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MORE THAN A MEMOIR

For Caltech, with appreciation.

Nelson J. Leonard

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Dedication

To the four women in my life:

My mother, Olga

My daughter, Marcia

My wife, Louise (Nell) Vermey
and

My wife, Peggy

Preface

This autobiography was written originally as a test of memory, as a means of diminishing piles of stored papers and file folders, and in an effort to record events as they actually happened. It had been my experience as a child, hearing oral histories presented by adult family members, that there was great variance in their perceptions. Perhaps I could set down the “facts” of a life and leave interpretations up to any readers.

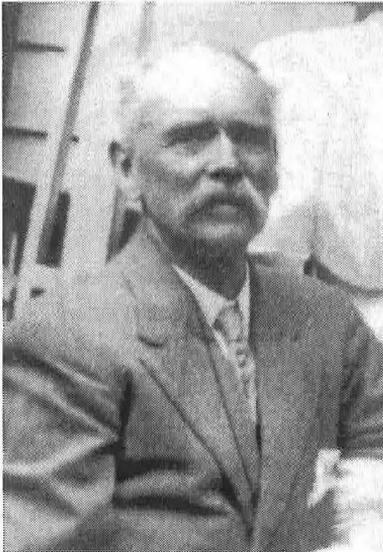
Each of the chapters was distributed to my four children, Kenneth, Marcia, James and David. Inasmuch as they read the sporadic mailings, I incorporated their corrections and tried to answer any questions they raised. I relied upon friends to check specific chapters against their memories and upon Peggy Phelps to offer penetrating criticism where she discerned opinion masquerading as fact. Diane Orona deciphered my handwriting sufficiently to produce a handsome, typed manuscript, and I thank her for her patience and her aim at perfection.

Who will read such a manuscript? Who among the grandchildren or children has the time for it? With the completion of the story, can I hope that others may find it of interest? The very personal nature may decide against that. The diverse nature of the subject matter would guide toward selective readings: organic chemistry with some biochemistry and plant physiology; music, but mainly singing; bi-continental living and romance; family; travel; universities; extraneous material about foundations, research support, national and international organizations, even some talks (in the appendix). However, there is a whole to it—the story of a sample life in the twentieth century and a bit into the twenty-first. I have found life’s journey exciting and rewarding. I have been fantastically lucky.

NJL

MY PARENTS

My father, Harvey Nelson Leonard (1877-1949), born in Buffalo, New York, was the son of William Nelson Leonard (1848-1915) and Julia Angeline Reynolds (1851-1935). His parents, whose ancestors had come from England in the first half of the seventeenth century, also had two daughters, Flora and Kate, who were born in 1871 and 1874, respectively. My mother, Olga Pauline Jordan (1882-1958), born in Hoboken, New Jersey, was the daughter of Caroline Klein and Henry W. Jordan, whose dates are less certain. Their forebears were Huguenots, who left France for Germany in late eighteenth century and sailed to the United States in mid nineteenth century. Olga was the oldest of four children, and she had some responsibility for the younger three: Henry, Louis, and Emma. Nevertheless, she was able to finish high school. She played the piano and could play the organ, while Henry played the cello. There was always music in their home.



Grandfather, William Nelson Leonard



Grandmother, Julia Angeline Reynolds

My father was unable to finish high school because he had to aid in the support of his two older sisters. I gather that his father William was not a very successful breadwinner, although he was adored by the family. My father, Harvey, went to work in a bicycle shop in New York City when he was fourteen. His stories of that time had an heroic quality, e.g., how he used to be able to lead two bicycles along for delivery, steering his own bicycle as necessary with his feet, and how he was fortuitously saved from being trampled when he, riding south on Broadway and turning east on 42nd Street, collided with a horse-drawn tram, coming north on Broadway and also turning east on 42nd Street. The triangular frame of his bicycle was caught on the whiffletree and lifted safely between the two horses. He helped to construct a bicycle built for six, for the Flora Dora Sextet, who were a Broadway act. He obviously enjoyed his bicycle days, and he was mechanically inclined. It was his parents' desire, however, that he should become a white-collar worker, quite possibly with an improved salary. Accordingly, he became a salesman of men's clothing and worked for many years for F.R. Tripler, an upscale store in New York City. My mother held the opinion that if he had stayed in the bicycle shop, he could have made the transition to automobiles and could have enjoyed a more interesting and profitable occupation. Nevertheless, my father adapted well to the retail trade and developed a large and loyal following of customers—friends, he called them.



Father, Harvey Nelson Leonard



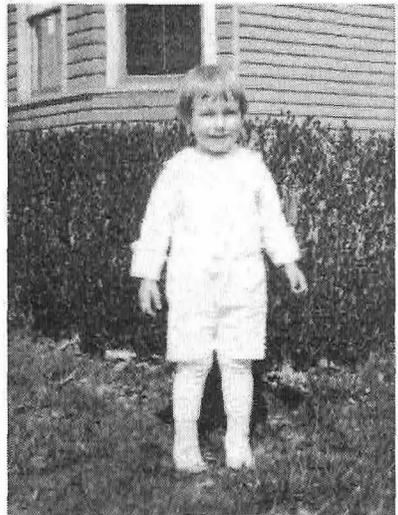
Mother, Olga Pauline Jordan

MORE THAN A MEMOIR

The first meeting of Olga and Harvey took place in Red Bank, New Jersey. It happened this way, according to my mother. She was visiting Carrie Mount, who was her sister-in-law, the sister of Ralph Mount, whom Emma had married. A Mr. Canfield, a sometime suitor of Carrie, was also coming for the weekend and was bringing along his friend, Harvey Leonard. The Mount house stood by itself with a clear view of the street (I visited there as a small boy) that led from the railway station. Olga spotted the two men walking from the station shortly after the scheduled time of arrival of their train from the City. It seems to have been a case of "love at first fright." Olga was about five feet, five inches tall. The dapper Harvey came striding along, six feet, one inch tall, sporting a cap and a handlebar moustache, and carrying his suitcase on his shoulder. Olga needed coaxing from Carrie to come downstairs to meet the new visitor. Family history does not record how long it took for shyness to give way to interest and affection, but that happened. In the first decade of the 20th century, it is also not clear how young people ever advanced to the engagement stage, especially when they came from "proper" families like the Jordans and the Leonards. Most contacts were made at weekend visits with friends or family members, or at church, or at "house parties," where married chaperones were present. Flora and Kate were not initially receptive to the



NJL, fourteen weeks

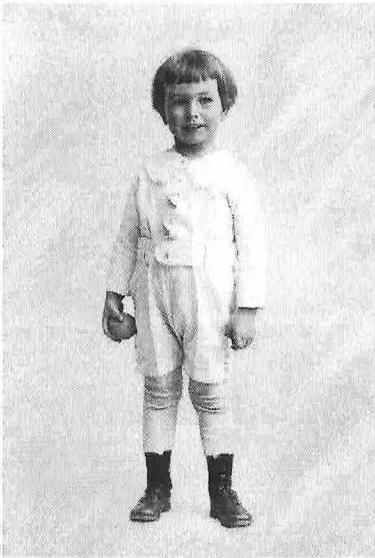


NJL, two years, seven months

idea of a sister-in-law, but the financial implication was relieved somewhat by the marriage of Kate to George T. Macbeth. He was a gas engineer

from South Carolina, who had been educated most recently at Temple University and who had been hired by the Westchester Lighting Company, with its main office in Mount Vernon, New York, where the Leonard family lived. Olga and Harvey were married on August 19, 1911, with Emma Mount as matron-of-honor and George Macbeth as best man. The couple honeymooned at Glen Falls, Watkins Glen, in upstate New York, and they started life together in Arlington, New Jersey, north of Newark.

In September, 1913, they had a son, Harvey, Jr., but he survived only one month. It was not until September 1, 1916, that their second son, namely Nelson, was born in the Presbyterian Hospital, Newark, New Jersey. I frightened them with a milder form of colic than my predecessor had, but I survived and grew. In 1918, the family recovered from another scare when my mother and I both had the influenza that was sweeping the world at the close of the first World War. Somehow, I felt assured that my parents, ever attentive, would always take care of me. I was allowed to be outside the house alone, and I was supposed to stay on the sidewalk in the small block on which we lived. If someone was concerned about my being lost, I was to recite, "I live at two two two Brighton Avenoo." We moved to Mount Vernon, New York, on the north side, when I was two and one-half years old in order to be closer to my paternal grandmother and to give my father an easier commute to his place of work in the City.



NJL., four years

My maternal grandfather moved in with us when he became a widower, and my mother, as the older daughter, assumed responsibility for him until he died. My memory of Henry Jordan is that of an amicable man with a moustache who used to read to me as I sat on his lap. We moved to the south side of Mount Vernon when I was four, and from that time forward we lived never more than one block away from the house in which Grandmother Julia, Aunt Flora, Aunt Kate, and Uncle George lived. I grew up surrounded by adults, all of whom offered advice and discipline, and all of whom "spoiled" me to some extent. There were, however, plenty of children my age in the neighborhood, and there was a growing contingent of cousins with whom I could spend holidays (Louis' and also Emma's children).

My parents never owned a house, never owned a car. Trolley car stops were two blocks from the house. One route would take us to the head of the subway line in the Bronx at 241st Street and White Plains Road on the Lexington Avenue line. The other route would take us to Pelham, New Rochelle, and the beaches on Long Island Sound (with one transfer for an extra five cents). A station on an electrified railroad line ambitiously named the New York, Westchester, and Boston Railway, was about five blocks away. The railroad was never extended beyond 139th Street in the Bronx going south and beyond White Plains going north. Six days a week, my father walked to and from the Mount Vernon station of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad (about 12 minutes), on which he commuted to the Grand Central Station at 42nd Street (about 24 minutes). There were small food stores, a drugstore, dry cleaner, and a fresh fish store two blocks away from our house and the major shopping avenue stretched between three to five blocks away. My mother shopped frequently because we had only a small ice box at the first addresses we occupied. I went along as a carrier when needed and with my little express wagon for bigger shoppings on Saturday. All of the schools I attended in Mount Vernon were within walking distance—elementary, middle school, junior high school, and high school. They were good schools with excellent teachers, and my mother was active in the PTA (Parent-Teachers Association).

We did not suffer from the lack of a car because of the efficient public transportation. Moreover, the houses in which we lived did not have any space for a garage. It was customary for us to take family walks, especially on Sunday afternoons or on holidays, although occasionally friends or relatives with an automobile would take us for an afternoon ride. While this was a treat for my parents, it was never a treat for me because I suffered from motion sickness. In my Uncle George's seven-passenger Franklin, I usually sat on one of the jump seats with my nose poking through a small window opening. In addition to walking around Mount Vernon, it was a custom to take a trolley car to the end of the line and then walk from there in the more open spaces. Dad always walked briskly, swinging his cane.

In the years when I was growing up, the churches were a major source of social life as well as spiritual guidance. The rented house in which I lived from the age of about four was adjacent to Trinity Episcopal Church. My father went to an early communion service on Sunday and was then free to work in his basement shop or to do various house repairs. My mother went to a later service and then came home to finish preparing Sunday dinner, customarily a feast. She was in the Women's Guild and in

some club which seemed to be devoted mainly to the playing of bridge. My father was in the Men's Club, which boasted, although not too loudly, of having one billiard table and two pool tables in their basement clubroom. I thought that room was a kind of "heaven," for I was allowed to come and watch the proceedings as long as I could sit absolutely still. It is enigmatic that a pool hall was considered an acceptable place for a child because it was in a parish house. My father was a skilled pool player and, when I was considered old enough, my patient teacher. Adult dances were held regularly in the parish house, plays were performed, and musicals and operettas were produced. All this was in addition to the special choir music that one could hear on Sunday evenings. A gymnasium with an almost-regulation basketball court was available to the young people of the church and for Boy Scout and Girl Scout meetings. The Boy's Choir, which I joined, rehearsed on Wednesday and Friday afternoons in a small room adjacent to the gym. When the combination of strong discipline and repressed energy became too explosive, we were released into the gym for a brief intermission. The phenomenon of church-centered social life that was pervasive in the 1920s can still be found in selected regions of the country and in certain churches, but other opportunities and diversions now abound.

What other social life did my parents have? It was mild, I can assure you. It was a custom for them to join friends, other married couples—perhaps three of them—for an evening of cards and dessert. I remember being taken to Aunt Flora's to stay overnight when, on a Saturday, my parents would be "going out to play cards." When it became my parents' turn to be the hosts, I probably made a nuisance of myself. After being put to bed, I would sneak down and sit silently on the stairs, trying to absorb the scene, if not to be a part of it. Someone would discover my presence, and I would have to retreat quickly. The process would be repeated until no one found it amusing. Bribery with a small dessert would end the incursions when tiredness did not. Occasionally, my parents would go out to a movie and, when I was considered old enough, they would take me, but only to films that were either uplifting or funny.

Both parents loved to swim. My mother always did the breast stroke with her head well out of the water. My father liked to float, which he could while remaining remarkably still. I once bet him that he couldn't read a newspaper while floating. I swam out to him, holding a rolled-up paper out of the water and placing it in his hands. To everyone's amusement, there was a gentleman floating and reading a newspaper out in the small bay. My dad was not shy in demonstrating his prowess. On the next swimming outing, I ventured to bet him that he could not read a newspaper *and* smoke a cigar while floating. He agreed to try. Accordingly,

a friend and I swam out to the floating parent and assisted in placing the lighted cigar in his mouth and the spread newspaper in his hands. Then we swam away. Now, to everyone's amazement, there was a gentleman floating out in the bay, reading a newspaper, *and* smoking a cigar. Wonder of wonders! All of a sudden, the peaceful scene metamorphosed into one of great splashing, coughing, and confusion. With my dad's hands occupied holding the newspaper, as the cigar burned down, there was no place for the cigar ash to go but all over his face. He recognized that the outcome might have been anticipated, but when he swam in following recovery, all he said to me was, "You son of a sea cook!" It was one of his favorite expressions.

There was a time of approximately seven years of my Dad's life when he was in excellent physical shape. Almost every Sunday after early church service, he would hike to Hunter Island in Long Island Sound, which was reached by a small pedestrian bridge from the mainland. The distance he actually walked was about seven miles round trip. The purpose was to take a dip in the Sound at a secluded, rocky spot on the east coast of Hunter Island. When I was about seven, I asked if I could go with him on a warm Sunday—he went the year round. We shortened the walking portion by taking a trolley part way. I enjoyed the excursion and the brief swim, but I did my usual trick of stepping on a piece of broken glass, and I needed bandaging. My variation on that trick was to step on a nail, which I did on several other swimming or clambering occasions. Two Sundays later, I asked to accompany my Dad again. After strong admonitions given by him and earnest promises on my part that I would watch where I was stepping, we made our second joint expedition to Hunter Island. It went very well. My mother, who had been so concerned about my wound on the first occasion that she did not ask me anything about the swimming, made up for her unasked questions with the following (approximate) exchange on the second occasion.

"Which bathing suit did you take?"

"None. You don't need one. I had a towel."

"Did Dad have a bathing suit?"

"No, he had a towel."

"Were there only men swimming there?"

"No, there were women also."

"Well, did anyone have a bathing suit?"

"I don't think so. Dad said they were mainly Swedish people, who liked to swim without anything on."

On the Monday that followed, my father said to me somewhat accusingly, "Son, you sure queered it for me!" He seemed to lose interest in those

Sunday walks and swims. Some seven or eight years later, we initiated a different practice on Sunday afternoons in the early summer. We would rent a rowboat near Hudson Park, New Rochelle, New York, and row out from shore. My father would try to fish, and I would jump out and swim around nearby. He never did catch anything, but he liked being out on the water and he indulged my whim to swim freely quite far from land. I was reminded of those afternoons in 1942 when I was about to leave New York for my job in Illinois. He questioned me, "Son, how long will you be able to be away from the sound of oarlocks?" It was an old-fashioned statement, but I understood its significance. For my part, the question was answered when Nell and I discovered Dunewood on Lake Michigan (1949). It is still being answered in my present fortunate locations with Peggy on weekends in St. Malo, Oceanside, on the Pacific Ocean, and in Desbarats, Ontario, during the summer.

There were swimming vacations in the summer when I was young, but they were a brief one or two weeks according to my Dad's allotted time off. I recall the locations of Lake Hammersly near Pawling in Dutchess County, New York, and Atlantic Highlands, Sea Bright, and Ocean Grove on the New Jersey coast. My parents enjoyed the Atlantic surf. In those days, there were ropes stretching out into the water that people would hang on and thus prevent their being washed out to sea. The waves appeared huge and threatening in my recollection. My father spent some time fishing when we camped alongside Lake Hammersly, but he was not a very lucky fisherman. At one stage in his life, he went occasionally with his friends on weekend excursions that were billed as deep-sea fishing adventures. The strange thing was that he never brought home any fish or, in fact, any part of a fish. My mother observed, moreover, that he was always very tired when he returned home on the Sunday evening. Those were prohibition years, and our supposition was that fishing was never really an important part of the adventure. The fishing vessel would make for a location outside the twelve-mile limit where it would be legal for a "rum running" ship to deliver whiskey to the "fishermen." Then, overindulgence in reasonable, tax-free liquor combined with the chop of the Atlantic could easily produce the "tiredness" that was so obvious at the end of the weekend.

Dad's other interests included pool, which I have mentioned, flying kites (for my benefit, of course), working in his shop in the basement, and playing checkers with a friend of his, Arthur Babcock. He also liked to ride trains despite the fact that he commuted six days a week. He tried all the little branches of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad and of the New York Central Railroad that served parts of Westchester

and Dutchess Counties in those days. These included the Silvermine Branch of the N.Y. Central, which actually terminated at a mine.

If Dad had had engineering training, he might have been an inventor. He could make and repair things. He made a fancy doorbell for the house at 342 South Third Avenue, Mount Vernon. It was made of brass, had a light inside that we could turn on at night and that shone through perforations reading “342”. The front of the small brass box was tilted down so that the number could be read without the necessity of coming up the steps onto the front porch. Dad tried to patent the construction, but it was deemed to have been a composite of known materials, as so it was. I have seen some versions of a lighted doorbell with a house number on it, but none so grand as our “342.” Summers could be very hot and humid in Mount Vernon, so Dad fixed up an outside cold shower in the grape arbor behind the house. He laid linoleum on the wooden floor of the arbor and constructed two canvas folding side doors that snapped into place, forming a corridor between the back door to the kitchen and the vine-protected shower. Cold showers outdoors before bedtime made it possible for all the family to go to sleep even on the hottest nights. Dad constructed a simple pinball machine for me as a gift when I was about ten years old. That game, made of wood, brass strips, brass nails, bells, sunken chromium pockets for the stainless steel balls, and a spring-loaded releasing device for the balls, remained in the family and was used by our children and the neighbors’ children until electronic games came into being!

Dad was fascinated by fires, and I was also, although frightened as well. Mount Vernon had a volunteer fire department that was summoned by a certain pattern of whistles to the site of a fire in the city. There were fire boxes distributed throughout the city and all were numbered. In our section of the city, most of the streets and avenues were numbered. By inspecting the numbers that appeared on the fire boxes (red, with a handle that could be pulled down) and relating these to the street and avenue crossing, I could decipher the code. The number of whistles and the number of pauses between whistles defined the location of the box that had been “pulled.” Thus, we could know where the trouble was and whether it was a walk or a bike ride away, or whether it was in another part of town. Nevertheless, I learned that it was not really fun to see someone’s house burn and also to worry about where the wind would carry the sparks.

What else did we do together? We went to Coney Island, on—or just off—Long Island. All three of us went the first time, and Dad and I went on subsequent visits to experience the more energetic rides. Steeplechase

Park within Coney Island was named after the mechanical steeplechase ride that circled the outside, high on the building. The riders sat on painted horses that traveled on parallel tracks that went up a high incline to begin with. This provided the potential energy that was then converted to kinetic energy for a fast trip downhill and lots of ups and downs thereafter as the tracks circled the building. It added the factor of a race to the individual roller coaster experience of those riding the parallel horse tracks. My favorite amusement was a high wooden slide with bumps that deposited one onto a flat array of polished wooden disks, with adjacent disks turning in different directions at different speeds. The body took a lot of “to-and-froing” until it was finally pushed off to a side trough that surrounded the square table of rotating disks. I would spend my time on the slide while my Dad liked to sit in a nearby theater with a stage that was actually the exit of a fun house. People would stumble onto the stage, groggy from the experiences of the dark fun house, but feeling that they were finally safe. They were not. A clown equipped with an electric cattle goad would threaten them into position over holes in the stage floor through which sudden blasts of air would raise the skirts of the girls and ladies. Such sexist exploitation and the “shocking” procedures visited on both males and females would probably not be acceptable practice today. I am speaking of 75 years ago. Amusement at the victim’s expense.

Luna Park had a Shoot-the-Shoots, so-called, that was really a short roller coaster ending with a splash into water. Outside these two parks were other amusements that challenged courage. One was a huge ferris wheel in which some of the carriages were fixed and some, when they had reached the apex, would slide down a track as though they would fly beyond the circumference of the wheel. A switch of tracks would bring them back into the interior of the huge wheel. Thrills could also be obtained on a wooden roller coaster called the Thunderbolt that lived up to its name and was one of the tallest of the time.

My father was not always in a good mood. His salesman’s job, always catering to the public, to the customers, often discouraged him. He would do some carpentry work to recover his spirit. When he was in good spirits, he would whistle. Mother and I loved to hear him whistle because he was very good at it. He invented a family whistle that, when he performed it from the front porch, meant that I should come in for dinner. It took only one whistle. Dad was superstitious, as were many of his era. It is not worth reciting some of his concerns, although I find that I unconsciously avoid some of the practices, such as raising an umbrella over your head in the house, placing a pair of shoes on the table, etc., that he was convinced brought bad luck. In later life, he developed ailments that were debilitating.

Varicose veins eventually led to ulcerated sores on his legs that required him to sit at home with his legs elevated. When the legs had healed, he could return to work. Adam Gimbel, who ran Saks Fifth Avenue, provided him with a folding stool that he could sit on when not waiting on a customer. I believe he was the only salesman in the store who had permission to sit or lean during working hours. He used the privilege only as much as necessary. He developed cancer of the prostate. After a prostatectomy, he remained in good health for several years until metastasis to the bones occurred, with its painful, eventually fatal consequence. My mother had a hard time taking care of him in his final half-year, but they arrived at a full and sympathetic understanding of each other during that period. When Nell and I drove from Illinois to Mount Vernon for the 1948 Christmas-New Year vacation in our new Mercury convertible, we organized the christening ceremony for Kenneth to take place in Dad's bedroom, much to his satisfaction. He was relieved to have another male Leonard in the family, the first one of the next generation. He was charmed by Ken's happy nature. When it became time for us to leave in January, I said goodbye and told him that I was praying for him. He asked rather aggressively *what* I was praying. I could sense that his pain was making death a welcome friend, so I answered simply, "For God's will to be done." He appeared relieved, and we parted on that note. He died in March, 1949, at the age of 72. I returned for the simple funeral.

My mother died at 76, so that she had some happy years to be Grammy to all four children. Although she had some nervousness and a tendency to high blood pressure, both were in control at the time of her death, which occurred suddenly during a heart attack. She had been playing bridge with "the girls," all old friends about her age, and was waiting for a bus to take her back to the apartment when she was stricken. I happened to be lecturing at the University of Rochester when my friends there were notified. (The value of a distributed itinerary is indicated.) I was permitted to finish the lecture and to answer questions, after which I was told as gently as possible. There is really no way to soften the blow of the loss of a parent or loved one, however. One moment you don't expect anything, and the next moment you know the worst. Resilience is necessary because death is followed by so many requisite formalities, not the least of which is the arrangement of the funeral and the burial. My parents' bodies occupied the last two graves in a pleasant cemetery in West New York, NJ, where my mothers' parents were buried, also the infant Harvey, Jr.

It was not until two weeks later that I broke down, when Nell and I had started to go through my mother's things in order to clean out her apartment in Mount Vernon. I was unable to act fast enough in deciding

what to do with her few possessions; accordingly, Nell shooed me out of there and made her own decisions quickly and unencumbered, with very good results. Nell and my mother really loved each other and enjoyed each other's sense of humor. In all Mother's visits with us in Urbana, Illinois, and in Manistee, Michigan, she never interfered with the running of the household or with the way we were bringing up our children. She really loved the four children, concocted various forms of mischief with them—as grandparents are supposed to do—read to them, played games, and occasionally cooked some desired specialty. Grandmotherhood was a happy time for her.

My mother had love for everyone. I am unsure as to whether this developed over time and experience or whether she had love in her heart from the beginning. She followed the approximate biblical words, "For now abideth faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love," from the King James version. Her feelings of love were real; they did not prevent her from being full of fun as well. She would have been surprised if someone had doubted the authenticity of her warmth. She had many friends and was always doing something for someone else. I felt her maternal concern and affection, even when I was being punished. I received spankings when I deserved them, accompanied by calming words such as, "I'm doing this for your own good." When the accompaniment changed to "This is hurting my hand more than it is your bottom," we both ended up laughing, and she concluded with "You will just have to behave yourself," making it a matter of pride for me to "toe the mark," which was my father's usual admonition. Forgiveness was always quick.

Mother was usually there when I came home from school in the afternoon, but if she planned to be away, the key was placed under the mat. If this were forgotten, I could climb up the trellis at the end of the front porch, ease myself onto the roof overhang, and enter the house through one of the unlocked bedroom windows that opened onto the roof. She asked for a demonstration as to how I could do this because she questioned that it was really possible. Imagine my surprise when, some weeks later, she arrived home before I did, had forgotten her key, and I found her in the process of climbing the trellis. The overhang would certainly have defeated her. I made her promise not to try it ever again. There was always a snack waiting for me in the kitchen in the afternoon, including milk or homemade root beer that my father used to concoct. When I was in middle school and junior high school, I walked home for lunch because we lived so close to both schools.

All of my friends were welcome to come to the house. There was ample space to play—in the house, in the yard, or in the churchyard next

door. My aunts thought I should be restrictive in my playmates. By contrast, my mother said that anyone I regarded as a friend was welcome, and, furthermore, that she would be very disappointed in me if I were not willing to bring *any* friend home, no matter what his religion, national background, or color. I am sure that my father felt that way as well. They had true democratic instincts. In local politics, they were Republicans, who were in the majority in Mount Vernon. Accordingly, it was in primary contests that most of the candidates were chosen. My mother was the Republican precinct manager; she was most interested in doing a fair and honest job. My father's political slant was more or less derivative of the newspaper he read on his commute home from New York each day, *The World Telegram*. When Roosevelt became President, Dad was appreciative of the Minimum Wage Law and the Social Security Act. I suspect there were some split ballots in the family. Dad's favorite reading material was Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*, which he reviewed several times, sharing the stories with me.

There were good books in the house plus *The World Book* for reference. I was given practically every book I asked for—at Christmas or on my birthday—and my mother and I were regular borrowers from the Mount Vernon Public Library. My friends and I took advantage of the library incentives and reading contests (i.e., numbers of books) in the summers. My mother particularly liked to read of the women of history or novels about “wicked” women, as she called them. They must have allowed her an escape from the quiet and good life that she led. She played the piano on request and when she wanted to play and sing some favorite hymn. She tried teaching me to play the piano, but I never got beyond one-finger sight reading. When I finally could carry a tune, she would play accompaniments for me, except when the key had too many sharps. We got to be quite a “team” with practice, particularly for the rendition of lieder and art songs. We regularly sang our rehearsed selections at my grandmother's house on Christmas evening and on Thanksgiving Day, well after dinner. Let me put it this way: we enjoyed it and the family expected it. Mother spent considerable time visiting with her friends, dropping in to cheer up some church member who was ill, and playing bridge with “the girls.” She was a great seamstress and made most of her own dresses. She mended the clothes that my father and I wore until they would mend no more. When I shifted my soloist job from Trinity Episcopal Church, adjacent to our house, to the Chester Hill Methodist Episcopal Church, which was a mile and a half away, Mother lost interest in Trinity Church but would only go across town for special music. She changed allegiance to the First Baptist Church, which was only several blocks away,

was less formal, and was more community-oriented. The minister, the music, and her friends made her feel at home in that church. Among those good friends were Ed Meury's mother and aunt. Reverend Ed Meury, my friend since kindergarten, later performed two important marriages in our family (Nelson and Nell, David and Elena). My father remained content with the early communion service at Trinity, which left him free for the rest of Sunday, and eventually he found he could forego even that early service.

Mother kept in contact with her siblings, especially Emma and Louis. Mother and I would go by train in the summer to stay in Providence, Rhode Island, where Emma and Ralph Mount first lived with their four children: Ralph, Dorothy, Edwin, and Frank. During some summers, we would stay in a cottage that they rented on Narragansett Bay. I have happy memories of those brief periods when I was in the midst of the large family of cousins. Visits to the Jordans in the less exotic location of East Orange, New Jersey, were more frequent and were made exciting to me because of the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western train ride between Hoboken and East Orange. Cousin Virginia, who is four years younger than I, did not share my early enthusiasm for baseball and toy trains; nevertheless, we grew to appreciate each other and have maintained a close friendship over the intervening years. Uncle Louis had an endearing sense of humor and an investment-level of interest in mint U.S. postage stamps, which, for me, made him intriguing. I was less interested in his celebrated rose-growing ability. Aunt Alice played the piano and would accompany my singing as long as I kept the repertoire to Stephen Foster and semi-classical music. When I visited East Orange, as I did frequently while I was attending Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Uncle Louis would always greet me upon my arrival at the house with "Now, when is it that you have to leave?" He was always joking (I think). When I took son Kenneth to meet him for the first time, years later, Uncle Lou convinced Ken that he kept a mouse in his pocket. For many years thereafter, Ken would refer to him as my "uncle who kept a mouse in his pocket."

My parents' humor was seriously tested during the depression years. The rented house we lived in during the 1930s had four bedrooms, an attic bedroom, and one bath in addition to the living room, dining room, and kitchen. I had a small desk in the corner of the dining room where I did my homework. Through 1929, a "roomer" occupied one of the second floor bedrooms. After 1929, Dad was unemployed for lengthy periods. Accordingly, a number of economic adjustments had to be made. We added another "roomer" and then a "boarder," who took breakfast and dinner

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with us. I was moved from the second floor bedroom to the third floor bedroom and then to the adjacent attic bedroom. Mother put her sewing ability to good use and made dresses for her friends, especially the unmarried school teachers. She put her baking skills to use. I would deliver her luscious, home-made coffee cakes on Saturday night or Sunday morning to neighbors on our block. Because of her maturity and experience, she became a favored babysitter. I delivered groceries and sold magazines. I no longer received an allowance, but I was paid for chores at my home and at my grandmother's house. I was allowed to bank my pay for singing in the choir. My father, when he was not employed in New York, "took to the road." He and his friend, Arthur Babcock, who supplied a car, sold Hoover vacuum cleaners. There were generic jokes about vacuum cleaner salesmen during the depression, but Dad and Mr. Babcock had remarkable success. They mapped out our section of the city and were relentless in their pursuit of a sale. They would demonstrate the efficiency of their product for weeks (free house cleaning), would enjoy the visiting process, and eventually their prospects would succumb. They enjoyed each other's company and seemed to indulge in some amateur psychotherapy when the customers needed it. The mere process of people befriending each other during the depression was therapeutic. Finally, Dad had our rent reduced a bit by doing repair and maintenance work for our landlady, who lived next door. Somehow, we managed, as did countless other families in the same circumstances. My father was re-employed at Saks Fifth Avenue.

No doubt influenced by the high unemployment rate in most fields of endeavor, my mother suggested that a postman's job was a worthy one because, as a federal employee, a postman had security from being laid off. I suggested that I might be more interested in teaching, and she responded well to that, thinking that it could mean a local position for me. I never deviated from my more specific goal of being involved in college teaching. Even to attend college, however, was an uphill climb in 1933, but more about that elsewhere. I visited my parents as often as possible when I was at Lehigh University, but I worked away from home during three of the summer vacations and tried to save money by not traveling. After two years at the University of Oxford, my time in graduate school at Columbia University was concentrated on research, but I managed to visit my parents in their new apartment—the second floor of a two-family house—in Mount Vernon on occasional Sunday afternoons. My first academic position at the University of Illinois put real distance between us, and wartime travel was discouraged except for professional reasons.

Was there no emergency that made travel to Mount Vernon necessary during this period? Yes, indeed. It was due to a misadventure in 1944.

While my mother was eating some chicken, a small bone had penetrated her esophagus, and foreign matter had been aspirated into the larynx and thence into the lungs. Complications had produced pneumonia, and she was losing her spirit. My father was also dispirited and exhausted. After work each day in New York City, he would stop at the Mount Vernon Hospital to see Mother, try to cook something for himself, and prepare himself for the early morning trip to the City. The impossibility of the situation was confirmed by the doctor. I made a late night decision to go to Mount Vernon, a colleague helped me cash a check at an all-night liquor store, and that allowed me to purchase a round-trip rail ticket, with a one-way reservation. There was no credit card economy in those days. I must say that the Mount Vernon situation improved upon my arrival. My mother rallied as I spent the days with her in the hospital until her release. I cooked for my father and arranged for necessary dry cleaning and all such matters to which my mother usually attended. He became less desperate. By arranging for temporary home nursing care, I was able to return to Illinois. It was really the first time that I had taken care of my family! Two of my colleagues in Chemistry at the University of Illinois taught my courses in my absence, in a great show of sympathy and comradery.

My parents made their first trip by train to Urbana-Champaign in 1946. They stayed in the best guest facilities available at that time, the Urbana Lincoln Hotel. My father captivated the hotel staff, so that all kinds of service appeared that had not existed before. I could show them the twin cities and introduce them to all of my friends at the University. They listened to rehearsals with Grace Wilson, Jane Watt, and Leroy Hamp, my voice teacher, but they could not remain for the recital itself that we had been planning. When they left Urbana on the Big Four Railroad for Indianapolis, a rail strike was in the offing. They called me from Indianapolis when it happened, asking what to do next. My advice was that they remain in the terminal and be ready to board their train for New York when President Truman would call an end to the strike, which, luckily, he did after approximately four hours. When they were on their way again, they celebrated with dinner on the overnight N.Y. Central train. Coffee was served while the train was in some station along the route, and my father asked as usual for a full cup of coffee. The waiter tried to predict for him what might happen when the train would be in motion, but my father was adamant. The result of the moving train's wobbly motion: a shower bath of coffee. My mother, who had heard almost every day of their married life, "What I do like is a *full* cup of coffee," giggled all the way to New York, according to my penitent father.

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He and I had become accustomed to some of my mother's statements when some piece of art or music was not to her taste, "That's different," or "That's unusual," or "That's interesting." The brutal translation, which my mother would never use, is "I don't like it." I am told I slip into the same judgmental habit occasionally. My mother wrote to me regularly when we lived apart. My father seldom wrote, but when he did, he always affixed a Special Delivery stamp to the letter. This was his signature, and it happened whether I was in Boy Scout camp, away at college, or only twelve miles away in New York City. He wanted me to know "right then" that he was thinking of me! I am still somewhat startled when I receive a Special Delivery letter.