family struggling, Elna must have felt abandoned, and vulnerable.

I don't know what the circumstances were leading to her father's death, but this event would have been a terrible blow to Elna, her mother, and the entire family. Her father's demise heaped additional responsibility on the eldest child's narrow shoulders, more than any 11-year-old should bear.

Enter, a villain. Most family stories have one, they come in many forms. This scoundrel joined the Bekker family at a time when Elna needed a hero. Instead, she got a lecherous stepfather, intent on exploiting Elna's vulnerability. "Affairs" were not talked about at the time (gossiped about maybe, but not logically discussed).

We know very little about the circumstances of the tryst between Elna and her stepfather. It *takes two to tango*, but any time a child and an adult are involved, the adult bears the responsibility.

We don't know all the circumstances, or exactly what possessed Elna's mother to banish her to a Nevada cattle ranch as a teenager, but it seems to be an egregious case of ...

**... Blaming the Victim.**



There is no tangible evidence of Elna in Lyman. There is also no direct family lineage to remember her. Elna's never-born children are also victims.

I hope that Elna found joy in her life, here in the great expanse of the American mid-west.

The outskirts of Lyman, or could it be Gravelbourg?



Marie's kitchen ...



... Ben's still?

