Forward by Byron R. Mayo, Nov. 7, 2012

I idolize my father. It was inevitable.

I suspect every kid given half a chance will put his dad on a pedestal. I know many kids never got that chance and I feel all the more fortunate for having the relationship I did with him. He wasn't perfect by any means, but his flaws were too few to keep me from making him my hero. I feel like he opened the doors to the world for me and invited me to do anything and be anyone I wanted. Most of my own memories start about age 5 when he started teaching me to play chess and buying me science kits monthly, both things that opened doors and started journeys that became my life for which I forever thank him. Everyone who knew him thought him utterly charming. But he was a very quiet, very private man and as we grew older I realized just how little I really knew of him.

Dad's memoires were begun in his retirement at the age of 74 in 1996 and arrived in the mail chapter by chapter as a serial novel over several years. Dad's creative energy was boundless and he very generously took up this project at my urging so I could know him better. It should be noted that at the same time, Dad was writing and editing the VOMPC Petanque Times for the Sonoma club and game that became his second family and passion in retirement. What started out as an intended 6 chapter life story became 17 chapters that cover the period from 1922 to 1943. And between talking and writing and playing Petanque with Dad during this period of his life many of the layers he opened up helped bring us much closer together. It also turned out to be quite a tale!

Dad loved writing, he majored in Journalism at the University of Oregon and learned to turn a phrase and express himself in very engaging prose. Thus his memoires turned out to be not just his story - they are a story of the Roaring Twenties, The Great Depression, Prohibition, the tide of War... a story of a life reflected in

the prominent people and events of his time and his personal place woven into that time. It's a story he tells with love and candor, with energy, humor and thoughtfulness, and in the end, it's a story worth reading whether you knew Byron Willard Mayo or not.

For the few of us who have read this, it was surprising, revealing and entertaining. And I greatly wish he would have written more. The understanding of the influences that shaped and in some ways flawed my father make me love and appreciate him so much more. This is not an ordinary life. Dad was not an ordinary man.

I am proud to present the gift of my father's memoires to his friends, relatives and anyone who enjoys a great tale. This is it.

# Dedication

**This will be a very personal and revealing memoir.**

**For Cathye and. Byron Robert: It will provide you with new insight into the environment, people and experiences which influenced my life—and indirectly, your own.**

**For dear Mary: It will provide you with an even deeper understanding of the lucky kid who grew up to be yours.**

**I love you all**

***1928****—Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic, Henri Matisse painted "Seated Odalisque," Jack Sharkey became world heavyweight boxing champion, Herbert Hoover was elected president of the United States in a landslide victory over Al Smith, George Gershwin wrote "An American in Paris," Sonja Henie won her first Olympic ice-skating gold medal, the country's Number One pop song was "Makin' Whoopee," the Jazz Age was drawing to a close—and my parents were divorced, after 15 years of marriage.*

*I was six years old. At the time, I was devastated.*
*I loved both my mother and my dad very much.*

*I remember my dad, Byron Albert Mayo, as a fun-loving man of integrity and good common sense - with a joyful Irish sense of humor.*

*When my mother left him and filed for divorce in the summer of 1928, he was head timekeeper for a Portland, Oregon, construction company.*

*At that time, my mother, Dellavina—everyone called her Della—was a vivacious, ambitious young woman. She wanted more. Much more. With the divorce, she soon discovered she had settled for less.*

# ONE

## Family Connections

My great-grandfather, Louis Martell, emigrated to the United States from French Canada following the American Civil War, searching for fame and fortune. He never found either one. But he did discover a petite and pretty French teenager named Mary. Born near South Bend, Indiana, she was living with her family in Lake County, Michigan, at the time Louis spotted her. They were married in January, 1872. I still own a formal, tintype wedding portrait of the two of them. He was a handsome, swarthy, rakish-looking character.

Louis and his teen-age bride settled in Berrien County, Michigan, in a Catholic district colonized by French-Canadian émigrés. He felt right at home. Their first of six children was born October 27,1873.

The eldest was Josephine, who later became my grandmother. She was followed by Fred, Lillian, Elizabeth, Phoebe and Noah, the youngest. There was a span of almost 20 years between the birth of Josephine and Noah. (The family pronounced the name Noah as NU- WEE—a French-Canadian corruption rhyming with Dewey—which I always found pretty funny.)

Josephine grew up to be a plain but passionate woman, still unmarried at the mature age of 22. She did much of the cooking for the entire family. Then, she met my future grandfather, James Thad Dewey, a lusty, hard-working, French-speaking, ranch hand from nearby New Buffalo, Michigan. She'd found her man.

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Born August 2, 1874, Jim Dewey came from French and English stock. His mother was Margrit Gugine, a French-Canadian. His father was Phelix Dewey. He had two brothers, Albert and Sam. Albert eventually married and had three children—all boys. Sam remained an

untamed bachelor all of his life.

Jim Dewey and Josephine Martell (he called her Jo) were married in the late summer of 1896—and my mother was born some three months later on November 24. She was an only child. But she was not truly alone. My mother and Aunt Phoebe Martell were both about the same age. They played together as children. And they remained close throughout their lives.

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Times were hard in Michigan at the turn of the century. My great-grandmother, Mary Martell, had died not long after the birth of Uncle Noah. Jobs were scarce. Unemployment was high. The future did not look promising. Meanwhile, the railroads were promoting the good life in the Pacific Northwest. After much family soul-searching, they succumbed. The entire family—Martells and Dews—headed West. They settled in Vancouver, Washington, across the Columbia River from Portland, Oregon. All except Sam. For reasons I still do not know, Sam broke away from the family and moved to Chicago.

"He changed his name to Sam Constantino. And traveled, he did...with a rough crowd," my grandmother once told me. She let it drop there. It was some 30 years before the family heard from Sam again.

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In Vancouver, Washington, the Martells and the Deweys started over. They were strong, working-class people. My mother entered second grade in the local Catholic schools. However, it was a painful experience for her, At that time, she could speak only French-Canadian, with some smattering of English. And she once told me that she endured teasing and taunting from other kids.

This may be one reason why the family went out of its way in later years to avoid speaking or teaching French to me as a child. They also clung to a mistaken and distorted determination to bury their French-Canadian past and become totally Americanized. During my earliest years, for example, while it was common for my mother and my grandparents to speak in French around the house among themselves, they switched to English whenever I was

around. As a result, I did not grow up with bilingual capability. One of my genuine regrets.

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My mother did not attend school beyond the fifth grade. When she was about eleven, my grandparents along with Aunt Phoebe moved to Oregon City, Oregon, where they started a new life on the Diamond A river boats. These were shallow-drafted, double-decked cargo boats with huge rear paddle wheels. Along with the cargo, they herded giant log rafts to the saw mills and the paper mills of the lower Willamette and Columbia rivers.

My grandmother, Josephine, worked on the boats as a cook. My grandfather, Jim Dewey, worked as a deck hand and logging roustabout. My mother and Aunt Phoebe, not yet in their teens, went along for the fun. They spent much of their time studying from schoolbooks and fishing over the side.

"The deck hands watched out for us. And we did a lot more fishing than reading," Mother once admitted. This was probably the beginning of my mother's lifelong love of fishing—for food and fun. By the time they were in their teens, Phoebe and my mother were also helping out in the galleys, and eventually won cooking jobs of their own. Come the weekends, however, folks could always find them at the popular dances held every Saturday night in Oregon City.

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At one of these loud and lively affairs, Phoebe met a tough, hard-drinking railroad cook named George Litteral. Within weeks, they were married. And from the first day out, their marriage was a wild one. It seemed to be one, long, on-going battle of words and wit and pots and pans. Aunt Phoebe had the look and caustic tongue of a Thelma Ritter. Uncle George matched her with his tilted derby, dangling cigarette and a Wallace Berry growl. They were a funny couple.

Initially, they worked the railroads, cooking for the surveying crews. Then, for a good many years after World War I, Phoebe and George worked for the timber companies, cooking in various Oregon logging camps. He played the blustering head chef role to the hilt—in full

command of the cook shack. She always played a strong-supporting role as pastry chef. The loggers loved her. And I loved them both.

The marriage lasted about twenty-five years. Uncle George was a constant smoker. He died of lung cancer in his fifties.

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Sadly, I know little about my dad's family. Another regret. What little I do know is this: Willard Mayo, my great-grandfather, served in the Union Army during the American Civil War. For years, one of my most valued mementos was his full-dress sword, presented to me by my dad when I was about twelve years old. I passed it on to Byron Robert some years ago. The blade is straight and heavy. Reminds me of *Excalibur*.

At the end of the civil war, Willard Mayo drifted from somewhere in the east on out to Kansas, where he met and married a woman named Joan, my great-grandmother. She gave birth to a son, which they named Adam, my future grandfather. Unfortunately, Joan died shortly after childbirth.

Adam grew up in Kansas. In his late twenties, he married a young Frenchwoman named Mary. During the earliest years of their marriage, they lived in the rural village of Somerville, Kansas, where they had five children—two boys and three girls—Byron Albert, Burt, Alice, Myrtle and Gertrude. Around the turn of the century, Adam and Mary Mayo and all five children joined the flow heading further West, looking for greater opportunity. They, too, settled in the Oregon City area, on the Willamette river some twelve miles south of Portland.

Grandfather Adam Mayo died before I was born. Grandmother Mary Mayo died when I was an infant. While I have a photograph of a stern-looking Mary Mayo holding me as a baby in her arms, plus a picture of Aunts Myrtle and Gertrude, I really don't remember them.

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Throughout most of his life, my dad worked as a machinist; or in the building trades as a carpenter, roofer, bricklayer, timekeeper or construction foreman. At the time he met my mother, he was a young carpenter

working in the paper mills.

They came together on a rainy night in October, 1912, at another one of those popular Oregon City dances. She always said he was a good dancer. And she was a party girl. She loved to dance. Six months later, Della Martell Dewey and Byron Albert Mayo were formally married. It was April 1913. I still have a small wedding photo in which they both look very serious, very proud, and perhaps a little scared. He was 23. She was 17.

Dad was a small, tough, wiry man with gray eyes and dark, unruly hair. With the outbreak of World War I, he enlisted in the US Army and served in France as a corporal in the 309th Trench Mortar Battery Division. They called it "the war to end all wars." It ended on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, 1918. My dad returned home to my mother in January 1919, unscathed.

He always remembered his homecoming for another reason, too. January 1919 was the month in which the 18th amendment to the US Constitution was ratified, blanketing the nation with prohibition—outlawing all alcoholic beverages. This was something my dad and George Littreal and thousands of other returning soldiers found hard to take.

*Welcome home, Yanks.*

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Prohibition in this country marked the beginning of "The Roaring Twenties." It ushered in an era of bootleggers. Speakeasies. The rise of the mob. Bath tub gin. Flapper fashions. The Charleston. Chicago jazz. And a wild decade in which "everybody" speculated in a booming stock market.

It was during these frenzied times that I was born — January 14,1922.

# TWO

## The Innocent Years

They called me Billy.

Willard Mayo was the name—taken from my great grandfather. However, when the day approached for me to enroll in school for the first time, my parents wisely changed their minds. They decided on Byron as my first name—the same as my dad. (A few years ago, I sent off to the State of Oregon for a fresh copy of my birth certificate. It arrived—still showing Byron as a hand printed entry in front of the original name registration.)

For me, Byron was a quick and easy change. I liked my dad's name. But my irrepressible Aunt Phoebe, God bless her, continued to call me Billy—or Bill—until the day she died. My grandfather, Jim Dewey, also had a problem getting used to the switch-over. He'd sometimes call me Billy one day and Byron the next. I just went along with the flow—answering to either name.

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A few months after I was born, my dad landed a good job up in Idaho, working on the new veteran's hospital being constructed in Coeur d'Alene. He took my mother and me along. My dad told me we lived in Coeur d'Alene for a year and a half, until the hospital was completed.

Returning to Oregon, the folks bought a small, white bungalow on a dirt road in the outskirts of Portland—at the base of Mt. Tabor. It had a big, front lawn with no sidewalks, and a little garden in back—one of my earliest memories.

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Memory does play tricks—especially in recalling the earliest years. A blur of images comes to mind.. Hazy chronology. Yet, within that disorder, paradoxically, separate fragments remain sharp and clear.

Bringing my mother a small bouquet of flowers that

turned out to be weeds—my dad and my mother singing around the house—holding hands while we walked in the woods—the day my dad proudly drove up the driveway in a brand new *Overland* touring car—the smell of freshly - baked cookies in the kitchen—family trips to Cannon Beach—watching my dad lather up and shave with a mean-looking, straight razor—sitting by my mother at the piano while she played—digging in a dirt pile along with the kid next door—a surprise birthday party—skipping rocks into the Zig Zag River while my grandparents tried to fish—and the first snow covering our front yard and all of Mt. Tabor: These are among the joyous memories I treasure from those brief few years at the little house in Portland, Oregon.

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One of my earliest memories of Christmas was an especially magical time. It was the first year I can remember snow at Christmas—a late December rarity in Portland. Inside the house, my dad had strung the lights and fixed a shining star firmly on the top of a Douglas Fir tree that stretched to the ceiling. My dad and mother together hung what seemed to be box after box of beautiful ornaments. I hung a few, too—breaking three, maybe four. The front room and kitchen were decorated for the holidays. We had some songs and some pranks. And all was ready—for a visit from Santa Claus.

On Christmas Eve, it happened. Early in his rounds, he came to our house. Honest. Sometime after dinner. The moonlight was shining on the snow outside. My mother was quietly reading me a Christmas story. When suddenly, I heard the exciting clatter of reindeer hoofs on the roof, a muffled knock on the door, and a throaty "ho.. .ho.. .ho".. .trailing off into the wind. "Merry Christmas," he chortled. My mother jumped up. "It's Santa. It's Santa. Let's go look."

I ran first to the window, then to the door. My mother swung the door wide open. There—right there on our front stoop—was a, shiny, new, red *Flexible Flyer* sled, topped with three gaily-wrapped Christmas packages. A moment later, I heard my dad come up behind me, shouting "There he goes, Billy. Look. Quick. Up there. Up there."

I looked up, transfixed, up into the sky. And do you know, to this day, I still believe I saw on the distant

horizon the fading vision of a sled in the night skies, pulled by eight tiny reindeer. (My folks happily got away with these wonderful Christmas theatrics for two, maybe three, more years.) Happy times.

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Right from the start, my mother made it clear she did *not* want me to call her "Mommy' or "Mom." She said she wanted me to call her "Mother." And that I did, throughout her life.

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There seemed to be a whole lot of singing going on around our house during those earliest years. I can remember my dad out back working in the garden, belting out *Bye, Bye, Blackbird.* Another one of his favorites, inside the house with drink in hand, was *Show Me the Way to go Home.* That was a party-time favorite. I will remember the words forevermore.

**Show me the way to go home I'm tired and**
**I want to go to bed.**
**Had a little drink about an hour ago and it**
**went right to my head.**
**Wherever I may roam**
**on land or sea or foam**
**You will always hear me singing this song**
**Show me the way to go home.... *How dry I am!***

We had a big, hand-cranked *Victrola*— a brand name that became so popular in those days it was almost generic for phonographs. My dad would let me stand on a chair and crank up the *Victrola.* But he wouldn't let me put any of his prize 78-rpm recordings on the turntable until I was a year or two older. I'd simply stand up there and watch the music go 'round and 'round. The oldest record in his collection was a scratchy but still exciting performance *oiPagliacci* by Caruso.

One of my own nutty favorites at that age was *Yes, We Havva No Bananas, We Havva No Bananas Today,* sung by some ukulele player with a high squeaky voice. Or, how about that popular hold-over from WWI, entitled *Hello, Central, Give Me No-Man's-Land, My Daddy's Over There?* We even, had the sheet music for that one.

Mother owned an upright piano and a piano bench

*loaded* with sheet music. She loved to play the piano and I thought she was pretty good. Her sentimental favorite was *Let the Rest of the World Go By.*

**We'll, build a sweet little nest**
**Alone in the West...**
**And. let the rest of the world go by.**

I would often sit beside her on the bench and watch while she played. In addition to chop sticks, she taught me how to play that funny little melody called *Java.* And we'd sing it together.

***Java... Java...***
***Java, Java, Jing Jing Jing.***

Once in awhile, she'd take me with her when she went shopping in downtown Portland. Woolworth's, Kress' and Newberry's were the big-three five-and-ten-cent-stores in town. These were *big* stores. Woolworth and Newberry's featured a lavish music section in their basements with live piano players rendering each week's sheet music hits, on and off all day long. Very impressive. As I remember it, Woolworth's had a pretty woman at the piano. Newberry's featured a young man. My mother thought the guy at Newberry's had the best voice. We'd usually go there shopping for more sheet music. On the wall back of the music section, they posted blowups of each week's colorful sheet music covers. It was a highly popular and highly competitive scene.

**I found a million dollar baby**
**At the five-and-ten-cent store**

Somewhere along the line, my mother talked me into taking piano lessons. It made her feel good, I think. Anyway, I did it for almost two years. Every Saturday morning, a fat, ugly woman with bad breath would come teach me a lesson. In between, I would have to practice almost every afternoon. It all ended shortly after I played in a recital which starred the woman's "best" students. I don't think I was very good.

The first full-length movie I can remember seeing scared the daylights out of me. It was a silent horror picture—built on the Dracula story. It might have been *Nosferatu.* (This was before talkies.) My folks probably should not have taken me along that night. But they did. And the ugly, terrifying vampire and eerie shadows and

menacing action all had me thoroughly frightened—and totally fascinated.

The evil atmosphere of the night was thickened by our problems getting home. A threatening, ground-level fog had come in, taking over in every direction. It was impenetrable—so bad that my dad stood outside the car on the running board and peered at the road ahead, guiding my mother, while she drove us home, inch by inch. We made it home.. And lying safely in bed later, I considered it a terrific night of terror and adventure.

The atmosphere was much more festive a few months later when Hollywood premiered the first full-length talking picture ever made: Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer,* The folks took me with them to see that one, too. And I was overwhelmed. The idea of people actually talking and singing up there on the screen just blew me away. I thought it was fantastic.

My dad and mother also viewed the movie with keen interest. However, in discussing it afterwards among themselves, my folks predicted that talking pictures would be only a novelty. You see, Jolson more or less remained in one position, facing the mike, during every scene in that initial film. "Talkies just aren't gonna work for any kind of action movie. Believe me, the good silent films are here to stay."

***

My mother was always a fastidious house-keeper. Everything was neat, clean and in its place. She worked hard to keep it that way. As soon as I was old enough to help without breaking something, she assigned me the job of dusting the furniture.

When my dad bought her a new *Hoover* vacuum cleaner, she gave up her clackity old carpet sweeper. But then I had to dust furniture to the roar of that loud and raucous Hoover. And I hated it.

***

At 7:52 a.m., May 20, 1927, Charles A. Lindbergh took off from Roosevelt Field, Long Island, in a small, single engine airplane called *The Spirit of St. Louis*—in an attempt to be the first man in history to fly solo, nonstop, from New York to Paris—3,600 miles across the

Atlantic.

He took along five sandwiches, one quart of water, no parachute and no radio (to conserve fuel). At 10:22 p.m. Paris time, exactly 33 1/2 hours later, he glided down out of the night for a safe landing at Le Bourget airport. Both France and America went wild.

In the days ahead, Lindy became the ultimate American hero, admired around the world. Today it's difficult to even comprehend the total dominance of his fame at that time and for some years to come. We've neither seen nor felt anything to equal such idolization in our current era. The shy, unassuming "Lindy" totally captivated the nation. Along with most people across the country on May 20th, we stayed glued to our *Atwater-Kent* radio as much as we could. We listened to sparse radio reports of sightings that first day, that long night, the next day, on into the afternoon. Finally, he made it. And with his landing in Paris came an explosive celebration. Like almost every little kid in America, I was thrilled beyond belief.

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Our *Overland* touring car was a black beauty. It seated five or six people. Top up or top down. Side curtains on or off. Gleaming over-size headlights. Heavy front bumper. Full-length running boards. Mounted rear tire. A newly-designed six-cylinder engine. And a horn I thought was a kick. “Ah-oooga.. .Ah-oooga”

It was called a sporty touring car. And tour we did. Some Sundays we’d drive to Vancouver for a visit with Uncle Fred and Aunt Edna Martell. Other times we’d go off on our own—up the Columbia River gorge on what is still one of the world’s most beautiful drives Or, down to Cannon Beach. My dad loved the Oregon coast. So did I. Or, once in awhile, we’d go all the way to Mt. Hood on a spectacular, two-lane road—pride of the 1920s. Other times, we’d just tour around town, enjoying the sights in the City of Roses.

My grandparents were picking hops and working the apple harvest in the Willamette Valley about that time.

We visited them, too. I’d take a nap in an apple basket while the folks were talking it up.

We even made it up into the mountains for a visit with Aunt Phoebe and Uncle George, who were cooking at a

Cascade logging camp. We almost got stuck in the muddy ruts going up. But we didn't. And what I remember best about that trip were Aunt Phoebe's incredible, fresh-baked, wild blackberry pies, topped with home-made ice cream. Remember the good times.

***

I was about five-and-a-half years old when my mother enrolled me into the first grade. No kindergarten. I was registered as Byron W. Mayo.

All I remember about that first year in school is that we walked through a woods to get to the old wooden school building—my mother made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for my lunch—the kids were friendly—I got to be in a school play—starting to learn the alphabet seemed like a good game—and I was glad when summer vacation came at the end of the school year.

***

Whenever my grandparents or any relatives came over for a visit, I recall that we'd always have an early dinner and lots of talk. Then, the grownups would invariably end up in an uproarious pinochle game accompanied by bootleg beer and lots of arguing. This could go on for hours. In the next room, I didn't get much sleep.

Every now and then, however, my folks would throw a party with their younger friends. Then it became an evening of loud music, dancing and bootleg gin. They'd cut the bad gin with gingerale and maybe a little lime. I think they called it a Gin Buck. They let me drink straight gingerale. The dancing was fun watching. I thought that my mother doing the Charleston in her funny straight dress without a waistline was hilarious. I'd usually watch what was happening for awhile and then go to bed. In the next room, I didn't get much sleep.

***

Ted Ewing was the name of the kid who lived next door. During that last summer, we had some good times together. We played in the woods. We built forts in the dirt back of his house.. We played with a dog that lived up the road. We played marbles. We hooted and hollered

around. And sometimes, on my front lawn, we'd just he on our backs with our hands behind our heads and gaze up at the sky. We'd try to create faces and shapes out of the cumulus clouds—or sometimes talk about the future.

"Hey, Byron, whadda ya wanna be when you grow up?"

"I dunno. Maybe an artist. Or a flyer. How 'bout you?"

"Think I'd like to be a doctor. Or maybe a fireman."

Ted Ewing's family moved back east during the depression. We traded comical postcards and notes occasionally over the years. He grew up to become a soldier—a second-lieutenant with the US Army's 106th Infantry Division during WWII. He was killed in Europe, December 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge.

***

When my mother walked out, she took only her clothes, a little money and me, (The piano came later.)

The end came fast. Unexpected. I was totally blind-sided. They say that kids usually sense the troubles. Well, I didn't. I had no idea my dad and my mother weren't getting along. They hid it amazingly well.

In the final week, my mother talked with me about her filing for divorce. I was bewildered. Confused. She wasn't coming through. It's difficult for me now to remember the conversation. She said something about "longtime troubles" and "certain problems," unexplained. She talked about a "new life...Mr. Neff...his daughter, Gladys... good times ahead... a happier future together it turned into a painful jumble in my mind.

All I knew was that I was facing a future I didn't know or want, or cause.

On that last day, when it was time to go, my dad picked me up to say good-bye. He kissed me and gave me a long, hard hug. I held on. He finally put me down. I held back the tears, turned, grasped my mother's hand and we walked down the front path to Neffs waiting car, sitting in the dirt road with its engine running.

# THREE

## Life on the West Side

My mother's lover, Clarence Neff, was a vain, gimlet-eyed, good-looking sonofabitch, with a shock of slick, dark hair combed straight back. He'd-swagger around his apartment with a smoldering look on his face—sweeping my mother up in his arms like he thought he was Rudolph Valentino or something. I'd roll my eyeballs—and head for the toilet.

To this day, I have no idea where they met or how their ill-fated affair ever developed. Even in her later years, my mother refused to talk about it.

Neffs eight-year-old daughter, Gladys, was another story. She was about a year older and about two inches taller than I was at the time. And I was surprised and delighted when she turned out to be a little offbeat and a lot of fun. She had a weird sense of humor, an abiding curiosity, a gangly look, dark bobbed hair and a lop-sided grin. Was it Clara Bow?

We became pretty good pals. Within minutes of our first meeting, she revealed in a dramatic stage whisper that she was going to be a "movie star" when she grew up.

Later, she put on a private performance for me. Wearing one of her dad's silk shirts, she did an exultant mimic of the arrogant Neff in action. As she swept haughtily around the room in long, exaggerated strides, I thought she was nuts —but interesting. (Looking back now on that bizarre scene from long, long ago, I'd say her performance was more Groucho Marx than it was Clarence Neff—or Rudolph Valentino.)

***

My mother and I moved in with Neff and his screwball daughter. Neff had once been a carpenter, like my dad. Now he was a salesman for some kind of home fixtures company. He really thought he was hot stuff. (Famous *Arrow* shirts cost about two bucks at that time. Neff insisted on $20 silk shirts as his trademark, every day of the week.)

He had a "furnished" apartment on the second floor of a three-story brick building in the interesting old Lincoln Theater district of Southwest Portland. The apartment was decorated in what you might call cheap moderne—or minimal Bauhaus. Whatever. My mother's piano looked lonely in Neffs sparsely-furnished front room, jammed up against the bare wall to one side of a bay window.

Neff and my mother slept in the big front bedroom. Gladys and I slept in a pull-down Murphy bed. It took up most of the floor space in a small study down the hall. During the day, the polished wood wall featured a full-length mirror. At night, when you pulled down the counter-balanced face of the wall, and snapped the legs in place, it became a full-size double bed.

On that bed is where my earliest sex education began.

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It wasn't long before Gladys and I were curiously exploring each other. By the end of the week, our curiosity had turned into a lot of playful fiddling around. We'd snuggle in bed and feel each other and rub and romp and wrestle and just have ourselves one helluva high old time. We didn't know what we were doing. But we knew it was exciting, it felt good, and it was a lot of fun.

These nightly games lasted maybe two weeks, maybe less. One night, my mother walked in on us, right in the middle of a most enthusiastic session. The bed was badly rumpled. And so were we.

All hell broke loose, My mother was absolutely lived as she stammered out, "No-no-no, you mustn't do that"—for reasons that were never explained to us. Then Neff jumped into the act. He went sort of berserk. He bellowed out his anger in my direction. For a grand climax, he threatened to thrash me within an inch of my life and send me to Woodburn. (I learned much later that Woodburn, Oregon, was the location of the state reform school for wayward boys.)

Gladys and I lowered our heads, put on contrite faces, and kept our mouths shut.

In the end, I suppose virtue triumphed. From that night on, I slept on a cot in an alcove next to the dining room. And I remained a virgin until I was almost seventeen years old.

***

My new school, where I entered second grade, was adjacent to Lincoln High, only a few blocks away from the apartment, This made it an easy walk to school. My mother came along the first week or so. Then we were on our own.

Gladys showed me her favorite route. It took us along an attractive street of little neighborhood shops and stores and restaurants, clustered in the blocks around the Lincoln Theater movie house.

Living in this kind of urban atmosphere was a wide new world for me, of course. I found it very intriguing.

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My mother would sometimes let Gladys and I attend a weekend matinee all by ourselves, as long as we stayed together. This resulted in lively wrangling over what movie to see. One vigorous debate over *"WINGS"* still sticks in my mind.

By 1928-29, the talkies were taking over the film industry. Yet a few silent films remained big box-office hits, especially at the neighborhood level. Advertising for *"WINGS"* told of "death-defying exploits/' coming to our local theater. I made up my mind, I had to see it.

*"WINGS"* was a silent, big-time, world war aviation thriller. It won the first-ever Academy Award for "Best Picture of the Year." (The combat flying sequences using WWI Spads and Fokkers are still considered among the best aerial dog-fighting sequences in Hollywood history.)

Gladys had no interest, whatsoever, in going with me to see *"WINGS,"* even when I told her it starred Clara Bow and Richard Arlen.

"Aw ... c'mon, Gladys."

"No way."

"You just gotta come with me."

"No way."

"Pleeze?"

"No way."

In the end, we made a deal. She'd go with me to see *"WINGS"* if I'd go with her to see something called "Broadway Melody." That Grade B bomb turned out to be of possible minor interest only because it was the first of the talkie musicals. I can't remember anything else about it. But I did go see it with. her. And Gladys and I

remained good buddies.

***

Most kids steal, at one time or another. My time came early. It wasn't much. But it taught me an unforgettable lesson—real quick.

One day I set out to explore the neighborhood on my own. I enjoyed checking out all the wonderful stuff in the windows, one shop after another—like the Jewish bakery, a used tools store, a fancy shoe store, an Italian deli, chocolate candy store, art supplies, and the open-front Chinese market. There was my downfall.

Tucked in with his vegetables and exotic Chinese herbs, the elderly store-keeper kept a wire rack next to the sidewalk, neatly stacked with boxes of chewing gum. *Blackjack* gum was my favorite.

I stared long and hard at that box of *Blackjack* gum. I'll bet there were two-dozen packages in the box. Came the moment of decision, I reached over, picked up the entire box, jammed it under my arm like a football and high-tailed it down the street.

Suddenly from behind, a big, heavy hand grabbed my shoulder and stopped me in my tracks. I whirled around. There I was, facing the biggest man of the law I'd ever seen in my young life. He was the local cop on the beat and he looked ten-feet tall.

We had a little talk. His approach was stern but not unkind. Then he walked me home to the apartment, two or three blocks away. By the time I trudged up the stairs, I was almost in tears. I had to face my mother.

Throughout her life, my mother held firm to a stubborn honesty. That day was no exception. She gave me a tongue lashing I'll always remember.

"You don't take something that belongs to somebody else," was her tough credo. She lived by it. And I learned my lesson well.

***

Agnes Peterson lived in the apartment directly above us. She was a tall, jolly, round-faced woman in her early thirties, about the same age as my mother. The two of them hit it off immediately. They became close friends.

***

Agnes worked as a hostess in a downtown speakeasy. On late rainy afternoons, before going to work, she'd often stop by for a cigarette and a cup of coffee. My mother and Agnes both smoked *Chesterfields.* They'd put on a fresh pot of coffee and the two of them would sit at the kitchen table and talk and talk and talk. Sometimes I picked up all kinds of things.

That's how I learned that the speakeasy where Agnes worked was located in what had once been the meeting hall of a German *Turnverein,* two blocks from City Hall. She worked for a guy named Battisti or Batuzzi or something like that.

Over a stretch of several afternoon visits, I also learned that Agnes had been married twice—her first husband was a merchant marine sailor lost at sea during the war—she was born and raised in Minneapolis—she liked to attend the fights at the Portland Civic Auditorium—she was trying to cut down on her smoking—she hated wearing girdles—she liked bootleg beer, French fries, kids and jazz—and her 21-year-old niece, Emma, was about to get a divorce.

I liked Agnes, too. She taught me how to build card houses, using an ordinary deck of *Bicycle* playing cards. She had a very steady hand. One afternoon she successfully built a tower three stories high. The best I could ever do until years later was a two story structure that collapsed when I tried to widen the second floor.

Agnes had a loud, marvelous laugh. Her belly used to go up and down. It fascinated me.

***

I can remember February 14, 1929. That was the day AL Capone's hit men walked calmly into a dingy South Chicago garage and machine-gunned seven rival mobsters from the George "Bugs" Moran gang. It was part of an ongoing gangland war for control of the illegal booze business. With big, black headlines, the newspapers called it the *St. Valentine's Day Massacre.*

In an era when violent crime was not an exploited staple of the nightly news, as it is today, this vicious gangland killing captured the shuddering attention of the nation. We didn't talk about it at school during class. But

you can bet it was the hot subject of conversation the following day on our school playground, during recess.

***

I can remember February 14, 1929 for another reason, too. My mother's divorce became final on that date—six months after the judge's original decree, she said.

Neff decided to take her out on the town to celebrate. He announced they were going to Battisti's speakeasy, which featured thick grilled steaks and French fries, freshly-made booze, a dime-size dance floor, Chicago-style jazz and Agnes Peterson as hostess—all for a price.

When they returned late that night, Gladys and I soon knew the evening had not gone well. Coming into the apartment, somebody loudly slammed the front door shut as if they were trying to knock it off its hinges. We jumped out of our beds with a start. The sitter hurriedly left. Loud arguing erupted.

My mother and Neff went at it, face to face. And it was ugly. Yet from what little I could understand that night, it all started over a spilled drink ... or was it a thrown drink? I don't remember. There must have been more to it than that.

This was the first of several quarrels between Neff and my mother that we were to overhear in the months to come. As I remember it now, most of those hot sarcastic arguments seemed to center on the subject of money, or lack of.

***

During spring vacation that year, my dad took me with <u>him</u> up into the mountains to visit Aunt Phoebe and Uncle George Littreal, who were working at a new logging camp job. My dad and Phoebe and George all remained good friends.

This new logging camp was in the rugged mountains of southwest Oregon. We drove up in the Overland. However, the only way we could get into camp the final three miles was by way of the old logging railroad tracks.

We joined up with two loggers who were returning to camp on the timber company's mechanized hand car—open on all sides. I held on for dear life as we rounded the bends and crossed two high, narrow trestles—hundreds of feet above some wild rapids in the steep gorge, far below. For me, it was a great adventure.

In the cook shack, I was spoiled rotten, as usual, with Aunt Phoebe's famous freshly-baked pies, right out of the oven, Apricot, strawberry-rhubarb. green apple, peach, wild huckleberry—hey, I don't remember them all. But I probably sampled them all, topped with generous scoops of home-made ice cream, of course.

***

In her ambitious climb to movie stardom, Gladys decided to take up tap dancing, She talked me into going with her. Tap dancing! Can you believe it?

*The Oregon Journal,* Portland's afternoon newspaper, sponsored a variety of activities for kids under the club name "Journal Juniors." Gladys read about the tap dance offer in the Journal Junior section of the Sunday comics. For 50 cents a lesson, you could learn how to tap dance during eight Saturday morning sessions at the Paramount Theater in downtown Portland.

Neff said the price was too high. He finally gave in, however, And my mother walked us into town and signed us up for lessons,

I had never seen a movie palace as big and as beautiful as the Paramount Theater. It had a grand carpeted staircase sweeping down to a long, inlaid marble lobby that seemed to stretch on forever, Magnificent crystal chandeliers sparkled overhead. Gilded rococo walls and smoky mirrors added to the glamour, It all had the look and feeling of the king's royal court in a fairy tale, I was entranced, (This Beaux Arts beauty still exists, I was happy to discover during a visit we made to Portland a few years ago, It's now a part of the city's handsome civic center performance complex.)

The tap dancing lessons took place in the lobby of the Paramount. Somebody said the teacher was famous. I doubt that. And I don't remember her name,

Along with 50 or 60 other kids, all shapes and sizes, Gladys and I lined up that first Saturday morning in the Paramount lobby, We lined up in three long rows, "Let the lessons begin," By the end of the second week, the number of students had dropped to about 30, By the third week, it was down to maybe two dozen,

Gladys took to tap dancing like a Ruby Keeler on parade. She became good—very good, My own buck and wing, on the other hand, never made it. After about

four lessons, I dropped out.

I had much more fun on Saturday mornings skating around the block on my new roller skates—or learning how to play ping pong with the Italian kid who lived in a big old rooming house around the corner. His house had a wide front porch with a swing set on one side and a ping pong table on the other.

***

Why is it that boys are so attracted to violence? Is it early environment? A learned response? Media influence? "Macho" traditions? Peer pressure? Higher levels of testosterone? Or does it begin with something in our genes?

How else can I explain why a group of ordinary seven and eight year olds would try to knock each other's blocks off with rocks and rubble—-just for the fun of it?

I tagged along that day. A group of us started poking around inside the fenced remains of an old apartment house, torn down the week before. The area was strewn with crumbling basement walls, rocks and rubble. It had the look of a bombed-out building in war-torn Berlin.

Almost casually, a very dangerous game developed. Crouched behind the stub of an inner basement wall, three of the kids laughingly pitched small chunks of concrete at the rest of us, about 30 feet away. They were just playing around. We jeered at their poor aim and dodged behind a parallel piece of wall, shouting back a few friendly obscenities. Then we started lobbing rocks back at 'em. Like a snowball fight.

Soon, however, the intensity escalated. All kinds of rubble started flying back and forth. An eerie dust cloud began to rise. The stormy scene turned into a fierce, small-scale battle.

Suddenly, the kid next to me got smacked in the side of the head with a small chunk of concrete. Blood dripped from a dirty gash above his cheek bone and he started to yell bloody murder. The rest of us were scared. That ended the battle, right there. Two of his best buddies walked him home, where they found out the damage was minor. But it could have been lethal, and I think we all knew that.

When I got home, I felt a sense of some vague humiliation and shame I couldn't get a fix on.

***

The inflated prosperity of "The Roaring Twenties" came to a crashing end in late October 1929, when the stock market tumbled into a disastrous free fall. Many companies that had been built on enormous debt simply collapsed like a house of cards. Many thousands of Americans who had speculated in the market found themselves totally wiped out. Losing everything. Many thousands of others who trusted their savings to banks found there was little or no money left. Many banks failed. Brokerage houses went under. Great financial companies went down in ruin.

Blind fear ruled the day. Panic spread. And the worst was yet to come.

I knew or understood nothing of this at the time. I did hear the stories about stock brokers jumping out of high windows and speculators shooting themselves. But the crash meant nothing to me personally, until that day when the company Neff worked for went belly-up. They closed their doors. Clarence Neff, in his $20 silk shirt, was out of a job.

***

It was no great surprise when my mother and Neff called it quits. Their relationship had been fraying badly for months.

In a noisy quarrel just before Christmas, Neff told my mother that he and Gladys were heading for Denver, where he was going to work with his brother. He said we could stay in the apartment until the end of the month. Then, we had to get out.

When Neff and Gladys pulled out, they packed everything they owned in three heavy suit cases. She smiled her crooked little smile, waved a plaintive good-bye, and that was it. They were gone. I never saw or heard from Gladys Neff again.

Over the years, I sometimes wondered. Did she ever grow up to become a “movie star?”

***

As we entered, the 1930's, America began its slide downward into the Great Depression—the longest, cruelest and most devastating economic crisis in our

nation's history.

My mother gamely faced the harsh reality of her situation. It was a time of sky rocketing unemployment— with people scrambling for fewer and fewer jobs. And here she was, a 34-year-old single mother with an eight- year-old kid, almost no education, no job training, no money, no alimony, no car, no place to go—and no idea of what was to come.

# FOUR

## Hard Times

"Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"

*Lyrics by Yip Harburg, 1932*

At the time of the crash, my grandparents were living on the second floor of an aging two-story wooden tenement on Portland's lower east side. It was located down around the docks, near the old Hawthorne Bridge.

My grandfather hadn't held a steady, full-time job in almost, a year. Their tight-fisted savings were dwindling. Nevertheless, after my mother's breakup with Neff, they took us in without question.

It was a small, low-rent apartment. My mother slept on a pullout couch, or daybed, in the front room. I slept on a folding cot they put up in my grandparents' bedroom. It was close quarters—but we had no choice. We all shared the one small bathroom.

***

My mother immediately started job hunting. **Day** after day and week after week, she followed every lead, every rumor, every idea—to a dead end. I think she did work one three-or-four-day stretch as a part-time waitress in a Southeast 12th street coffee shop. Then nothing. No job. Nothing. It was an agonizing time for her. I felt it. And I remember how I wished that I could do something to help. I was in my third school at the time—finishing up third grade.

Then the irrepressible Agnes Peterson stepped in. She helped my mother to get a job in Battuzi's speakeasy as a hat check girl. It paid nothing. But Battuzi let the girls keep their tips. Agnes also invited my mother to come share her west side apartment. And my mother gratefully accepted the offer. However, with Agnes and my mother both working late into the night, I remained with my grandparents.

That was the start of a new way of life for me, It went on for several years. Sometimes I lived with my grandparents. Sometimes I lived with my mother. Sometimes I lived with my mother and friends.

***

In 1930, my grandfather, Jim Dewey, was approaching sixty. He was tough, stocky, hard-muscled, with a full head of shaggy white hair and bristling black eyebrows. His hands were rough and calloused. These were the hands of a laboring man.

His early days as a ranch hand and river boat roustabout had not prepared him well for the urban milieu. Throughout his years in Portland, he had to work hard—-very hard—as a manual laborer. Yet he held to a fierce level of pride, salted with a strong sense of personal responsibility. He went from job to job, eking out a living for my grandmother and me and sometimes helping out my mother, too. Even when things looked hopeless, he stubbornly refused to apply for relief. And he retained a lusty sense of humor.

This was at a time, too, when there was no such thing as a "safety net". No unemployment compensation. No Social Security. No Medicare, or Medicaid, or insured savings. No federal help of almost any kind. There was only local community relief for the destitute—and oftentimes little of that.

***

Over the years, Jim Dewey proudly remained a loyal, long-time, dues-paying, card-carrying member of the Laborers International Union of North America, AFL (American Federation of Labor), Local 296.

I remember one bleak day in '31 or '32, when he took me with him to the Portland AFL Labor Temple in search of a job. He'd heard the City was hiring four additional laborers for a short-term pipeline replacement project.

That morning, when we walked into the smoky hiring hall, the place was already jammed with what must have been two-hundred men, maybe more, lined up to get their names in the job draw. Yet the entire hall was strangely quiet—eerily quiet. A strong feeling of anxiety hung in the air.

My grandfather observed the scene. Then, grabbing

my hand, he led me to a far back corner of the hall, where he opened the door into some kind of bustling business office. There, he told an elderly secretary he wanted to see his old friend, Andy Hawkins, for just a moment—to introduce him to the Dewey grandson.

That's how I first met Andy Hawkins, famed business manager of Local 296 and a big shot in Oregon labor circles. He must have weighed a ton. As he stood there in the doorway to his office, face flushed and breathing laboriously, he cheerfully greeted my grandfather like he was a long lost buddy from the picket lines. We were invited into the inner office. Hawkins seated his bulk behind a giant wooden desk.

My grandfather and Hawkins proceeded to talk on and on about the old days, the labor front, hard times, Democratic politics, the four city job openings, and Andy Hawkins' aching back.

When it was time for us to leave, Hawkins took both my hands in his big paws, looked me in the eyes, smiled a big, fat genial smile, and said, "Okay now, young fella, I want you to be sure and grow up to be a good, solid labor union man. Ya hear?" And he deftly slipped me a folded dollar bill.

Afterwards, my grandfather took me into the Labor Temple cafeteria, where I bought us sandwiches for lunch, with two-bits left over—thanks to our favorite labor boss, Andy Hawkins.

The following Monday, Jim Dewey was one of four "lucky" union laborers who reported to the City for work, digging ditches with pick and shovel, ten hours a day, six days a week. That back-breaking job lasted three, maybe four months.

***

In our neighborhood, all the younger kids seemed to have apple box scooters. My grandfather helped me to make mine. We started with a hunk of 2x4' about three or four feet long. On the bottom, we attached old roller skate wheels, well-oiled. We screwed two in front, two in back. On the top, we nailed upright a solid, wooden apple box, which our friendly neighborhood grocer gave to me. We screwed a pair of whittled wooden handles on the top of the box. And that was all there was to it. *Voila.* I had myself a hand-crafted Hood River apple box scooter.

The kids raced these scooters. Mine turned out to be a slow racer. But I did get to a level where I could boldly roll for almost half a block, balanced on the *2x4',* without using the apple box handles. “Look, Ma, no hands!”

***

*There was no letup. As the 1930s wore on, the Depression worsened. ‘30, ‘31, ‘32 were the cruelest years. Almost one-third of the nation's workforce was out of a job. Another 25% or more worked part time. Those lucky enough to have some kind of job found that wages were about half of what they were during the “Roaring Twenties. More corporations, large and small, were going under. All over the US, banks were collapsing, closing their doors, taking people’s savings accounts down with them. It was an epidemic. People were bewildered. A sick feeling of fear swept across the land.*

*Thousands of homeless families lived in Hooverville “shanty towns”—vast clusters of wooden crates, tar paper, tin and cardboard, jammed under bridges, in dry creek beds, culverts or wherever they could huddle. Long lines of men, numbering in the hundreds, could be seen constantly crowding employment offices and factory gates or applying for relief, or lined up at the soup kitchens or in the bread lines—long double lines that went all the way around the block. Bands of hungry teens roamed the country like scavengers, begging or stealing food. Crowds of men and women rode the freights and rails, searching for jobs, food, or any small semblance of a settled life. There were hunger riots in several cities. A growing class struggle. Widespread disillusionment. Unrest. Even talk of revolution.*

***

I knew it was hard times for us, too. But as a kid, I didn't question it. In no way did I consider us poor. In fact, if anyone had told me we were poor, I would have been astounded. There were so many desperate people much worse off than we were. Besides, everybody around us seemed to be in the same boat.

We got along.

My grandmother made every scrap of food go a long way. We seldom had leftovers. Although I do think she

sometimes made a little extra just to pass along to an elderly Jewish couple who lived next door. They were having an awfully hard time making it.

No complaining was called for, however, in our family. During those troubled times, there always seemed to be a bowl of oatmeal or cereal on the table for breakfast. For supper, I remember that we ate a lot of macaroni and cheese, biscuits and gravy, and such things as soups and thinned out stews, fish on Friday, all kinds of vegetables, baked potatoes—lots of baked potatoes—beans and rice. For a special Sunday dinner once in awhile, we'd even have fried chicken, or a pot roast, and one of my grandmother's fresh-baked apple pies.

Our local grocers, a pair of Armenian brothers, helped out their regular customers in the neighborhood. They'd let us have overripe bananas, and other fruit, too, just before it turned rotten. That's the moment when the flavor is intense and at its best, anyway. In that same vein, I would often get to bring home wilted, unsold vegetables to go in my grandmother's pot of "Mulligan Stew," simmering away on the wood-burning stove. We had no gas or electricity for cooking.

We got along.

***

The Frostkist Dairy and Ice Cream Company was located a few blocks away from where we lived The Frostkist folks helped out people in the neighborhood, too, by selling us run-off skim milk at five cents a gallon. Limit: one gallon to a family per week. So once a week after school, my grandparents gave me the job of wheeling my old red wagon over to Frostkist, with a lidded gallon bucket, to pick up our allotment.

The guys at Frostkist would joke around with me on the loading dock, and fill my bucket with milk. But the exciting thing was—every week they'd give me one of their Popsicle or ice cream bar seconds. These were badly formed bars they couldn't sell.

Once, they gave me an entire box of a dozen deformed frozen Popsicles. Great! I licked away at one fruit Popsicle on the way home with the gallon of milk.
However, by the time I got home, the remaining Popsicles were softly melting. I handed them out to other kids who were hanging around. I heard no complaints.

It was also my job to pick up stale bread, two-or-three-day's-old, at the baker's. Sometimes the baker would give me a cookie or a *bear claw,* to eat on the way home. That kind of friendly gesture was typical.

There seemed to be a sense of communal spirit during the Depression. People shared the troubles. I think people went out of their way in those gritty times to show others a little touch of kindness along the way.

***

My grandfather taught me how to make an instant "poor man's dessert" using that stale bread. Here's how you do it: Take a piece of white bread. Wet it under the water faucet. Sprinkle sugar lightly over the bread. Sprinkle cinnamon on top of that. And there you have it. Delicious!

On those special mornings when my grandmother was willing to go along with the fun, my grandfather would also make huge obscene pancakes for breakfast, one at a time. These were doughy giants, believe me. Each pancake covered the entire bottom of our biggest frying pan. He'd make 'em about one-half inch thick. When he figured they were ready, golden brown on top, he'd slide one on my plate and pour *Log Cabin* syrup all over the top. And in his best, bawdy style, he'd sing out, "Go ahead, eat your way through this one, Billy. It'll put lead in your pencil." Then he'd chuckle to himself and pour out the batter for another one, coming right up.

After one of those giant pancake mornings, I'd plod down the stairs with a full belly, indeed.

***

Christmas during this time in my life was on the lean side. Those fancy holiday packages usually contained necessities—like socks, underwear and handkerchiefs.

However, on my ninth birthday I did receive an exciting *Chandu the Magician* set with all kinds of sleight-of-hand paraphernalia. I took to this magical array like a young Houdini.

Once, when the Martells came over for Sunday dinner, I set up a card table with a sheet over it and put on a show that totally mystified them—I think. Anyway, they applauded wildly. Magic became a hobby I

thoroughly enjoyed. Later on, it got me started delving into strange and obscure books on early magic and mysticism.

When I made objects disappear, such as coins, handkerchiefs, cards, that sort of thing, I spoke in what I called a magical cabalian chant. It was simply a bit of Indian-French-Canadian doggeral taught me by my grandfather. Phonetically, these were the "magical words": *Bo-Knee-Bo-Nah . . . Ch-Plee-Ch-Plah . . . Koo-Row-Shmah . . . Bow-Yer-Kiv-Yah,*

***

I owned two pair of shoes at the time. One was a pair of leather oxfords and one was a pair of *Keds.* When I wore holes through the soles of the oxfords, my grandfather would carefully cut out cardboard insoles for me to stuff inside. It's surprising how well that worked—for awhile.

I also owned a pair of rubbers for walking in the rain.

***

Geography was an early favorite of mine in grammar school. I even learned how to spell the name of the capital city of Turkey by singing the silly lyrics of a song that went like this: "Con-stan-ti-nople . . . C-O-N-S-T-A- N-T-I-N-O-P-L-E." In 1930, this had been a popular ditty.

Then in 1931, the wily Turks turned around and changed the name of their capital city to *Istanbul.*

***

My grandmother, Josephine Martell Dewey, had a passion for Pinochle, which she sometimes called *Bezique.* I often listened and watched the grownups play. Early on, I learned that my grandmother was an awesome card player. The other players handled her with caution and care and the utmost respect.

She was a big woman, broad in the beam. She would sit royally at the end of the table, straight up, impassive, surveying the scene, quietly goading other players into overbidding. I noticed that in a pinochle game, she consistently won trick after trick, piling up the points.

She would have made a great poker player.

I spent a lot of time with my grandmother during those early Depression years. She was a smart, tough, soft-hearted woman with a sly sense of humor. She let my grandfather do the posturing and the roaring. But she controlled the purse strings. She knew exactly how much money we had left at any moment, what still had to be paid out, what had to be stretched.

She taught me how to play *Papillon,* the ancient card game that is easy to learn, yet so difficult to master. We would frequently sit at the kitchen table and play all evening long—-just the two of us. A few years later, I discovered that everybody else in America seemed to call the game *Casino.*

My grandmother had the ability to keep track of almost every card played in *Papillon,* so that when we came down to the last deal, she always had a good idea of what four cards I was holding. It was infuriating.

In playing a game of cards, she showed no mercy. She forced me to study the cards carefully and to do my best. She taught me something else, too. She would wiggle her finger in my face and speaking in her fractured French-Canadian accent, she would warn me, "Play smart, Byron. Play smart. But nevair cheat at cards. Nevair. Nevair."

A good lesson for playing at cards—and life.

***

During those days, my grandfather made a good full-flavored home brew. Strictly for our own family and friends, his beer was a big hit at family dinners and pinochle parties.

However, with no steady job and with the Depression pushing us toward the bottom, he began a little local bootlegging to bring in some extra money. He would take advance orders and then deliver the finished product—a case or two here, a case or two there, mostly to industrial workers at the machine shops and warehouses in our neighborhood and down around the docks.

He cooked the malt and the hops and the other fixings in an old 10-gallon enamel kettle. Then he'd siphon the cooled wort into glass jugs, adding the yeast. In about a week, the product was ready for bottling.

My mother would come over to help out at this point. We used a thin rubber hose about five or six feet long.

When my grandfather sucked on the hose and got the brew flowing, he would quickly hand it to me. It was my job to fill the bottles, working my way from one to another, trying my best to avoid spilling a drop.

My mother's job, kneeling next to me, was to carefully and firmly work the capper in order to get a tight seal. My grandfather would then get at the other end of the line, stacking the bottles in cases. Finally, the finished product was ready to move on out. We had a crude but effective small batch operation going.

***

In March 1931, our fourth grade class had a short history lesson the day after an act of congress officially approved the "Star Spangled Banner" as our national anthem. We stood up in class and sang the new anthem as best we could, in our pre-pubescent voices.

The American poet, Francis Scott Key, wrote the "Star Spangled Banner" while he was held by the British during the British bombardment of Fort McHenry in the War of 1812. Later, his words were put to the tune of an old British drinking song and it became a patriotic 19th century American favorite.

I've always maintained, however, that congress made a mistake. They picked the wrong song. They should have selected "America," written by Samuel Francis Smith in 1831. Smith's simple and very moving work became the most popular song in the entire history of American music. And every school kid in America can reach all the notes, too.

**My country. Tis of thee,**
**Sweet land of liberty,**
**Of thee I sing.**
**Land -where my fathers died.**
**Land of the Pilgrims' pride.**
**From every mountain side,**
**Let freedom ring!**

***

One other World War I aviation saga I wanted to see as a kid in the early '30s was Howard Hughes' aerial spectacular, "Hell's Angels", starring that platinum-haired bombshell, Jean Harlow. "Hell's Angels" was a talkie. I never did get to see it, though. Later on,

somebody told me the aerial dog fights were terrific, but the sound wasn't so good.

***

In the third or fourth grade, I won third prize in a safety poster contest. Two Japanese sisters won first and second prize. I thought their posters were sensational. They were beautifully done. As soon as I saw their work, I figured they deserved to win. And they did.

***

When the law came knocking on our door, I was home alone with my grandmother. It was late afternoon. She was in her bedroom, not feeling well.

I could hear them lumbering up the stairs. They knocked sharply on our door. I opened it. And there stood two large men. I remember they wore lumpy blue serge suits and green fedoras. One was silent. The other spoke in a flat voice.

"Is Jim Dewey here?"

"No, six."

"Who's in here with you, son?"

I hesitated. The spokesman flashed an open wallet at me. I saw a police badge.

"We're from police headquarters."

I squeaked out my reply. "My grandmother's here with me and she's sick in bed." My throat was dry. And I was scared. .

"So you're takin' care of her, huh?"

"Yes, sir," I squeaked again.

"Is it alright if we come in and look around?"

"I guess it's okay," I replied doubtfully. I really didn't know what else to say. Asking for a search warrant or anything like that was far beyond my state of mind.

For the next hour or so, these two plain clothes cops minutely ransacked our apartment from one end to the other. They asked me a lot of questions while they went about their search. For some reason, they were especially interested in our wood-burning stove. They peeked and poked all around inside and on the back and underneath.

Twice, they asked me when we had used the stove last. I told them early that morning.

Ironically, it wasn't -until the very end of their search that they discovered my grandfather's home brewing

equipment, stacked neatly in a closet next to the front door where they first entered.

My grandfather had already made his deliveries that week from our most recent batch. All that remained was about a half a case of beer which he was saving for himself. The two cops examined the bottles of beer and our pitiful little stack of home brew equipment and looked at each other in disgust. One muttered something like, "For Chrissakes, Hal, this is nuthin'. Let's get the hell out of here. We're wasting our time."

Hal gave me his card and told me to have my grandfather call him at headquarters the next day. They said they wanted Jim Dewey to come on down to headquarters for a little talk. Our phone had been turned off for months, but I told them I'd sure have my grandfather call him.

The two cops in mufti took our half a case of beer with them as they trudged on down the stairs. When they walked out the door, I also noticed for the first time that one of them wore white socks with his blue serge suit and green fedora.

***

My grandfather spent most of one day at the Portland police headquarters. When he came home, he told us an interesting story. It seems that somebody had reported to the police that Jim Dewey was running a big bootlegging and dope operation. Out of our little dump?

After the questioning, the cop in charge sort of insulted my grandfather by telling him that our ten-gallon kettle and half a case of beer weren't worth the paper work it took to write 'em up. They gave my grandfather a stern warning, however. They told him to stop selling home brew—period. Then they sent him on home.

So much for my budding career as a bootlegger.

# FIVE

## The Beat Goes On

**"Life is just a bowl of cherries.**
**Don't make it serious.**
**Life's too mysterious..."**

**George White s Scandals, 1932**

*As the second year of the depression drew to a close and a third relentless year began, an ominous black cloud of disillusionment and fear hung over America and Europe. The disparity between rich and poor continued to widen. Inexorable conditions led millions of unemployed to desperate measures in order to survive. It was an almost unbelievable era.*

***

Sometime during this period in my life, I vowed to myself that I would be the first person in our family ever to graduate from college.

***

In the midst of it all, many Americans turned to light-hearted motion pictures to get their minds off their troubles. An evening out at the movies usually started off with a ten-minute newsreel, followed by lengthy coming attractions, a cartoon or two, and finally, the main feature. Zany comedies and happy, escapist fare like the Busby Berkeley musicals were especially popular. Who can ever forget *Footlight Parade, Forty-second Street* or *Gold Diggers of 1933?*

At neighborhood theaters, weekly "Bank Night" drawings for cash prizes packed them in, too.

During those dark days, many Americans also looked for answers in a new wave of astrology, fortune tellers, mediums and the Ouija board. They became fascinated, too, by such diversions as wacky flag pole sitters, elaborate new outdoor miniature golf courses, and the

sleazy marathon dance craze.

Marathon dance contests were sorry spectacles that attracted hungry and desperate young people with the promise of excitement and three square meals a day (or night) and a chance to win a pile of money—sometimes as much as $5,000.

***

Agnes Peterson's niece was one of the many.

Divorced and alone, close to the end of her rope, Emma Lindquist teamed up again with her ex-husband. They hitched a ride down from Spokane and entered what promoters called "The Grand Pacific Northwest Championship Marathon Dance Contest."

Twice—Agnes and my mother took me along to cheer for "Couple Number 78."

At a later time, I learned that Emma's parents had died in a head-on crash when she was about 16 years old. Out on her own, she married early. Within a year, however, she separated from her surly husband, a young Spokane truck driver. It had been a bad teenage marriage from the beginning.

For the next year or two, Emma worked in a small Spokane dance studio, teaching farm boys how to dance the *Fox-Trot.* At the age of 21, she paid for her own divorce. Early in the depression, the dance studio folded. And Emma was dead broke—left without a hope in hell.

For months on end, she was out of a job. She started working the streets. The marathon dance contest sounded like a way out.

The promoters' concept for these contests was simple: *You get the kids to dance 'till they drop. And you get the crowds to come out and watch.*

In Portland, the contest was held in a fading dance pavilion across Highway 99 from the popular Jantzen Beach Amusement Park. We sat on circus bench seats surrounding the dance floor. At one end they had built a platform where people said an orchestra played on weekends. I never heard them play. On the nights we attended, amplified canned music blared over the air.

Back of the platform, the promoters had draped a huge curtain. Emma told us later that behind the curtain were cots for the rest breaks, a dressing room area, food counter and washrooms.

The contestants danced for one hour and 50 minutes a stretch. Then a whistle blew. And they got a 10 minute rest period for a quick sleep or something to eat or wash-up or whatever. That was it.

About 150 couples entered the grueling event in Portland. Half of them dropped out during the first week.

A big sign on the curtain back of the platform kept track of the elapsed time and the number of couples remaining. It's hazy for me now, but I think when we walked in that night, the sign read **ELAPSED HOURS:** 220. **COUPLES LEFT:** 66. Something like that.

Emma told us that during the first week, people actually danced. From then on, however, it quickly degenerated into a sad exhibition of dead-eyed couples, shuffling to the music, hanging on, supporting each other, swaying side to side, desperately trying to stay awake and to keep moving.

*Collapse...hit the floor...and you're out.*

I was not there on that night when Emma's knees finally buckled. Agnes said that she fought it hard—she held on for dear life—as she slowly slid to the floor.

**ELAPSED HOURS: 556. COUPLES LEFT: 14.**

When the ordeal was over, Emma moved in with my mother and Agnes. Her ex-husband cut out for California.

***

The slumlord who owned our sagging Third Street tenement raised our rent. My grandparents searched and searched for another place to live. Eventually, they landed an arrangement that was good for them.

A few blocks east of our tenement area was a friendly old neighborhood of 'morning' houses, vacant lots, flats and small apartment houses. My grandparents took on the job of managing and handling the upkeep of two separate four-unit buildings in the neighborhood—in return for a two-bedroom flat, rent free. My grandmother did the managing—collecting rents. My grandfather did the upkeep and maintenance. The location was Southeast 15th and Salmon. And I was delighted. I happily shared the second bedroom with some storage boxes.

Next to our building was a large vacant lot heavy with undergrowth and two old walnut trees, still standing. It was a great place for kids to climb trees or to play "Cowboy and Indians" or "Cops and Robbers." (Same

game. You stalk the other guy with your “rubber gun.”)

***

In the new neighborhood, I soon learned that every kid above a certain age owned a “rubber gun.” You had to make your own. That was part of the mystique. Some were ornately carved and decorated.

The way you made one of these toy weapons was simple. Pick up a piece of scrap wood, about three-quarters inch thick. Cut out or whittle the outline of an old western long-barreled pistol. Carve a notch in the end of the barrel. Tape a clothes pin on the back of the slanted pistol grip handle. That was it.

Ammunition for this wicked, single-shot weapon came from worn out inner tubes. (In the days before tubeless tires, old blown-out inner tubes were easy to find.)

I cut an inner tube into half-inch bands. Huge, thick rubber bands. I loaded the gun by hooking a band into the notch at the end of the barrel, stretching the rubber back over the edge of the handle and inserting the band into the grip of the clothespin. At that point, the clothes pin would hold it tight until I squeezed my hand. Then—S*nap! Zing!* Away it would go, a good, straight 15-20 feet. Sometimes more.

We'd stalk each other in the underbrush. The guy who got smacked first lost the game. You knew when you were hit, too. It stung. But not for long.

***

Sometime around the age of ten or eleven, I sold subscriptions to *Colliers* and *Liberty* Magazines. I worked the entire neighborhood, not very successfully. The job didn’t pay a single dime. But they gave me a prize catalog. And I earned points towards a prize for each subscription that I sold.

One prize I earned that I had fun with was a ukulele. It came with full instructions for fingering the chords and it included a small-scale repertoire of songs.

My best rendition was a little depression era tune that became the theme song for many flat broke lovers:

T *can’t give you anything but love, baby.*
*Love’s the only thing I’ve plenty of, baby.”*

***

Like most kids, I changed my mind countless times about what I wanted to be when I grew up. In '31 or '32, with all the commotion about the new Empire State Building, I became enthusiastic about the world of architecture. I decided then and there I would grow up to be an architect.

When the Empire State Building officially opened, the New York celebration was broadcast by radio to millions of listeners. It even became a subject our teacher had us write about at school.

I got a good grade for a short paper I wrote that went something like this: "The world's tallest building shoots straight up 1,050-feet. It has 85 floors and 67 elevators. On the roof is a 200-foot mooring mast for big dirigible airships like the *Graf Zeppelin*. I think it's terrific." What did I know about the future of dirigibles?

(In the early '30s, "aeronautical experts" predicted that dirigible airships would soon become the favored mode for crossing the Atlantic and the continent. The planners of the Empire State Building were looking ahead. All such predictions came tumbling down, however, when the *Hindenberg* exploded in flames in 1937.)

Building the Empire State Building in the face of the Great Depression was hailed as a symbolic triumph for the country. And for me, that exciting structure will always remain "the world's tallest building."

My all-time favorite skyscraper, however, is still the 77-story Chrysler Building, with its sleek, art deco aluminum-banded facades and its graceful pointed spire. The Chrysler Building was completed in 1930.

The Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building remain our two most distinguished Manhattan Towers.

***

My mother and Agnes loved Chinese food and they loved to gamble. In Portland's teeming Chinatown of the early '30s, they found plenty of both.

One early evening, on their day off, they took me to a Chinese restaurant on Southwest Couch Street in the heart of the old Chinatown, a few blocks from the Union Pacific train station. Both sides of the crowded street

were lined with a jumbled array of herb shops, seedy rundown hotels, open markets and restaurants.

The place they picked to eat was on the corner of an alley leading into Couch Street. It was a narrow restaurant with high-backed wooden booths and a small counter in the back. Garish Chinese lanterns and red dragon panels on the side walls made up the decor.

The three of us sat there in a booth and joyfully worked our way through fragrant platters of good, cheap Chow Mien. Nothing fancy.

What my mother and Agnes didn't tell me was that this unobtrusive family restaurant was the front for a popular Chinese gambling joint.

I don't think they really planned in advance to take me with them into the gaming room. One thing led to another and it just turned out that way. About the time we were opening our Chinese fortune cookies, somebody— I don't remember who—said, "As long as we're here, let's try a little Blackjack. Okay?"

The next thing I knew, my mother had me by the hand, edging me through a curtain at the back of the restaurant and on through a door leading down a short hallway. At that point we faced a second door, with steel straps across its face and along its edges. A buzzer sounded, the heavy door opened, and there I was—standing in a live gambling joint for the first time in my young life.

I found out afterwards that a thin, little Chinese man sitting at the back counter in the dining room was the spotter. He made the decision who went in and who didn't. And he pressed the buzzer. He knew both Agnes and my mother.

I'm still astonished they let a ten-year-old kid in the joint. However, since the entire operation was illegal anyway, perhaps they rationalized that it didn't make any difference one way or the other. .

The gaming room setup was bewildering. But later in life, I learned what they had. It amounted to one craps table, two blackjack tables, a Chuck-a-Luck table, plus a back alcove with a money cage, a counter and a few chairs where they played Chinese tickets. Today, they call that Keno. At the rear of the alcove, next to the money cage, they also had a drink cooler and a little table with a few magazines. A Chinese kid about my age sat on one side of the table, thumbing through a magazine. I

found out later he was part of the family. We ignored each other.

My mother got me a creme soda. Then, for the next hour or so, I scrunched down in a chair on the other side of the table, also leafing through magazines.

It was all pretty boring.

***

During the first week in February, 1932, for the first time ever, the Winter Olympics were held in the United States—at Lake Placid, New York. Sonja Henie of Norway won the gold medal in ladies' figure skating.

Across the continent in Seattle, Washington, that very same week, a little girl named Mary Bovee celebrated her sixth birthday. A strong admirer of Sonja Henie, Mary went on to become the Junior Pacific Northwest figure skating champion. Later on, shortly before the 1944 Olympic trials, she turned pro and opened in Madison Square garden with the Ice Capades. By the following year, she was one of the Ice Capades' featured stars.

My second (and final) visit to the Chinese gambling joint turned out to be far livelier than my first visit.

It happened on a Saturday afternoon when my grandfather had me in tow. The gaming room was filled with a loud crowd. When we entered, I spotted the same Chinese kid, along with a little girl who appeared to be his younger sister. They were sitting around the small table in the alcove. This time he waved me over and greeted me as if I was an old buddy. Said his name was Ben.

My grandfather really didn't have the money to gamble. All he did was play two-bit Chuck-a-Luck a few times and mark some tickets Then he stood around the craps table for awhile, watching the action. In about a half an hour, maybe less, he was standing in front of me, telling me it was time to go.

Suddenly, all hell broke loose. A piercing bell started ringing and a red light above the main door started flashing. Someone yelled, "It's a raid." I heard loud

pounding and crashing on the other side of the door and muffled yells. “Police...Police. Open up.” A woman screamed. Confusion reigned on all sides. Noise in the room reached bedlam level.

Out of nowhere, the large Chinese manager in a dark blue suit appeared in the alcove. Fast on his feet, he swept the young kid, the little girl and myself in behind the cage, where we were shielded from view. A jabbering woman in the ticket cage slammed shut a money box and closed down a curtain in front of the cage. My grandfather surfaced at my side. So did two Chinese dealers. A narrow panel in the wood-paneled wall opened behind us.

At this point the main door splintered and the police came crashing through, just as we were shoved brusquely into what appeared to be a downward tunnel. Behind us, the wall panel silently closed.

One of the dealers led the way. We were herded quickly down several steps and along a narrow, dimly-lit passageway underneath the alley. Eventually, we climbed several steps. A door opened. And we emerged in the kitchen of another Chinese restaurant across the alley. It was then I realized there were nine escapees in our underground party: the big man in charge, the woman with the cash box, two dealers, my grandfather, one other gambler, and three kids.

My grandfather and I walked out of the restaurant and mingled with the crowd that had gathered on the corner. A paddy wagon and two police cars blocked the street, with lights flashing. We watched wordlessly from across the street as the police escorted people into the paddy wagon.

***

In the 5th or 6th grade, I thought I was in love with Nancy Kazarian. She had an exotic, sloe-eyed look, with high cheek bones and velvety, olive skin and a long, graceful neck and shining black hair. She wore colorful, expensive-looking clothes. And when she walked, she walked with her head held high. There was a cool, detached, mysterious air about her.

I thought she was the most glamorous creature in all of Buckman Grammar School, for sure. To my young eyes, she looked every inch like a royal princess out of *The*

*Arabian Nights.*

Trouble was—she had me mesmerized from afar. All year long I could never even get up the nerve to speak with her. Looking back on that now, I wonder why I was so shy?

***

Throughout my childhood, I always wanted a Lionel electric train and a dog. I never got either one. In later years, dogs did become an important part of our family life, of course. The loving friendship of a dog can be a very precious thing.

***

On Halloween, kids in our neighborhood would sometimes head for what we thought was the "rich" section up around Laurelhurst Park to do our Trick or Treatin'. We figured we'd get more and better treats up there, although it never seemed to turn out that way. Nevertheless, I did it for two or three years in a row, because I liked to look at the big, impressive houses. Usually I would get a chance to peek inside the front doors, too.

The last time I did this, it was a frosty Halloween night. In my mind's eye, I can see the place now. A large, two-story Italianate house set far back on the property. An expansive lawn curved down to an edge of shrubs and an ornate iron fence. The windows were ablaze with light and Halloween decorations. On the wide front porch, jack-o'-lanterns welcomed us.

The kid I was with, however, didn't want to take the time to go up to that mansion with me. He said he could hit two or three houses to my one by heading on up the street. So I did it alone.

Clutching my paper sack half-loaded with goodies, I opened the gate, walked up the path, bounded up the steps and rang the bell.

After what seemed like several agonizing minutes, the great door opened wide. And there—oh my God—there she was—a bemused Nancy Kazarian, beautifully backlit by the lights of a huge chandelier hanging in the entry hallway.

I stood there in stunned silence. Embarrassed. Speechless. My face flushed beet-red, like a damned fool.

All I could do was sort of stammer out "Happy Halloween." Then I turned around, stumbled awkwardly down the steps, and headed for the street. I kicked myself all the way home.

At the end of the school term, Nancy Kazarian transferred to a private school. The next time our paths crossed was in Seattle, some 13 years later.

***

I saw little of my dad during the early '30s. He didn't escape the depression. The construction firm he worked for went belly up. Then he was in and out of town on various jobs, including about five months up the Columbia River on the Bonneville Dam project.

On one of his infrequent visits, he took me to a fancy miniature golf course far out Sandy Boulevard, on the way to Mt. Hood.. We played three rounds of golf.

Started in Florida in 1929 by a creative entrepreneur named Garnet Carter, miniature golf courses developed into a national craze in the early '30s. By the summer of 1932, some 30,000 roadside courses regularly attracted hundreds of thousands of Americans. These were true fantasyland courses, far more elaborate than the pale imitations that exist today.

Playing against my dad, I won two out of three rounds. But I really think he let me win.

***

Arthur Murray was probably the most successful ballroom dance instructor and dance promoter ever to appear on the American scene. He devised the idea of teaching simple dance steps with footprint diagrams, in two years during the late '20s, he reportedly sold more than 500,000 dance courses by mail.

After he married his dance partner, Kathryn, he started opening popular dancing schools. By the middle of the 1930s, they operated hundreds of dance studios around the world.

Emma Lindquist landed a job as an instructor at the new *Arthur Murray Dance Studio* that opened in Portland. Finally, she got a lucky break.

***

*By the early '30s, prohibition laws were being flouted more openly than ever before. After ten years of prohibition, most people held "the noble experiment" in complete contempt. A full-scale national straw vote indicated an astounding 70% of adult Americans favored repeal of the 18th amendment. Politicians began to listen.*

***

Battuzi' s speakeasy was booming. Agnes said she was finally making some good money. My mother was getting by on heavy tips, too. At the same time, she became involved with the drummer in the club's Chicago jazz band. The drummer's name was Freddy something. I don't remember his last name. They had some wild times, my mother admitted later. It was fun and games for awhile.

I never did get to meet Freddy, however. Everything fell apart when a new reform mayor announced that he was "cleaning up" the City of Portland.

They raided Battuzi's speakeasy. Closed it down tight. Agnes and my mother were thrown out of a job. Freddy and his buddies in the band returned to Chicago.

***

My mother was a tough-minded optimist. She was a survivor. After several weeks of enduring once again the hardship of finding a job where no job exists, she went to work as a waitress in a popular diner up near 39th and Hawthorne. She worked hard—very hard. Long hours.

Agnes eventually landed a hostess and cashier job with a remodeled seafood house in the Skidmore Fountain district of downtown Portland.

About this time, Agnes, Emma and my mother went on the prowl for lower-cost quarters. They were fortunate. They found, a comfortable old. flat for rent on Southeast 17th and Taylor, only a few blocks from my grandparents. At that point, I moved in with the three women.

# SIX

## A New Deal

**"Just around the comer,**
**There's a rainbow in the sky.**
**So let's have another cup of coffee.**
**And let's have another piece of pie."**

*Irving Berlin, 1932*

*The year 1932 was a national election year. For millions of depression-weary Americans, Herbert Hoover's Republican presidency was doomed and on its way out. The Democrats nominated the debonair governor of New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who pledged a "New Deal" for the American people. His confidence in the face of despair was infectious.*

*Roosevelt won by a landslide.*

***

Every summer during the depression years, my grandparents would join the migrant workers in the fields for two or three weeks, picking fruits and vegetables. They made a little extra money doing this. Very little. However, as pickers they found ways to bring home boxes of seconds for home canning, at little or no cost.

I can remember my mother and my grandmother sweating in the kitchen for hours as they put up dozens of *Mason* jars full of preserves, jellies, pickles, beets, peaches and pears.

***

Living in a 1 1/2-bath flat with three single women had its unique problems. Yet I think of that brief period in my life as an exhilarating time.

Despite the darkness of the depression, menial jobs and a constant concern about money, our flat seemed to reverberate with unexplained gayety and friendly banter, especially between Agnes Peterson and my mother. They

were great pals.

Both of them watched over their wistful new roommate, Emma Lindquist, as if she was a younger sister. And all three of the women watched over me.

I was doing lousy in school at the time. All three of them pounced on me. They saw to it that I started completing my homework. Period.

***

Emma had a broad face, luminous hazel eyes, a big nose, and an absolutely spectacular body. Most of the time she wore her long ash-blonde hair pulled softly back into a bun, spiked with an ornate gold pin that she said once belonged to her mother.

A thin, pale, ugly scar slanted downward into her left eyebrow. It gave her a disdainful, raised-eyebrow look that made some people uneasy. However, from the viewpoint of a ten-or-eleven-year-old boy, I thought she had a cool, quizzical expression that was nifty.

It was not until much later I learned the sordid story behind the facial scar and two ugly scars on her shoulder. Her jealous, overbearing husband, during one final, furniture-smashing, bottle-shattering, insane rampage, had brutally attacked her.

It brought their ill-fated marriage to an end.

***

Emma and I hit it off well from the start. Shortly after I moved into the new flat, my mother and Agnes went out on a double date. Emma volunteered to hang around and keep me out of trouble. What did she do? She took me to a movie.

We discovered that both of us were eager to see a scary new film that was the talk of the town, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." It was showing on the east side, at the nearby Orpheum Theater. Or was it the Bagdad? I don't remember. I think it was the Orpheum.

She caught me by surprise.

Only minutes after Agnes and my mother walked out the door, she turned to me and said, "Well, Byron...how would you like to go see Jekyll and Hyde?"

"No kidding? Hey...terrific!"

Off we went.

Frederic March's performance in that 1932 version of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic horror story was incredible. He won an Oscar for his berserk portrayal of the gruesome Mr. Hyde. And I ate it up. Every minute.

(In Hollywood today, it's still debated exactly how they achieved the Jekyll-Hyde transformation scenes. It had a chilling effect. And the secret has never been revealed.)

Emma was less enthusiastic. But she did enjoy Miriam Hopkins' sensitive portrayal of the tantalizing trollop.

***

*On a gloomy, rainy Saturday in March 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt was sworn in as president, taking over under terrible circumstances. He addressed a worried and weary nation in a short, twenty-minute address that marked the start of the long, long road back.*

*'My friends," he said, "...Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. "*

*He faced a monumental task.*

***

Another world leader took over in early 1933, too. Adolf Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany. In out-classes at Buckman Grammar School, we paid little attention to the event. The terror of Hitler and his Nazis came home to us a little later on.

Out on the streets, however, we were paying attention to news about another German: Max Schmeling, the arrogant heavyweight boxing champion of the world. There were cheers around the neighborhood that summer when Jack Sharkey defeated Schmeling in 15 rounds, bringing the world's heavyweight title back to the US.

***

The Chinese gambling joint on Couch Street quietly reopened. I don't know how they got away with it. But they did. And one crowded night, my mother and Agnes were there in the middle of the action, when something extraordinary happened that my mother would talk about

for the rest of her life.

*She made eleven straight passes on the craps table!* That means she threw an opening seven or eleven or made her point, eleven successive times. She held the dice for almost 45 minutes. Everybody in the place started crowding around, watching her play out her hand. It was an incredible run.

Agnes said that as the atmosphere grew more and more tense, the crowd loudly cheered her on with every roll of the dice. It was probably the noisiest shift since the police broke the doors down.

Fortunes have been made with the kind of lucky roll my mother had going that night. It's the kind of run that every craps player dreams about. With smart, heavy betting, a string of eleven straight passes can wipe out a small gambling house. Literally break the bank.

A few high rollers around the table that night did make a pile of money on my mother's hot hand. Yet all my mother won was $300, because of her small bets and conservative betting style. She didn't let any of her winnings ride. She picked up the money after every pass. And she seldom took the available odds on her front line bets. She admitted this to me when she described the night again, years later.

She said that after the third or fourth pass, she became scared. She was shaking. She expected again and again to lose on the next roll. And she didn't have the nerve to beef up her bets—to push her luck.

However, she told of one small, lean, neatly-dressed man who did have the nerve to increase the size of his bets—on her luck, He walked away from the table with winnings of more than $4,000. That would amount to ten times that much in today's money. Maybe more.

In true gentlemanly fashion, he politely introduced himself to my mother. He thanked her for her significant contribution to his successful night at the table. And he graciously asked her to permit him to double her winnings. He then. presented her with $300.

That's how my mother met Henry Sperling, a well-known Portland businessman, who later on became her lover and "fairy godfather."

Late that night, when my mother and Agnes arrived home, they were chattering and giggling like a couple of Buckman school girls.

With her $300 doubled into a $600 bonanza, my mother paid-off past-due grocery bills for my grandparents. She bought herself an old, third-hand Chevrolet jalopy that seemed to be in pretty good shape after 96,000 miles. And she bought me a shiny, new *Schwinn* bicycle.

She said she still had $40 left over, which she popped into the bank.

***

What a bike. I remember the day we brought it home. It was bright red with white and gold racing stripes. Wide, steer-horn handle bars. Fat balloon tires. Single-speed. Firm, no-nonsense, foot-pedal brakes. Stylized chain-guard and extra jeweled mud-guards. Cushioned, harness-leather seat. And a gleaming, chrome front headlight. I tell you, it was a real hog.

Boy, was I proud of that bike. It was the first new bicycle I had ever owned. My grandfather attached a fancy metal owner's tag to the frame, with my name on it.

Three days later, when somebody stole the bike, I was heart-broken. Absolutely miserable.

It was my own fault. I swallowed hard, blinked back the tears and admitted full responsibility to my mother. I'd left the bike unlocked, leaning against a post in front of the grocery store for five, maybe ten minutes. It was a painful lesson for me.

However, I was a lucky kid. Far luckier than I deserved. A few days later, the Portland Police Department's stolen bike detail (one uniformed cop in a pickup truck) found the bike abandoned in a Ladd Park driveway, less than a mile away. It had suffered one long, deep gouge in the paint job,

***

During the early days of his new administration, FDR's contagious optimism seemed to hit everybody. Even the kids. I can remember sitting on the floor in front of our *Atwater Kent* radio, listening along with my grandparents to his intimate fireside chats.

Using the new medium of radio like a master, FDR took his ideas directly to the people. These were "radical"

unheard-of new ideas—like unemployment benefits, social security pensions, federally insured bank deposits, and a federal jobs program called the Work Progress Administration (WPA).

FDR, also demanded the repeal of prohibition.

***

One day Emma insisted that I had to learn how to dance. I insisted that I didn't.

"Who needs it?" I sneered. (Ballroom dancing was not a 6th grade measure of success in the rough and tumble school yard at Buckman.)

She kept after me and kept after me and finally cajoled me into trying. She cleared out some chairs in the front room. Then she put a recording of Hoagy Carmichael's new hit song, "Stardust," on the *Victrola.* The name of the band on that old recording escapes me.

She had me stand and listen to the feel of the music. She showed me how to hold the girl without crushing her. She demonstrated the basic box step. And that was the start of it. Her reluctant student was ready for his first awkward lesson.

"Okay, here we go."

*"Sometimes I wonder why I spend the lonely night... dreaming of a song..."* Hey, this isn't so bad. *"The Nightingale...sings its merry tale...and I am once again with you. "*

"Very good. Very good. Now let's try it again."

With Emma's patience, wry humor and professional touch, it finally started coming through to me—after several' sessions. The rhythm, the steps, the feel for leading. The basics, at least. And this was none of that Arthur Murray, Lambeth Walk kind of stuff, or The Big Apple, or the Jitterbug. This was Honest-to-God, hold 'em in your arms kind of dancing.

(I've always thought calling it the Fox Trot was a misnomer for anything so smooth and mellow.)

Eventually, I forgot almost everything Emma taught me. But some of it came back a few years later when I was swept up into the high school maelstrom.

***

At the flat on Taylor Street, Agnes and Emma put together a simple celebration dinner the night my mother came home with the news she'd landed a job as an elevator operator at Meier & Frank's department store. She had quit her job slinging hash at the all-night diner.

As I remember it, there were candles on the table, fried steaks, cold bottles of home brew from out of the ice box and not much else.

After a few months at Meier & Frank's, my mother moved on to a job as an elevator operator at one of Portland's major downtown office buildings. The pay wasn't any better. But in her new job, she didn't have to call out each floor, which she detested.

*"Second floor, ladies lingerie and sportswear...Third floor, ladies coats and designer dresses...Fourth floor, sporting goods and toys...etcetera, etcetera, etcetera*

***

Books have had a joyous and important influence in my life, Yet, admittedly, I had trouble reading early. I was a spotty reader until I was about ten or eleven. Then, something kicked-in. I got into high gear. And I became a voracious reader.

Books excited me. I read—not simply to pursue knowledge. That intense desire came later. As a kid, I read to quench a thirst for adventure.

***

For Christmas that year, I received three prized gifts that became the beginnings of my childhood collection of good books—a collection that grew and grew.

My mother gave me a twin set of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* Reading the escapades of Tom Sawyer was fun. But it was the Huckleberry Finn book that really hooked me. Huck got himself into scrapes and experiences that made my mouth water. And how about the Duke and the Dauphin? In all of literature, has there ever been a more delicious pair of rascals?

Emma gave me a beautiful edition of Robert Louis

Stevenson's *Treasure Island.* I related to Jim Hawkins immediately, as he observed the human nature of those exuberant characters who surrounded him. But it was that lovable rogue, Long John Silver, who fired up my imagination. "Fifteen men on a dead man's chest." Remember? "Yo—ho—ho—and a bottle of rum."

Agnes gave me an early edition of Jack London's *Call of the Wild.* Critics called the book an expression of London's credo: survival of the fittest. "The ruthless struggle for existence." As a boy, however, I found the gripping story of the great dog Buck to be a thoughtful lesson in courage and loyalty. It's a compelling book, worth reading again.

From that Christmas on, I would sit up almost every night reading a book in bed.

Reading in bed is something I consider to be one of mankind's most endearing and fulfilling activities. It's an addiction I continue to pursue to this very day—or night.

***

I quit my play-time job selling magazines when I finally earned enough points to get myself a slick-looking *Daisy* pump-action BB gun. I'd had my eyes on it from the beginning. The gun arrived with three rolls of BBs, a thick pad of twelve-inch paper targets and a manual crammed with instructions on target shooting.

My grandfather looked it all over and then added a stern safety warning of his own.

"Now you listen to me, Byron. This BB gun's no toy, you hear me? Never point it at anybody. And keep your finger off the trigger until you're ready to shoot."

I stored the gun in a closet at my grandparents' flat. When I stayed there overnight or on occasional weekends, I practiced target shooting in the vacant lot next door.

I would mount targets on a stuffed cardboard box backed up to the fence and I'd mark off distances. Then I'd get in position, take a deep breath, let it out just like the book said, draw another breath, release half of it, line up my sights, and gently squeeze the trigger. *Bang!*

Sometimes I'd shoot sitting. Sometimes standing. Sometimes on my belly. Within weeks, I could cluster

seven out of ten shots in the bull's-eye at 25 feet. Later on, I did a little better.

A kid from up the street named Chuck Brown sometimes practiced with me. He had his own BB-gun. We'd setup targets side by side and we'd alternate, squeezing off three shots at a time.

Then, there were the lazy days. Just hanging around my room, we'd take pot shots at tin cans from the open bedroom window.

***

Late one night, my grandfather received a jarring phone call from Chicago. It was his long-lost brother, Sam. On the phone, Sam abruptly announced that he was getting on a train immediately, bound for Portland. And he made it clear he expected my grandfather to meet him at the train station.

What do they call that? *Chutzpah?*

This marked the first word of any kind between the two brothers since a day some 30 years before, when the Deweys and the Martells had set out from Michigan on their move to the West coast. . .

Sam had drifted off to Chicago, where he changed his name from Dewey to Constantino and disappeared— totally cutting himself off from the family. Over the ensuing years, my grandparents heard vague rumors. But nothing definite. And there had never been any contact whatsoever.

I was staying with my grandparents when the call came through. However, they had me return to my mother's flat before Sam's arrival, two or three days later. I met him for the first and last time the following evening, when my mother and I were invited over to dinner.

No question about it, the two men were brothers. They inherited a striking resemblance. In a classy dark blue suit, Sam looked leaner than my grandfather. But both of them had the same full head of thick white hair. And both of them had deep-set eyes under bristling black eyebrows.

There was one meaningful difference, however. My mother and I sensed it right away. Sam's deep-set gray eyes were cold and humorless. He looked at you with an icy, piercing stare. He had none of my grandfather's

robust sense of humor.

It was an awkward, uncomfortable dinner. There was little of the warmth that usually prevailed around our dinner table. Sam was surprisingly close-mouthed from beginning to end. He asked my mother and my grandparents a few pointed questions about their lives and the depression. He listened intently to their replies and to any other bits of conversation. That was about it.

He ignored me completely. That was no big deal to me. But later on, when it came time for my mother and me to say good night, I was definitely ready to go.

Sam stayed two days. My grandparents offered to show him a few of the sights around Portland, but he turned them down. He stayed inside the flat both days. Then, the following morning, he boarded a train and left town. Back to Chicago?

Later, my mother told me that he had left some money with my grandparents. How much? I don't know.

In fact, I know nothing more about my grandfather's enigmatic brother. Nothing. To this day, the full story of Sam Constantino remains a mystery. We never heard from him again.

***

In the 1920s, US airmail was flown across the country by private pilots under contract, in single-engine, open cockpit planes. By the early 1930s, small commercial airline companies started springing up—-American, Delta, United. These infant carriers took a few passengers along with the mail.

Most of them flew the legendary "Tin Goose"—the sturdy, corrugated-metal Ford Trimotor that held up to 15 passengers and hopped across the country in 31 grueling hours of airtime (at 90 mph).

Admiral Byrd also flew a Ford Trimotor on his historic flight over the South Pole, November 1929.

When I was eleven years old, I got my first ride in an airplane. It, too, was a Ford Trimotor. The corrugated- metal sides looked like one of my grandmother's old gray washboards.

***

Emma Lindquist was going out with two different guys about that time. The one who had the inside track was Dick Rankin. I was pulling for him. He was a flyer. And I was really impressed.

Dick offered to take all of us up for a flight over Portland. Agnes, Emma, my mother and me. None of us had ever been up in an airplane.

For several days, my mother thought long and hard about whether to go, while I nagged and pleaded and begged. She finally said "yes." And we all accepted Dick's invitation.

***

Dick Rankin was the soft-spoken, younger brother of "Tex" Rankin, a flamboyant ex-WWI flyer, stunt pilot and air racer of some minor fame. Both of the brothers had barnstormed from place to place during the twenties, flying in air shows and exhibitions, operating out of small grass fields, hustling to make a buck.

They had started out with a war surplus SPAD, the tough little biplane fighter that played such a critical role for the Allies in WWI.

(Germany's Baron Manfred von Richthofen, in the highly-maneuverable Fokker triplane, was the scourge of the skies over France in 1917. The Red Baron and his Flying Circus dominated—shooting down Allied flyers in frightening, ever-increasing numbers.

That changed, however, with the introduction of the scrappy, French-designed SPAD. America's top ace, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, flying a SPAD, shot down 26 German planes during eight months of furious combat along the Western Front. He commanded the Yanks' famed "Hat-in-Ring" squadron.)

When the depression hit, the Rankin brothers gave up barnstorming and hunkered down in Oregon. They operated a flying service out of a tin hanger on a small dirt field located in the lowlands of north Portland. They called it Rankin Field. By this time, along with the SPAD, they owned a Nieuport 17 (another WWI surplus fighter), plus the 1929 Ford Trimotor.

They scraped by—doing some engine repair work, taking sightseers up for a spin, handling photography assignments, plus occasional out-of-town air racing, stunt flying and air show exhibitions. Anything to pay

the rent, the fuel bills and stay alive.

***

At take-off, the Ford Trimotor was probably the world's noisiest aircraft. The buzz-saw rasp of three uncowled engines, the vibration, and the external control cables slapping against the grooved metal sides, all combined to scare the hell out of Agnes and my mother as the "Tin Goose" lumbered down the field, picking up air speed. For me it was one, big, heart-stopping thrill. I sat there gripping the seat handles, with a silly grin on my face.

Once in the air, the howling engines and continued vibration still made so much noise it was impossible to hear anybody talk. I hooted and hollered for the fun of it.

Dick Rankin flew us over the hills and towers of Portland and then up the Columbia River gorge, all the way to Mt. Hood and back. Looking down at the top . of Mt. Hood up close, through the "Tin Goose's" large windows, was awesome..

Dick sat at the controls. Emma sat in the co-pilot seat next to him. My mother and Agnes sat in the cabin on each side of the narrow aisle. And I bounded from one side of the plane to the other with pure delight, checking out the fabulous views.

By the time that old "Tin Goose" flapped in for a landing on Rankin Field's dirt strip, I had once again changed my mind. I had decided that when I grew up, I wanted to be a pilot.

***

A few weeks after that memorable flight, Dick Rankin took Emma along on a flight to Kansas City, where the two brothers were entered in an air exhibition. It must have been a captivating trip. Upon her return, Emma told us that romance was in the air and that she and Dick were moving in together. He had an apartment across the Columbia River in Vancouver, Washington.

When the time came for her to move, we helped her pack. There were a lot of hugs. We all kissed her good-bye. And that was it—the end of a brief but intriguing interlude in my life, when I lived on the eastside in a

Taylor Street flat with three women.

***

*At 32½ minutes past three (MT) in the afternoon of December 5th, 1933, Utah became the required 36th State to ratify the 21st Amendment to the Constitution, repealing prohibition. A telegram went off to Washington confirming the vote. Within minutes, President Franklin*
*D. Roosevelt declared the end of prohibition for the nation, after a "dry spell" of nearly 14 years.*

***

At the start, Oregon became one of 15 states that made the selling of liquor a state monopoly. You bought your bottle of booze at a state liquor store. The serving of beer, however, became legal in licensed taverns everywhere in the state. Tavern owners were poised for the magic hour, ready to swing open their doors.

On the night of the 5th of December, 1933, it was party time in Portland. The lid was off.

My mother and Agnes went out on the town to celebrate,* along with thousands of others. That's when big Otto Larsen and Eddie "Double Thumb" Daniels stepped into our lives.

# SEVEN

## Fun and Games

Somebody told me later that Otto Larsen and Eddie Daniels ran a tight ship when they were at sea. But when they hit port—look out. They turned into a couple of lusty, high-spirited roughnecks out for a good time. And they usually found it.

Otto was first mate and Eddie second mate on a 22,000- ton freighter that worked both coasts of North America. Portland was home port and their ship docked the day prohibition ended. Somewhere during the ensuing melee, they hooked up with my mother and Agnes.

Late that night, the two party girls brought Otto and Eddie home for a nightcap. As it happened sometimes, the two guys stayed over for breakfast. Otto and my mother took one bedroom, Eddie and Agnes took another, and I stayed holed up in my own messy back room. (About that time, I was working my way through Edgar Rice Burroughs *Tarzan of the Apes*. I tried to read one chapter each night in bed.)

From that point on, though, whenever Otto and Eddie's ship came into port, my mother would discreetly scoot me over to my grandparents' for a few days. Sometimes, we'd all get together for dinner.

Underneath their bluster, Otto and Eddie were a couple of generous, good-natured characters. At my grandparents' flat, I remember vividly one night the two of them came bursting in with a package of thick steaks, a slab of bacon, a wheel of cheese, and I think one or two bottles of bourbon and a case of pop—all compliments of ships stores, they said.

***

Otto was tall and lanky, with a thick Nordic accent that gave me a lot of trouble at the start. When he drank too much, he would sometimes belt out Norwegian folk songs at the top of his deep off-key voice. I had no idea what in the devil he was singing about—or talking about either, for that matter.

On the other hand, Eddie was as American as they come. With sloping, heavily-muscled shoulders, he was built like an old-time line backer. He said he was born and raised on a Nebraska farm—a cornhusker who left home when he was 16 years old.

What captivated me about Eddie, however, was that crazy double thumb on his right hand. Honest to God, sticking out of his right thumb at a 45° angle was a small mutant—a second thumb, nail and all. As an eleven-year- old, I thought it was grotesque. And utterly fascinating.

Otto told me the crew called Eddie, "Double Thumb" Daniels, but never to his face.

***

During one of their visits, Otto and Eddie took me on board for a tour of their ship and a memorable lunch. Over the years, I've often tried to recall the name of their vessel. It still escapes me. What I do remember was the obvious respect the crew paid the two mates. And I remember the lunch as an ugly platter of codfish and boiled potatoes, followed by the most unusual, richly- flavored vanilla ice cream Id ever tasted. It was real vanilla bean ice cream, a proud specialty of the ship's cook. He made it himself.

My grandmother was probably the only other person in the whole wide world who could dip into soft vanilla ice cream with the same insatiable gusto I displayed. She blushed and beamed with pleasure that next day when Otto and Eddie brought her a bouquet of flowers along with a full gallon can of freshly-made vanilla ice cream, right off the ship. They said the ice cream was a treat for the two of us.

We took 'em literally.

After they left with my mother and Agnes, we wasted no time. My grandmother and I began digging deep into the ice cream, piling one scoop on top of another in cereal bowls—gorging ourselves—and coming back for more. Sometime later, when we gradually slowed down, feeling satiated, bloated, vaguely sick and somewhat guilty, we realized we could see the bottom of the one-gallon can.

The entire episode was self-indulgent, gluttonous and glorious. Somehow, I think Brillat-Savarin would

have understood.

***

Once in awhile, Agnes Peterson liked to get down in the dirt and shoot some marbles. Said she'd been a "deadeye" when she was a kid. On two successive shootouts, after she won all my marbles, I learned that I'd better believe her.

We were only playing "funsies," so she gave them back to me. But at Buckman, during the lunch hour and after school, kids "played for keeps." That's when you keep any of the other guy's marbles you knock out of the ring. Or vice versa. I won a few and lost a few. One time, however, I lost all my marbles in a hard-fought game with a schoolmate named Fred Hage.

My mother surprised me with a new bag of marbles when my grades improved and I made the school honor roll—for the first time in my life. She even included two beautiful aggies, which are heavier marbles made of agate. Aggies make great shooters. They give you more backspin and help you stay in the ring after hitting the other guy's marbles out.

I didn't put any of my new aggies at risk in a game of "keeps," however, until after Agnes taught me a better way to "knuckle down." Instead of using the index knuckle, she taught me how to press the middle knuckle firmly in the dirt as a stronger base for shooting.

I practiced her technique and it helped.

One day after school, Fred Hage challenged me to a game "for keeps." It was a tough one. Back and forth, the marbles flew. But I was on a roll that day and eventually, I cleared the ring. I won almost all of Fred's marbles, including one of his favorite aggie shooters.

I was never considered one of the really hot players. However, from that day on, I did hold my own.

I wonder, do kids anywhere play marbles nowadays? Probably not. Nevertheless, a few colorful expressions from the game still linger in American slang.

"He plays for keeps."

"Knuckle down."

"Have you lost all your marbles?"

***

Some kids at Buckman collected baseball trading

cards. Some collected stamps. Some collected coins.

In our hard-scrabble neighborhood, the popular fad was collecting and trading match book covers. I don't mean any old used matchbook cover you might find tossed in the gutter. I mean pristine new, unsoiled matchbooks from famous places, exotic locations, or maybe even a local beer joint with a clever name.

I had one of the best collections of the bunch. Otto and Eddie helped me see to that. They brought me a handful of new, out-of-town matchbooks every time they came into port. And they usually included a few extras which I then used to negotiate trades. My mother and Agnes fattened the collection, too, as they played around. They made a game out of it—looking for likely, offbeat additions.

I can recall only a few of those prized childhood mementos now. One special favorite that does still come to mind was a glamorous, mint condition matchbook from ***The Stork Club*** in New York. I think I had to trade an extra from San Francisco's ***Top of the Mark*** along with one from ***The Old Absinthe House Bar*** in New Orleans in order to get that Stork Club beauty.

(At that time, ***The Stork Club*** was columnist Walter Winchell's nightly hangout. It also became famous as the favorite Manhattan watering hole for members of so-called "Cafe Society.")

Another prize in my collection was a striped matchbook that Otto brought me from the ***S. S. Aquarius,*** one of two or three luxurious gambling yachts that plied their trade during the '30s just outside the three-mile-limit off the Southern California coastline. Speedboats operating out of San Pedro would take high-rollers to and from these floating casinos.

***

Two things happened that broke up the long-running Otto and Eddie show.

First, the shipping company offered Otto Larsen a key berth on the east coast where he figured he could get his master's papers and the captaincy of his own ship within two or three years. He grabbed at the transfer, said his goodbyes on all sides, and headed for New York. It happened fast.

A short time later, Eddie Daniels and Agnes Peterson

pulled a fast one on us, too. They drove down to Reno for a three-day vacation—and they came back married.

Married? Agnes and Eddie? We were all happily astonished. For Agnes, it was her third marriage—her second to a merchant marine sailor. For Eddie, it was his first. My mother threw a small party for them and it was fun to watch as the newlyweds cavorted like a couple of big, playful, overgrown puppies.

They moved into an apartment across the river in northwest Portland, up near the old ice skating rink. Once they were settled, Eddie returned to sea, while Agnes went back to Minnesota for a visit with her family.

At the flat on Taylor Street, my mother and I were now alone.

***

The romance between Emma Lindquist and Dick Rankin faded fast.

The story we heard was that Rankin Field operations were going broke. Then "Tex" Rankin decided to make another go of it as a barn-stormer, and he pulled his kid brother, Dick, along with him. So it was more stunts and exhibitions. More air races. An occasional Hollywood job. More and more travel. Emma said no thanks.

During one of their quarrels, Emma walked out on Rankin and moved in with us for a week or two. It was during that moody period that she took me with her to see Myrna Loy and Clark Gable in a lurid ***film noir*** called "Manhattan Melodrama." Myrna Loy was Emma's favorite motion picture actress. I had no opinion on Myrna Loy one way or the other. But I liked Clark Gable. And I remember that I thought the movie was terrific. I sat there goggle-eyed during that climactic scene when Gable, as "Blackie" the gangster, strode to the electric chair with a bemused smile on his face.

A few days later, Emma flashed in front of me the ***Portland Oregonian*** headline and front page story: John Dillinger, Public Enemy No. 1, had been gunned down the night before by the FBI as he came out of the Biograph Theater in Chicago with "the woman in red." Agent Melvin Purvis and his men had been waiting outside for more than two hours. They'd been tipped off. When Dillinger emerged from the theater, the FBI

agents closed in. His mysterious girl friend stepped to one side. Dillinger reached for his automatic. They shot him dead.

What was the movie that Dillinger and his girl friend had gone to see that fateful night at the Biograph Theater? Myrna Loy and Clark Gable in "Manhattan Melodrama!"

(Some years later, the biographers of Franklin D. Roosevelt reported that Myrna Loy also had been FDR's favorite motion picture actress.)

***

***The New Deal did not wipe out the Great Depression. Far from it. By the mid '30s, nearly 63 percent of the population still lived below the poverty line. National income was still less than half of what it had been during the Roaring Twenties. Almost one-third of the workforce was still unemployed. And it was still tough going for our family and our neighborhood.***

***However, the New Deal did help to reduce the suffering. It helped some people get back to work, if only for awhile. It sparked a renewed spirit across America—a feeling that better days might be just around the corner.***

***

My grandparents lost out on their free rent deal at the flat on Salmon Street. And my mother, alone, could no longer afford to pay for the flat on Taylor Street. So my grandparents and my mother rented a crumbling old two-story house at Southeast 14th and Pine, and we all moved in together. The location was only two blocks from Washington High, where I was to go to school a year or two later.

***

Franklin D. Roosevelt's Work Progress Administration (WPA) was a temporary godsend. This vast emergency program helped millions of desperate, hungry, out-of-work men and women feed their families and regain some sense of dignity and self-respect. It put people to work for the federal government on useful and in many

cases triumphant projects, while it helped people avoid the humiliation of script or cash handouts. These were folks who wanted to ***work*** for the money they received. The WPA not only put several million blue collar workers back on a job, it sponsored and stimulated extraordinary achievement in the theater, music and the arts, as well as in federal and university research.

My tough old grandfather, Jim Dewey, unemployed and still doggedly refusing to sign up for cash relief, finally did agree to take a job with the WPA—as a ditch-digger.

***

On Sunday afternoons, for the fun of it, my mother and I would sometimes go "house hunting." That was wishful recreation during the depression. We'd get in her old jalopy and go visit open houses. It seemed like everything was for sale or for rent. We'd walk in and walk all around and my mother would day-dream about where she would put this and where she would put that and where her room would be and where my room would be. I'd go out back and see what kind of trees there would be to climb.

At some of the big houses with rolling land out behind, I'd day-dream about where I'd keep a horse, maybe two.

My mother wanted so much to have a home and garden of her own.

***

My neighborhood buddy, Chuck Brown, and I were both diehard Western movie fans, like most 11 and 12-year-old boys of that era. I plastered one wall of my room with fan magazine photos of cowboy stars like Hoot Gibson, Buck Jones, Tom Mix and Ken Maynard—along with my favorite photo of "Lindy," a photo of the actress Sally Eilers (Hoot Gibson's wife), a photo of Jimmy Doolittle sitting in the cockpit of his ***GB Sportster,*** plus a newspaper clipping of Wiley Post standing in front of the ***Winnie Mae.***

(In July 1933, the American aviator and one-eyed adventurer Wiley Post made the first solo flight around the world, flying a Lockheed Yega monoplane named the ***Winnie Mae.*** He flew 15,596 miles in 7 days, 18 hours, 49 minutes, a new record for that distance.)

***

On many a rainy Saturday afternoon, Chuck Brown and I sat scrunched down in our seats at the Rex Theater for hours on end, watching the good guys come thundering over the ridge, again and again.

The Rex was a rundown movie house that featured Western movies exclusively. It was located on Portland's west side, a block or two up from the waterfront. And it cost a dime to get in.

Sometimes that was a problem for us.

Still, we got along.

To start with, we'd usually hitch a free ride into town on the back ledge of one of the big streetcars that cut a swath down through the sprawling east side of Portland to the Morrison Street Bridge and on across the Willamette River into the heart of downtown. The first time we tried this trick, the conductor spotted us and kicked us off at the next stop.

As the depression deepened, however, the transit system did away with conductors. They ran the big green and yellow streetcars with only the one motorman up front. So we'd crouch low on the back end and ride the rails all the way to the bridge.

Dangerous? Yes, it probably was. But we didn't tell our mothers about it.

At the Rex Theater, on those occasions when we only had a dime between the two of us, we'd try to sneak in. As you sat in the theater, the small men's room was down the aisle and through some velvet curtains to the left of the screen. Early on, we'd spotted the small "exit" sign above the curtained doorway. Sure enough, at the end of that hallway was a door that opened onto a back alley.

If Chuck had a dime and I was broke, he'd pay to get in. After sitting in the dark a few minutes, he'd make his way down the aisle and through the curtains on past the men's room, open the exit door a crack, stick a clothes pin he carried into the door jam, and then return to his seat. In the alley, I'd wait maybe three or four minutes before making my move, so nobody would notice one kid going through the curtains and two coming out. When I felt the time was right, I'd slip inside the theater, close the door behind me, take a pee in the tiny men's room, wash my hands, and nonchalantly walk out through the curtains and up the aisle to our rendezvous point.

Sometimes this gambit worked—sometimes it didn't.

***

A few blocks south of the Rex was located Portland's wondrous burlesque house—the Rialto Theater. Chuck Brown and I were curious about the place, but at that time we were too young to be able to imagine what went on inside. We checked the Rialto's back alley exit doors several times to see if we could sneak our way in, but it didn't work.

A year or two later, we did finagle our way into the Rialto and as I look back now on that playful burlesque, it all seems so innocent. To my young eyes at the time, those slapstick comics were hilarious, the dancing dollies were gorgeous, and the blowzy blonde second from the left sent an illicit chill through me.

***

Reading the "funny papers" on Sunday morning was always a happy highlight of the week around our house. My favorites were Krazy Kat, Tarzan, Buck Rogers, and Dick Tracy. The Dick Tracy strip introduced hard-hitting realism into the funnies for the first time. Then in 1934 came a flurry of new strips. I added Terry **&** the Pirates, Lil' Abner and Flash Gordon to my list of favorites.

***

On rainy winter nights when I was about 12 years old, if I wasn't doing my homework or reading a book or staring at the ceiling or drawing cartoons or listening to the radio or playing cards with my grandmother or playing checkers with my grandfather, I sometimes could be found working on model airplanes. There was no such thing as a plastic model airplane kit. Making model airplanes was a labor of love that demanded a blueprint, diagrams, balsawood, carving knife, tissue paper, glue, sandpaper, paint, decals, thread, determination, sure hands and plenty of patience. I still remember fondly the exotic banana-smell of model airplane glue. My grandfather helped me to get started. I think I made five maybe six models total. Using fine thread, I hung the finished products from the ceiling of my room

I had two favorites:

One was the SPAD, of course—that tough little WWI fighter plane. It was always a machine set to stir the blood. Yet it always retained a sense of Gallic elegance and style. I decorated my model with Eddie Rickenbacker's famed "Hat in the Ring" insignia.

My other favorite was the ***GB Sportster,*** that squat, stubby all-powerful, all-out air racer developed by the Granville brothers, Zantford and Tom. It had a brief, bloody but spectacular history. It took four firsts in the National Air Races. And in September, 1932, it established the world speed record when Jimmy Doolittle flew the GB over a three-mile course at 296.28 mph.

(This was the same Jimmy Doolittle who became a celebrated hero ten years later during WWII. April 18, 1942, during the early stages of the war when things were not going well for us in the Pacific and when American morale badly needed a boost, Lt. Colonel James H. Doolittle led a daring, seemingly impossible, one-way, low-level B-25 air raid over Tokyo that shocked the implacable Japanese.)

The ***GB Sportster*** looked like an angry, pugnacious bumble bee, with its fat, stubby 15-foot fuselage painted yellow and black. And that's exactly the way I painted my model.

***

On opening day of the baseball season in '34 or '35, my dad introduced me to his latest girlfriend, a bubbly, effervescent 20-year-old brunette named Eleanor Brook. I liked her immediately. Her friendly face was pink and round as a pie. And when my dad introduced us, she enveloped me in a bear hug that darn near took my breath away.

The Portland Beavers were playing the San Francisco Seals—two arch rivals in the old Pacific Coast League. The rains had stopped. It was a bright, sunny spring day. And the three of us went out to the ball game.

I played a little softball as a kid, but I never did play any baseball. I admit I was never more than mildly interested in what was then "the national pastime." But hey, it was opening day of the new season, with roasted peanuts and root beer and hot dogs slathered with mustard and close-up action on the field and a loud hopeful crowd in the stands. It had all the makings of a

great afternoon.

As I recall it, the Portland Beavers lost the game.

***

I could tell that my dad and Eleanor were falling in love. It was obvious, even to my immature grade-school mind. The two were inseparable.

On her 21st birthday, my dad gave her a ring, and a few weeks later they were married. He was 41 years old at the time. A 20-year-difference in ages! To the surprise of many people, including my mother, their marriage was a strong and happy relationship that lasted 32 years, until the day my dad died of cancer in 1966.

At the time of their wedding, Eleanor was pastry maker in an east side gourmet bakery. The bakery often featured her silky-smooth custard pies. However, when she learned that I was wild about banana cream pie, she launched a tradition that I was to appreciate for years to come: Whenever I joined them for dinner in their small house out on Southeast 72nd Street, she would bake us a luscious banana cream pie for dessert.

***

I'm not certain why, but during the '30s, everybody seemed to love the comical antics of black-faced Amos and Andy. It was the most popular nightly show on the NBC radio network. I thought it was stupid. So I didn't share in my grandmother's nightly ritual of listening to Amos and Andy, followed by the trials and tribulations of Myrt and Marge. But I did share her healthy enthusiasm for The Shadow, an over-the-top atmospheric thriller.

"Who knows what evil lurks in the minds of men?"

"The Shadow knows."

Sunday nights on the NBC radio network it was a different story. We all sat glued to the radio on Sunday nights, laughing and listening to the Eddie Cantor Hour followed by the Jack Benny Show. Jack Benny was probably my all-time favorite radio comedian. He was a master at self-deprecating humor. Years later, his wit and style led the way on television, too

***

Following the death of Uncle George Littreal from lung

cancer, my Aunt Phoebe gave up life in the logging camps and returned to the city with an exciting idea.

Sitting around our dining room table one night, she shared her thoughts with my mother. The two of them talked earnestly far into the late hours. The following morning, they announced their new partnership.

***Phoebe and my mother had decided to open a restaurant!***

After scouring the town for a good, low-rent location, they settled on storefront space in a drab, two-story brick building over on the west side, across the street from the Portland Civic Auditorium. A grubby little coffee shop that had once occupied the space was long gone, although fixtures' and equipment were still in place. The building owner was growing desperate. My mother and Phoebe said he made them an offer they couldn't refuse. The deal included painting the interior, installation of a new ***Frigidaire,*** and a low-rent lease

They named their restaurant the "Good Eats Cafe"—neatly scripted in a small circular neon sign which they hung in the front window.

As you entered the "Good Eats Cafe," a counter with maybe eight or nine stools took up the entire left side of the room. Four, maybe five booths lined the wall along the right side. At the rear end was a small kitchen, storage space and a single toilet. That was it.

My mother handled the front end, both counter and booths at the start. Phoebe handled the kitchen. My grandfather, with an aching back and a gimpy leg, quit his WPA job and came in as part-time dishwasher and potato peeler. He alternated with a Chinese cleanup man. And when I was around, I poured water, cleared dishes or just hung out.. They kept the place open for lunch and early dinner.

Phoebe and my mother made a good, hard-working team. They enjoyed each other's company. In the mornings, they'd work together on one big daily special. This was usually some old family favorite, such as meatloaf with mashed potatoes, or corned beef and cabbage, or chicken and dumplings, or pot roast with onion gravy. Then Phoebe would go to work, baking those magnificent fruit pies that had made her the toast of the Oregon logging camps. Apple pie was on the menu every day, along with a couple of changing fruit varieties. Once she put raisin pie on the menu.

But my grandfather and I seemed to be the only ones around who appreciated it.

***

Today's world of professional boxing is such a stinking cesspool that it's difficult for me now to recapture the frame of mind I had as a 12-year-old, when I was an avid fight fan. My dad and my grandfather certainly never demonstrated any great personal interest in the ring. Admittedly, my grandmother did. She listened regularly to the Friday night fights on radio. And she had strong opinions on everything that happened at the heavyweight championship level.

Ask her and she could tell you in an instant that in 1930, Max Schmeling of Germany won a hotly-disputed decision over the tough Irish-American, Jack Sharkey, to become the new heavyweight champion of the world. Two years later, in 1932, Sharkey beat Schmeling and regained the title. In 1933, massive Primo Carnero knocked out Sharkey in the sixth, taking the heavyweight crown to Italy. Less than a year later, the Italian giant lost the championship to America's Max Baer.

Baer was a natural. He could have been one of the all-time great ones, according to sports writers in the know. But he was never a hungry fighter, he was a playboy.

In June 1935, the month that I graduated from Buckman Grammar School, I can remember huddling with my grandmother in front of the radio as we listened, round by round, to a broadcast of the championship bout in which Max Baer lost the title on points to that popular Irish-American family man, James J. Braddock.

No knockout.

***

The restaurant location turned out to be a good one. Across the street, the civic auditorium drew crowds for all kinds of events, both high and low. During the concert season, for example, the auditorium featured such guest artists as Lily Pons, Paul Robeson, John McCormack and Vladimir Horowitz with the Portland Symphony Orchestra. During the rest of the year, the auditorium featured Friday or Saturday night boxing matches and other special events.

All of this action resulted in good business for the "Good Eats Cafe." After only a few weeks, a parade of musicians, stage hands, boxers and handlers were joining in with, local workmen who piled into the restaurant daily for great home-style cooking. In the afternoon, too, many of them started popping in for an extra cup of coffee and another piece of pie.

During summer vacation that year, when I was able to spend more time at the restaurant, I started collecting autographs of the top boxers who came in to eat. I got myself a cheap autograph book, which I kept under the counter. Id approach my targets when they were in a good mood, usually right after they finished eating a big slab of Aunt Phoebe's pie.

Most of them were ham and egg fighters. No big names—until the day when Max Baer, himself, walked through the door, along with his towering brother, Buddy, and a couple of handlers. Everybody instantly recognized the recent ex-champ. He was in town to help manage the corner of his younger- brother, who had top billing in the upcoming Saturday night fights.

When several of the locals called out, "Hi, champ," Max Baer worked the room like a Hollywood, star. He turned and waved, shook hands up and down the counter, slid into his brother's booth, and then signed a few autographs, including a flourish for me that filled one entire page in my book.

Buddy Baer lost that Saturday night fight. But I got his autograph before he ever got into the ring. Some years later, he went on to carve out a minor career for himself in Hollywood "B" movies.

***

As far as I know, none of the concert stars who appeared at the civic auditorium ever made it across the street to the "Good Eats Cafe," with one notable exception. That was the violinist, Yehudi Menuhin, one of this century's greatest musicians. He visited our little restaurant one day in the company of his manager. At the time, Menuhin was about 19 years old.

Menuhin agreeably signed a special page in my "boxers" autograph book. And his manager invited me across the street to sit through an afternoon rehearsal.

I don't remember the program. Part of it might have been a Hungarian Rhapsody. I remember that it was an enthralling eye-opener for me. Hauntingly beautiful music. An incredible violinist. An absorbing afternoon.

***

The great Irish-American tenor, John McCormack, was nearing the end of his lengthy career when he appeared on the concert platform at the Portland Civic Auditorium in the mid '30s. He was a much beloved international figure of the '20s. Loyal crowds came to hear his lyrical rendition of Irish folk songs. In honor of McCormack s visit to Portland that week, my mother and Phoebe went all the way. They featured "McCormack corned beef and cabbage" with boiled potatoes, all week long.

McCormack never made it across the street to see how he'd been honored at the "Good Eats Cafe." But a few of the stage hands did. One evening, when it was almost closing time, three workmen sitting in a back booth finished their heaping plates of corned beef and cabbage. Then, unexpectedly, in "a tribute to the chef," they burst out with a rousing rendition of "When Irish Eyes are Smiling." The surprised customers seemed to love it.

That's when my grandfather prodded and cajoled me into joining the fun. "Come on, Byron," he growled, "stand up there and give 'em an Irish song of your own." The workmen picked up on that and urged me on.

I was terribly embarrassed, of course. While I had often hammed it up with the family at home, the idea of singing in public scared the daylights out of me. Finally, after further arm-twisting, I did it. I made my painful debut there in the middle of the "Good Eats Cafe."

Silence descended on the room, as I stood there for a moment or two with a poignant look on my face, clutching my checkered cap in both hands. Then, I gulped a couple of times, opened wide, and belted out a heart-grabbing chorus of dear old "Mother Machree" in my high 12-year-old tenor voice.

A dozen or so people still left in the place applauded wildly. My grandfather said afterwards, "There wasn't a dry eye left in the house." I don't know about that.

***

Even now, when on a darkened street, seeing a faint neon CAFE sign, I am reminded of those days and my mother and Aunt Phoebe and their little west side restaurant called the "Good Eats Cafe.

# EIGHT

## Reality Check

***What's the matter with us?***
***No country ever had more and no country ever had less.***
***Ten men in our country could buy the***
***whole world, and ten million can't***
***buy enough to eat.***

**WILL ROGERS 1935**

There were those who said America's luck ran out the night of August 15, 1935, when Will Rogers and his old pal Wiley Post were killed in a mysterious plane crash far up in Alaska. The end came when their ***Lockheed Orion,*** with Wiley Post at the controls plunged into a remote arctic lake 15 miles south of Point Barrow.

For millions of Americans, it was a calamity.

Wiley Post, the eye-patched, record-breaking speed pilot, was known throughout the land. But it was the loss of Will Rogers that was devastating to so many. America loved Will Rogers as it had never loved any other private citizen before—nor probably ever will again.

It's hard, even today, to express the extraordinary hold that Will Rogers had on so many millions of Americans in his lifetime. Cowboy philosopher from out of Oklahoma, part Cherokee, beloved humorist, stage and motion picture star, wise and witty newspaper columnist, serious writer, hard-riding rancher, expert roper, confidante of presidents, shrewd political analyst and always a protagonist for the common man, Will Rogers had been a reassuring and calming voice during the darkest days of the Great Depression. Now he was gone.

My grandfather, Jim Dewey, took Will Rogers' death as a personal loss. His old lips tightened over his mouth and for several days he didn't talk much to anybody.

I tacked up on my cluttered wall the last published newspaper photo of Will Rogers and Wiley Post together—taken at the Fairbanks airport only minutes before they took off on their final flight.

***

In tracing the threads of my childhood, I realize that I grew up with no sense of entitlement. Never did I receive an allowance, for example. Nor did any of the other kids in our blue-collar neighborhood. We never even thought about it. However, I did work at odd jobs around town in order to rustle up spending money. Then, at the age of twelve or thirteen, I took on a real job for the first time.

After only three weeks, I was fired.

The job was that of a newsboy—selling newspapers on a crowded corner in downtown Portland, near the main entrance of the US National Bank building. I started out full-force, hawking papers every afternoon with all the zeal of a feisty, sidewalk preacher.

***"EXTRA! EXTRA! HUEY LONG ASSASSINATED! READ ALL ABOUT IT/ LONGSHOREMEN GOIN' OUT ON STRIKE! LATEST SCOOP ON PENTHOUSE MURDERS! EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!"***

As a new kid on the street, I held my own. However, after the initial flurry of sales that came with each truck-drop, I would often steal a lengthy break. I'd sprawl out on the bank's low window ledge, prop my feet up, and thumb through the latest edition of the ***Oregon Journal.*** That turned out to be a forbidden pleasure. The street boss—a stubby, foul-mouthed, pot-bellied ex-New Yorker called Nat—warned me that I'd better get off my ass, stay on my corner and keep peddling.

The second time he caught me with my nose buried in the news, he fired me—right on the spot. No mercy granted. Like some livid, red-faced umpire, he jerked his thumb and bellowed, "Yer outta here, kid. Yer canned. Ya hear me? Get yer ass outta here."

Totally mortified, I didn't say a word. I picked up my cigar box loaded with loose change, tucked it firmly under my arm, and plodded homeward.

Getting fired on my very first job was humiliating. It was embarrassing. And it was embarrassing for my mother, too. She had asked a favor of a friend to help me get the job, and I'd let her down. I felt my failure.

We had a long talk—the two of us.

From out of this sorry little episode and other lessons along the way, I think she finally hammered into me an

enduring habit of dependability.

And she never let up.

Again and again, she made it clear that I had to accept responsibility for my own actions. No excuses.

***

The endless grind of the "Good Eats Cafe" eventually wore down my mother and Aunt Phoebe. They were exhausted. A supportive crowd frequented the little storefront restaurant, but I don't think my mother and Phoebe had the business acumen to turn the place into a moneymaking venture. They sold out cheap to a middle-aged couple from Baker, Oregon, who took over the lease.

On that final night, my mother and Phoebe said good-bye to a few favorite customers and walked out the door—with a bundle of lively memories, no serious regrets and a heavy sigh of relief.

***

By 1935-36, even with modest recovery at the top levels, most Americans had to accept the cold, comfortless fact that prosperity wasn't "just around the corner." Five, six years after the panic of 1929, the relentless Depression still gripped much of the nation in an economic strangle-hold, despite the innovative programs of FDR's New Deal.

For millions of Americans on the thin edge of poverty, the ***crisis*** had become semi-permanent.

Jim Dewey, into his sixties and still scrabbling for work, stayed tough and stubborn and independent as ever. No more WPA for him. Ignoring a chronic backache and still flexing the whipcord muscles of a stonemason, he handled any and every job he could get. Roofer, watchman, ditch digger, dock worker, janitor, hod carrier, fruit picker—he took 'em all on. He held fast to his lifelong respect for hard work.

I remember one ten-day cherry picking job at a sprawling Willamette Valley orchard near Estacada, Oregon. Both my grandfather and grandmother signed on for this one—and I went along. We slept in an Army surplus tent setup in a work camp on the banks of the roaring Clackamas River. There must have been 15 or 20 families in camp, along with scores of out-of-work,

migrant “fruit tramps,” gathered for what turned out to be a brief, peak-of-the-season harvest. I scrambled up the ladders and worked alongside my grandparents.

I was a slow picker. We were paid something like two maybe three cents a pound. Afterwards, they claimed that I ate more than I picked. I think they exaggerated.

***

My mother and her family were cradle Catholics. However, when they moved westward, they drifted away from the Church. I was not raised a Catholic.

Instead, my mother enrolled me in Sunday School at the nearby Hinson Memorial Baptist Church when I was about nine years old. The church was a squarish building of dark-gray stone. It looked like a small fortress.

For several years, I sat there squirming on Sunday mornings, singing the somber, rock-ribbed hymns and listening to parabolic stories from out of the King James Bible. Prior to the start of the full 11 a.m. chinch service, I would often slip out a side door.

When I was about 12 or 1'3-years-old, on the other hand, I was inveigled into a more exhilarating religious experience—the provocative world of Aimee Semple McPherson and her Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

A casual Buckman classmate named Paxil Bender and his merry-looking mother invited me to a "family barbecue'" one Sunday afternoon, that turned out to be a jolly evangelical get-together. It ended with everybody heading off to a Sunday night assembly at the two-tiered Foursquare Gospel Church, where the faithful were beckoned by the glow of a revolving neon sign on top of the towering roof.

Inside that Foursquare auditorium, I can remember the entire congregation singing and clapping their hands in a swiftly mounting crescendo. And I can remember the sensational entrance of a gangly, suntanned preacher, who was the visiting evangelist from Sister Aimee’s Angeles Temple in Los Angeles. He leaped onto the stage, shaking the air with his fire and conviction, as he whooped, hollered, sweat, cried, snarled, preached and prayed—invariably rewarded on all sides with shouts of approval and fervent ***amens.***

***Hallelujah!***

I attended several such charismatic Sunday night

sessions with the Benders before walking out on the entire show. It was an electrifying atmosphere. But I was uncomfortable with their level of intense religious frenzy. And I was skeptical of the quick "miracle" cures, nonsensical wailing, gibberish "speaking in tongues" and the assiduous call for more money in the collection plate.

Eventually, the Benders gave up on me.

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My own spiritual perspective remains a very private and personal force.

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Most classic car buffs agree that for sheer elegance and craftsmanship, the ***Pierce-Arrow*** of the 1920s and 30s was in a class by itself. The remarkable quietness of its powerful engine only added to the ***Pierce-Arrow*** legend.

(During prohibition, ***Pierce-Arrow*** engines were the favorites of the offshore rumrunners who converted them for use in their speedboats—-not so much for their tremendous power, but for their uncanny quietness.)

My mother's latest lover, entrepreneur Henry Sperling, drove a gleaming, silver-gray ***Pierce-Arrow*** sedan with sleek, fender-mounted headlamps. I rode in it once. And I thought it was awesome.

***

My mother and Henry Sperling had crossed paths again at a club in downtown Portland. One friendly nightcap had led to another. Soon, they began going out together, quietly dining around. The chemistry sparked. And their occasional dinner dates blossomed into a heated, full-blown affair.

One problem, however: He was married.

That didn't stop the ingenious money-man. He rented a small cottage near Ladd Park as a ***Pied-a-terre*** for their midweek trysts. And he showered her with attention in the months that followed, leading up to an overwhelming surprise on her 37th birthday—or maybe it was her 38th. He presented her with the keys to a shiny, yellow and chrome, two-door ***Hudson-Terraplane,*** parked out front.

My mother was astonished—and ecstatic. When she

drove her new car home that night, I joined with her in the excitement. We danced around the dining room table.

My mother accompanied Sperling on several trips, too: I think they sometimes drove up to Olympia or Seattle. Once, I know they traveled the full length of the Oregon coast from Astoria to Gold Beach. Another time, in that elegant ***Pierce-Arrow,*** he took her along with him on a business trip—all the way to San Francisco. It was my mother's first visit to California. She said they stayed at the Mark Hopkins on Nob Hill, with a lofty room looking out over the bay towards the Golden Gate Bridge.

Before returning to Portland, they also headed up over the High Sierra for a holiday in Reno. Both of them still shared a kindred interest in the gaming tables.

No question about it, those were playful, devil-may-care days for my mother. A time of strong emotion and fairy-tale dreams. It ended with the inevitable let-down.

Somehow, Mrs. Henry Sperling learned about the ***Hudson-Terraplane.*** That blew it. Almost overnight, the entire affair unraveled. My grandmother told me later that Sperling's wife issued her philandering husband a bitter ultimatum, "Give up your mistress—-now. Or, I'm filing for divorce. And believe me, I'll take you for everything you've got."

Henry Sperling calculated his inescapable decision. The end came in December, shortly before Christmas.

That final night, when he walked away from my mother, he left her with a collection of bittersweet memories—and one shiny, yellow and chrome, two-door ***Hudson-Terraplane.***

***

As a kid, I loved to run. For no special reason. There were times when I would run pell-mell up or down a hill and shout at the top of my voice ... yelling in pure physical exuberance, just for the hell of it.

When I first entered high school, I turned out for freshman track. Long distance running. "Cross country" they called it then. Mr. Vere Windnagle, the jug-eared track coach, also served as the school's vice principal and official disciplinarian. Out on the track, he did his damnedest to take the joy out of running, with an unending spew of sarcasm. But that didn't matter. I had to drop any ideas about making the track team anyway,

when I landed another afternoon newspaper job,

This time, I went to work as a paper boy, delivering the ***Oregon Journal*** after school. My route included the old tenement area around the Hawthorne Bridge, where I had lived with my grandparents during those earliest days of the Depression.

I handled this job on my bike during the week. On Sunday mornings, however, the load was extra heavy. That's when my remarkable mother would often help me out. Before daybreak on Sundays, we'd both crawl out of bed and quickly slip into old clothes. Usually she'd shake herself awake, light-up a ***Chesterfield*** and heat up a cup of coffee. Then, off we'd go. She'd drive me to the pick-up point and even help me roll papers. We'd load up the right front seat with fat Sunday editions. And she would then slowly drive me around the route in her ***Hudson-Terraplane.*** With the window open, I'd stand on the running board, holding tight with one hand and tossing papers with the other. When it was too far to toss, I'd grab a paper, hop off the running board, run up to the door, dump the paper, run back and hop on board—while she continued to ease the ***Hudson*** slowly down the street in second gear.

***

One afternoon while sitting at the truck drop, leafing through the pages of the ***Journal,*** I spotted a photograph of "Mrs. Charlotte Sperling and her husband, Henry" in formal attire, attending a benefit party for the new Portland Art Museum.

***

Entering high school, I soon discovered that most of the girls were prettier than I expected—-algebra was more rigorous than I expected—the study of Latin was easier— and the Glee Club music class was a lot of fun.

"Professor" John Muir even recruited me from the Glee Club music class for his new Catholic boys' choir. Can you believe that? Me? In a ***Catholic boys' choir?***

No relation to the famed American naturalist, John Muir of Washington High School was a Scotsman with a thunderous voice—a benevolent dictator with piercing gray eyes and kinky, gray hair, stiff as iron mesh.

He was respected throughout the Portland school system as a choral director, voice coach and accomplished organist,, devoted to the works of Johann Sebastian Bach.

We called him "the professor."

As a lucrative sideline, this canny Presbyterian also served as organist and choir master for the Church of the Madeleine, one of Portland's wealthiest and most beautiful Catholic churches, located near Grant Park. The pious Catholic fathers at the Madeleine were on a mission-—to build the best boys choir in the Portland diocese, bar none. They hired John Muir to do the job.

By the time I showed up, he was well on his way.

He had called me into his office for a conference one day after school. I remember sitting stiff and upright in my chair, not knowing what to expect. To my surprise, he stood over me, shook his finger sternly in my face, and told me that I had a good voice, worth developing. Then he made me an offer. He said he would give me free vocal lessons, if I would sing in the boys choir at the Church of the Madeleine. The following day, with a strong push from my mother, I tenuously accepted his offer.

Throughout that autumn, I practiced John Muir's crazy breathing exercises daily, projecting my voice up and down the scale. Wednesday nights at the Madeleine, I had a vocal lesson followed by choir rehearsal. Then, Sunday mornings, I sang in the Madeleine boys choir at the eleven o'clock mass.

Eighteen of us sang in that choir. Twelve were Catholic boys from the Madeleine parish. Six were non-Catholic John Muir recruits.

The high point for me came when "the professor" picked me to sing the ***Kyrie eleison*** solo during the elaborate high mass on Christmas Day. It was a deeply moving occasion.

A short time later, he offered me a lead in the school's upcoming production of Gilbert and Sullivan's ***Pirates of Penzance.*** Trouble was, I didn't want it. In the interim, I had discovered the intriguing world of high school journalism and I had decided to drop Glee Club and go to work on the staff of the school newspaper.

When I faced up to John Muir with my decision, he appeared bewildered, unbelieving ... then furious. We talked about it for days, it seems to me now. But I held to my decision.

After one final meeting that turned into a tirade, it was over. He tossed me out of the Madeleine boys choir. My adolescent "singing career" was aborted.

Was that a slight twinge of guilt I felt? Yeah, but I suppressed it rather quickly.

***

My sexual experiences during my first year in high school were pretty much vicarious, such as they were: Like holding hands with Juanita Romme at the movies as we huddled in our seats watching ***Frankenstein.*** Or stealing sidelong glances at Bernice Reuff's jutting breasts during history class. Or goofily mussing the tousled hair of sexy Lurine Rosenburg as we walked home from the library. Or patting Jeanne Browning on the ass as we playfully wrestled for a Coke up on her back porch.

***

Everybody said the hard-eyed Volk brothers were the two toughest kids in our neighborhood. If an argument turned into a little brawl—it happened now and then—George and Joe Volk could punch quick and hard...***smack...pow***...like nobody else around. Several kids learned that lesson the hard way. Yet, surprisingly, the Volks were no swaggering bullies. They didn't go out of their way to stir up trouble. They knew they'd catch unholy hell from their older brother, Eddie, if they did.

I was never a close friend of the Volk brothers. But we got along okay. After they entered Benson High trade school and I entered nearby Washington High, they still invited me over to their place occasionally for a little roughhousing, a workout on the bags, and a "free" boxing lesson. They issued the same invitation to Dan Borich, another neighborhood buddy. Maybe they were just looking for naive sparring partners they could knock around. Nevertheless, we accepted the invite now and then. It gave us a chance to hang around and listen to the famous Eddie Volk, himself.

Eddie had been a rock-solid middleweight with a dangerous left hook who made a name for himself, scuffling for a buck around Portland and Seattle during the early (30s.

Piling up something like a 24 or 25-2 record, including

several knockouts, he started grabbing the attention of the big-time promoters. They signed him up for his first big moneymaker. He took on the pride of LA's rabid boxing crowd—an explosive young Mexican with lightening speed whose name I no longer remember. I do remember what happened, though. Eddie Volk was cut to pieces. The fight ended in a bloody TKO, seventh or eighth round. Startling flash photos were splashed across the ***Oregonian*** sports pages the morning after. Eddie's legion of Portland fight fans went into shock.

Eddie was never quite the same again. A few bouts later, he wisely gave up professional boxing. But he didn't give up the ring. In the old barn out back of the Volk's house on 24th Street, Eddie built a boxing ring and makeshift gym. He devoted his spare time to teaching his younger brothers and other neighborhood kids something about "the sweet science."

He emphasized what he called solid mechanics—things like a proper tight fist, keeping your body compact, the confident step forward, keeping your hands up, the virtue of the three-punch combination and other stuff I've long forgotten.

Several times, I put on the gloves and danced and shuffled around the ring with young Joe Volk, as if I knew what I was doing. Joe was my age. Maybe I learned a little footwork, a quick jab. Maybe how to slip a punch. Then again, maybe I didn't. One sweaty, sweltering afternoon, sparring with Joe Volk,-1 got my ears pinned back. The second time he hit me flush in the cheek ... ***bam*** ... I felt groggy all the way down into my toes. I tell you, I didn't like it one bit.

I did learn to keep my hands up and to keep moving. Eventually, however, I tired of getting smacked around and I moved on to other interesting sports, like swimming, running—-and chasing after girls.

***

On the rebound from Henry Sperling, my mother walked straight into trouble. She fell in love.

She fell for a big, beefy, good-looking boilermaker with a devilish smile, unending passion and the unlikely name of ***Stanley Wentworth.***

He worked the day shift at the Soule Steel Company and he worked his own -night shift, playing around town

with my mother. She was totally infatuated with this smoldering stud.

She told my grandparents, frankly, "I've never felt loved like this by anyone," or something to that effect. I wasn't listening closely at the time. I was probably heading for my room, head up in the clouds.

Wentworth called my mother constantly—sometimes long after midnight. He told her she was the perfect woman for him. That she met his needs. She also told us afterwards that he pushed her for an exclusive commitment almost immediately.

On the other hand, Wentworth and I were wary of each other from the start. He never had much to say to me. I never had much to say to him. I was growing into that exasperating, adolescent age where I craved my privacy. Whenever I came home, I would raid the ice box and go hole up in my room.

Only weeks after they started running around together, my mother married Stanley Wentworth! Agnes (Peterson) and Eddie Daniels accompanied them to the simple ceremony in Portland's ornate City Hall. I think it was early 1936. I can't remember why, but for some reason, I couldn't attend.

So my mother became Della Wentworth—the new ***Mrs. Stanley Wentworth.*** And the three of us moved into a rambling, two-bedroom flat on the second floor of an old, wooden building at the corner of Southeast 10th and Clay. We had the upper flat on the left.

The location was only three blocks from the noisy Gilmore Gasoline truck stop where the ***Oregon Journal*** van dumped my afternoon newspapers. That I liked.

***

The marriage was doomed to failure from the very beginning. A matrimonial disaster. My mother soon discovered that she had rushed into marriage with a heavy-drinking, ego-driven, muscle man whose passion could turn in a matter of minutes into biting sarcasm and explosive violence.

There was a lumbering viciousness about the man. Even during the frisky, early days of the marriage, there were times when their playful antics dissolved into hot arguments and face-to-face shouting matches. He was extremely jealous. As the months went by, he tried to

assert complete control over her life. He even accused Agnes of "causing trouble" and ordered my mother to cut off ties with her old friend.

My mother started fighting back.

The white-knuckle mood around our flat became one of growing turmoil. The constant bickering became mean and ugly. Several times, I noticed my mother hiding bruise marks on her face and neck with pancake makeup. At the time, she didn't want to talk with me about it. When I came home each night from my paper route, however, as soon as I walked into our flat, I could feel the visceral tension in my gut.

One night, I came home late from the route. As I climbed up the back steps, I could hear loud arguing even before I opened the door into the kitchen.

Once inside, I could hear them in their bedroom. Something banged against the wall. A chair. A scuffle. What sounded like a body hitting the floor. Loud curses from Wentworth. And my mother screamed, "Get out of here, you sonofabitch."

"Get out... get out," she sobbed.

I ran down the hall towards their room, shouting, "Hey, leave her alone."

The door flung open. Wentworth came bursting through. He saw me ... grabbed me by the arm ... whirled me around ... slammed me up against the wall, holding me by the throat as he spit out his words, "And don't ***you*** try and give me any crap, either, ya little shitheel."

Shoving me aside, he lurched on down the hall to the back door. Opening the door wide, he paused, turned back towards me and snarled, "Ya little bastard, yer not even Della's kid. Ya got that? Yer nuthin' but a fuckin' orphan."

Then he turned and headed out into the night.

Stunned silence.

***

His words still echo in my mind. It took a few moments, but the words sunk in ... deep. I stood there bewildered. My mind spinning.

With questioning eyes, I turned to my mother, who by now was sitting on the couch with her head in her hands, crying softly.

She lifted her head slowly and looked up at me. Her cheek was bruised, her lips were puffy. Tears ran down

her face. Her left eye was swollen almost shut.

There was a kind of crying down in her throat as she sat there and slowly revealed to me the hidden past.

***Through seven years of marriage, my mother and my dad tried unsuccessfully to have a child. They wanted a baby so much. When my dad returned from World War I, they decided finally to adopt. It took almost another two years before they were able to do so.***

***In 1922, working through Portland's Waverly Home for abandoned babies and orphans, they were successful. They brought me home at the age of two months. I became Willard Byron Mayo.***

***Birth mother and birth father—unknown.***

***

As she talked, softly and haltingly, I listened intently to this loving woman ... a battered woman ... who was the single most important influence on my life. Racing through my mind were the childhood memories of our jumbled life together. And I thought of my dad and Eleanor, my grandfather Jim Dewey and grandmother Josephine, Phoebe and George Littreal, Noah Martell, Adam and Mary Mayo, Louis Martell and the others. They were all a part of the fabric of my life. And in my mind I knew they would ***always*** be my family—-my given heritage. Nobody-—Wentworth or anybody else—could ever take that away from me.

I put my arms around my mother, trying to comfort her. I told her that I loved her very much. And I swore that Wentworth's vindictive disclosure meant nothing—nothing at all.

That's the way it has remained, throughout my life.

***

From that night on, my mother manifested to Wentworth—how can I say it—***pure contempt.***

He moved out of the flat, but his drunken harassment didn't end there. He called my mother late one night, asking her to forgive him. He told her that he didn't mean to hurt her—then he ranted on about why it wasn't his fault. And he ended the conversation by calling her a string of ugly names.

On two successive nights, he even stood in the middle

of the street out front, yelling up at our windows, alternately pleading and cursing from below.

He carried this further when he stomped up our back steps, pounded on the door window and threatened to beat the hell out of her if my mother didn't let him in. Quickly, I grabbed a hammer for protection. A minute or two later, he broke out a pane of glass. But as he reached through to unlock the door, I moved in close and slammed the hammer down hard on his arm. He bellowed and cursed and stumbled back down the steps.

Two or three nights later, it all came to an end.

He talked with my mother on the phone—cold sober. Polite. Convincing. Again he asked her forgiveness. He said he wanted to stop by a moment to say good-bye. He told her that he knew their romance was over now. And he knew she was filing for divorce.

With some uneasiness, she agreed to meet briefly with him, one last time.

As a fourteen-year-old, I was skeptical of her even being in the same room with the goon who had severely mauled her. Without telling her, I took a boning knife with a keen, five-inch-blade from out of the kitchen drawer and I hid it under the front edge of an overstuffed chair in our front room. I had no idea what I would ever do with that knife—if anything. But I was determined, absolutely determined, to prevent Wentworth from again beating my mother.

I was sitting in the overstuffed chair when my mother let him in the front door. He wasted no time. Ignoring me, he took off his coat, tossed it on a chair, wheeled around towards my mother and growled, "There's something yer gonna have to learn, you bitch." And he hauled off and slapped her across the side of the face.

Instinctively, I reached for the knife and let out a howl as I sprang up from the chair and lunged. He saw me coming. He turned and caught my right wrist in the air, twisting it sharply back so the blade of the knife was aimed at my own chest. I jerked frantically to the right as the knife came stabbing downward. The blade cut into my arm, at the left elbow. I held on. Twisted loose. Then, like a bar-room brawler, he cocked his beefy fist and swung a roundhouse punch that would have taken my head off. I slipped under his killer blow. And with the bloody knife still clutched firmly in my right hand, I drove the blade deep into his side—deep into his ribs.

He grunted. He gasped. He staggered ... and slowly stumbled to his knees. Then he collapsed.

I stood there paralyzed, trembling and panting. In shock. With blood streaming down my left arm, dripping off my fingertips, I stared vacantly down at Wentworth's body sprawled on the floor. The knife was still sticking out of his ribs. His shirt was wet with blood. From under his body, a small, dark pool began to spread on the floor.

For the next few agonizing minutes, my mind went blank. Sometime later, I remembered only the sound of a distant siren, growing closer and closer.

# NINE

## The Baggage of Youth

At the hospital on that critical night, the doctors stitched up my left arm—and they rushed .Wentworth into emergency surgery in an attempt to save his bloody life.

The following morning, a police inquiry began sorting out what happened—and why. They questioned my mother, my grandparents and our neighbors on all sides. Later on, I learned they also checked my record at Washington High School and at ***The Oregon Journal.***

They talked with me, too, for what seemed like hours. I still remember the bleak interrogation room at the police station: drab walls, lightless windows, gray metal desk and hard, metal chairs. Yet the two interviewers, a woman from the juvenile division and one older detective, turned out to be surprisingly sympathetic and supportive. They patiently pulled the stormy details out of me, including my earliest awareness of Wentworth's abuse of my mother and everything I could remember about that final, explosive night in our Clay Street living room.

The police never revealed this to me—but following the initial investigation, they told my mother privately that if Wentworth lived, they planned to drop the case, without filing any charges whatsoever. No juvenile court hearing. No record. On the other hand, they said, if Wentworth should die, the situation "would become much more complicated" and they advised her to get a lawyer.

Wentworth fought a grim, ongoing battle for his life. Under intensive care, he squirmed on his back in the hospital. I confess I felt no remorse.

Eventually, he pulled out of it. He survived and we never saw him again. Sometime after the divorce, my mother received word that he had landed a job in Pittsburgh, California.

***

Three or four of us hung around the ***Gilmore*** truck stop every afternoon, pitching pennies and waiting for

the delivery truck to drop off our bundles of papers.

We chalked a line about five yards out from the station's back wall. Then we'd take turns tossing a penny in a spinning arc towards the wall. At the end of each round, the kid whose penny landed closest to the wall won all the cash.

I filled my ***Log Cabin Syrup*** penny bank to the roof with pennies I won in that innocuous paperboy pastime.

***

***In the 1930s a severe drought that was to last almost seven years ravaged the windy panhandle of Texas and Oklahoma, parts of Kansas arid beyond. Terrifying dust storms swept across the land.***

***Farmlands crumbled into great dunes of shifting sands. Topsoil blew away. Smothering "black blizzards" clogged the roads, invaded the houses, choked the livestock, wiped out the harvests, half-buried trees, farm buildings and machinery under mounds of sandy black grit. They called it "The Dust Bowl." Families were left destitute and suffering. Thousands and thousands of farmers went bankrupt. It was one of the worst environmental disasters in history—adding further to the misery of The Great Depression.***

***

In 1935-36, refugees of The Dust Bowl fled westward, in ancient family jalopies piled high with their possessions. They streamed into California and Oregon, where they competed for jobs with West Coast migratory "fruit tramps" who followed the harvest from California's Imperial Valley up through the San Joaquin Valley, the Willamette Valley, and into the valley of Oregon's Hood River and the Yakima Valley of Washington.

Locals called the incoming refugees "Oakies." When wave after wave of "Oakies" poured into California, where jobs in the fields were already scarce, the farm labor market became glutted.

The new migrants often met with violence from bands of local vigilantes as well as hostile deputies.

In Oregon, however, folks received The Dust Bowl families with greater sympathy. I remember vaguely an occasion when my grandmother took part in some kind of canning festival in nearby Gresham for the benefit of

drought victims. Both of my grandparents had worked in the fields alongside the migrants. They knew the life.

I came to know the "0akies" myself, during the time I worked the cherry crop with my grandparents and we stayed in a migrant workers' camp along the banks of the Clackamas River. I worked alongside the migrants again during my high school fruit picking days in the Willamette Valley and again, later on, up in the Hood River Valley apple country.

I thought they "talked fanny." But there was a kind of music to their voices. I always found the "Oakies" to be good, friendly, hard-working people.

***

At the start of my first high school summer, I quit the afternoon paper route. A classmate named Johnny MacDonald and I decided that we'd make some seasonal money picking strawberries. ***The Innocents Abroad!*** We signed up at a federal AAA clearing center for migratory workers, located in the old downtown court house.

Early the following morning, two hard-faced, field bosses herded about two dozen of us onto a flatbed truck. With bedding rolls in tow, we held on tight as they trucked us down to the sprawling fields around Newberg, Oregon, where they put us to work immediately.

We soon discovered that picking strawberries was one hot, dusty, miserable, backbreaking job. The sweat ran down in rivers. We squatted or bent over low, picking row after row, hour after hour. Unending.

One scorching afternoon, after two weeks of excruciating work in the fields, we painfully stood up, looked each other in the eye, asked ourselves what the hell we were doing—and walked out. With tender sunburns, aching backs, filthy, dirty bedrolls and less than twenty bucks earned between us, we hitch-hiked our way back to Portland.

Today, whenever I drive past a coterie of Mexican fruit pickers at work in a California strawberry field, bending their bodies low to the ground, I feel a strong, commiserating twinge in my lower back.

Somewhat recovered, Johnny MacDonald and I went

back to work. We snagged a job picking string beans for a Japanese truck farmer whose land bordered the Columbia River slough, where Portland's International Airport is now located. I developed into a fast picker. But not as fast as one, sturdy, bow-legged, Japanese woman who tallied more giant sacks full of beans at the end of the day than anybody else working the fields.

Most of the bean pickers were Japanese.

***

During the tail-end of that sweaty, hard-working summer, I lazed around. Almost daily, I went swimming at a public pool located in Powell Park, far out on the southeast side of Portland. Id bicycle out in the morning, taking along a sandwich, an apple or maybe a ***Baby Ruth*** candy bar. I'd spend the entire day, hanging around with a few guys I knew, swimming, flirting with girls from other high schools and working on my tan, like every other callow teenager lying around the pool.

That's where I met Bob Ballard, a burly, big-boned, Franklin High sophomore with an uproarious sense of humor. We became good friends. He sold me my first set of golf clubs—a beat-up set with wooden handles. I think I used them twice, maybe three times, before I gave them away. A few years later, Bob entered Naval flight training about the same time I did. Eventually, as Marine Corps pilots in the South Pacific, our paths crossed at Espiritu Santo and Bougainville. He flew in VMTB-134, another Marine torpedo squadron.

***

Franklin D. Roosevelt ran for a second term in 1936—the same year I had a secret, unrequited crush on Beverly Welch, the snooty daughter of Portland's wealthiest undertaker. She was a standout.

The Republicans nominated Governor Alf Landon, "The Kansas Sunflower," to run against FDR. As a campaign button, the Landon camp used Landon's portrait, centered on a bright, yellow felt, sunflower background. It made an eye-catching, decorative button. That's what Beverly Welch was wearing, on the day that I started teasing and taunting her about her fat-cat, Republican cause.

As I think back now on my boorish behavior, it was

inexpiable—and inexcusable.

With a couple of FDR buttons pinned on my fraying sweater, I moved in close, pointed at her Landon button and smugly wise-cracked, "Sunflowers wilt in November, ya know." She whirled angrily and walked away, calling me a damned Bolshevik. ***A Bolshevik?***

Our romance was over before it had even begun.

***

***In November 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his running mate, "Cactus Jack" Garner, rolled up one of the greatest landslides in American political history, carrying every state in the Union, except Maine and Vermont.***

***

At Washington High, we seldom saw our haughty principal, Mr. Hugh J. Boyd. He seemed to emerge from his inner sanctum only on special occasions, looking stiff and proper in a tightly vested, blue-serge suit, peering through ***pince-nez*** glasses with a scornful look on his face.

One of those special occasions was the afternoon of December 11, 1936.

On that day, Mr. Boyd, an ardent Anglophile, called a special assembly in the school auditorium so that all of us could listen to the live, trans-Atlantic broadcast of King Edward VHIs abdication.

For weeks, the drama of a king forced to choose between his kingdom and the woman he loved had been a sensational topic of conversation in our current events class—and in the tabloids across America. They called it "the century's No. 1 celebrity love affair."

The fact that the king was the popular, former Prince of Wales, now Edward VIII of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions Beyond the Seas—and the fact that the woman was an American, the elegant divorcee Wallis Warfield Simpson of Baltimore—-further heightened the historical drama.

All through the summer and fall of 1936, while Roosevelt and Landon had been stumping the U.S., the American press had buzzed over the royal romance.

On the day that Britain's Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin reported to the House of Commons on his

successful negotiations as the sovereign match-breaker, the afternoon headline on the ***Oregon Journal*** screamed, "THE KING QUITS." Millions of Americans, including our entire high school student-body, gathered around radios that afternoon to hear, above the crackle of static, the slow, measured words of Edward, himself.

We listened intently. Many of the girls sniffled and quietly sobbed, as Edward spoke.

"At long last, I am able to say a few words of my own. I never wanted to withhold anything, but until now it has not been constitutionally possible for me to speak ... ***(static, faded in and out)*** ... I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duties as King as I should wish to do, without the help and support of the woman I love ... ***(more crackling static)*** ... and now we all have a new King. I wish him and you, his people, happiness and prosperity with all my heart. God bless you all, God save the King!"

***

In those days, before cheap long distance phone lines, faxes and piles of e-mail, the telegram was the ultimate form for an urgent message—ten words or less, regular rate. Every word counted.

For most people, a knock on the door from a Western Union messenger, bearing one of those instantly recognizable yellow message forms, brought on a tingling moment of anticipation, drama, or sometimes dread.

Was it 1936? '37? I worked one entire Christmas vacation as a Western Union bike messenger in the city's downtown business district. There were about eight of us operating out of the Western Union office on Salmon Street. It was a seedy, oddball assortment of guys. Five were on the job year-round as full-time messengers. The rest of us were temps, working through the holidays.

We parked our bikes in a rack outside the front window. Inside, we sat on a long wooden bench jammed against one wall, across from the message counter. When a wire came crackling through and the tape was stripped in place and the telegram was stuffed in an envelope, ready to go, the manager would bellow for the next messenger up, by number.

The job was exhilarating. Perilous fun—as I learned how to wheel madly through heavy, downtown traffic,

darting between cars and streetcars, swerving around pedestrians, hell-bent on my mission of delivery.

***

My dad had worked on the construction of Bonneville Dam, which crossed the spectacular Columbia River gorge between Oregon and Washington. Famed industrialist Henry J. Kaiser's company handled the planning and construction. Started in 1933 as a mighty hydro-electric project, the job reached its 1937 completion date on time and within budget. President Franklin D. Roosevelt came out for the dedication ceremonies.

During one of those infrequent days when I was able to spend some time with my dad, he took me with him to view FDR's arrival in Portland. We were a part of the enthusiastic mob in front of Union Station.

In an open limousine, FDR and his son Elliot were slowly driven from the station. My dad and I were standing in the crush, about fifty feet away. Smiling, always smiling, with his trademark cigarette holder in hand, FDR waved at the cheering crowd in front of the historic station. It was a skillful performance.

Like most Americans, I did not learn until after his death, some eight years later, that the man had been stricken with polio in 1921 and had never walked again without the aid of braces and a cane.

***

Do you remember Kay Francis? She was a stylish and worldly actress of the 1930s. A glamorous brunette.

My literature teacher at Washington High School was a Kay Francis look-alike. Her name was Miss Kohns. Miss Gwendolyn Kohns. She deepened my interest in the world of books—classics and contemporary.

One of her recommendations that kept me up past midnight was ***The Time Machine.***

That 1895 British thriller served as my introduction to G. Wells, the first great writer of science fiction and a provocative and prolific philosopher still worth perusing.

When I finished the hook, I burrowed into his poignant story of ***The Invisible Man,*** which also enthralled me.

There were times, however, when Miss Kohns drifted

over my head. Once she spent two successive days trying to interpret for us the complex philosophy of good and evil, represented by Herman Melville's American masterpiece, ***Moby Dick.*** I listened to her and stared into her radiant eyes and picked up what I could—by osmosis.

During the night, about this time, I experienced a frustrating and reoccurring, adolescent dream. As I recall the fragments now, I dreamt that I was sitting cross-legged on the rolling deck of a massive square-rigger under full sail. It might have been Captain Ahab's whaler, the ***Pequod.*** I was sitting on the deck with a book on my lap, trying to study for an exam, while Miss Kohns strode back and forth in front of me—buck naked.

***

It was 1937, winter.

A pop version of an obscure, minor-key, Yiddish folk song called ***Bei mir bist du schon*** confounded the music world by winning worldwide popular appeal. It became the Number One song of the year.

My mother had a new job that cold, rainy winter, working the front counter in a deliciously warm and fragrant Jewish bakery. It was located inside Portland's ***faux*** art deco, Public Market building, which dominated the central, west side waterfront. My mother worked with a friendly, big-bosomed, Jewish woman who liked to sing while she worked. Nobody seemed to mind.

I don't remember the woman's name, but I d.o remember that she rendered the ***Bei mir*** song and everything else she sang in an offbeat, nasal tone:

***Bei mir bist***
***du schon***
***Please let me***
***explain***,
***Bei mir bist du***
***schon Means that***
***you're grand ...***

My own personal favorite that year was the saucy Rodgers and Hart tune, ***The Lady is a Tramp.***

***

They converted Portland's giant Public Market

building into the Oregon Journal's printing plant in later years. I toured the operation. Eventually, the city tore down the ugly behemoth. Today, the land is part of a beautiful, two-mile promenade and park along the Willamette River.

***

Jack Devlin was a big, tough, craggy-faced cop with a problem. He was an alcoholic. He'd been suspended from the Portland Police Department for drinking while on duty, one too many times.

When my mother started going around with Jack, however, he was in the middle of a come-back. He'd gone on the wagon. He'd joined AA. He'd won another chance to make it on the force, albeit part-time. They brought bim back on special assignments: crowd control, VIP visits, directing parade traffic, that sort of thing.

My grandfather never quite approved of him because Jack was hard-line, anti-union, while Jim Dewey remained a determined, craft union man all of his life. Labor politics made no difference to me, however. I liked Jack Devlin. He laughed loud and gloriously.

Of all the lovers my mother had over the years, he was the only one who happily bonded with the family. We became good pals during the all too brief time in which he was a part of our lives.

Once, he came along with us when my mother and grandparents and I had a wet, comical day, scooping buckets of smelt during the annual Sandy River smelt run. Another time, he took my mother and me on a picnic alongside a small creek in the woods, where he set a gunny sack trap and we landed about a dozen crawfish.

Jack and I sometimes played handball at the park on Sundays. We pitched pennies. We arm-wrestled-—-sort of. He bought me an illustrated edition of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" to add to my growing book collection. He taught me the beginnings of chess. And he was good-with my mother, too. They had playful times together.

While he lived with us, Jack pushed me to do my best. He'd tell me, "Give it all you got, Byron—-then a little more on top of that."

One night, while checking out his equipment lock-box, he presented me with a fearsome-looking, 24-inch riot

stick that I'd been warily admiring. He said it was a well used, old-timer and he wanted me to have it. The club's mellow luster came from hand-rubbing with linseed oil. He "warned me that I'd better take care of it the same way. I promised.

Woven around the handle was a leather thong that enabled me to hang it proudly on my wall with my other memorabilia. I have no idea whatever happened to that illustrious weapon. I wish I still had it. Along with my Alaskan ***Oosik.***

During the celebrated, Portland Rose Festival parade that year, Jack was able to get me a job as a street peddler. With a wide strap around my neck and another around my waist, holding the metal case out in front of me, I worked my way up and down the street in front of the crowded curbs. I loudly hawked chocolate-covered ice cream bars and Popsicles.

My territory was a two-block stretch along one side of Grand Avenue, ending at the intersection where Jack directed traffic. He waved at me as I worked the crowd.

Including a few good tips, I came away from the parade that year with a fistful of dollars.

***

Jack and my mother came close to making a go of it. I think they could have been happy together.

Any such dream shattered on the afternoon that Jack Devlin suffered a massive heart attack and collapsed on the handball courts of the Portland YMCA. They told me he died on the way to the emergency hospital. That night, I locked myself in my room. And I sobbed bitterly.

***

My mother strongly admired Amelia Earhart. The slender, female pilot with the engaging smile symbolized for my mother the new American woman, who could do anything a man could do, oftentimes better.

The legendary pilot captured my imagination, too. I pictured her as a gutsy, American woman who thrilled to the sheer adventure of flying. As much as I could, I tried to keep track of her exploits. I knew that during the year I was born, she had set a woman's altitude record of 14,000 feet. I also knew that in 1928 she had been the first woman to fly the Atlantic. It wasn't until later that I

learned she did this as a passenger, with an alcoholic pilot and an ex-Army mechanic. The strange trio made the flight in a tri-motor Fokker flying boat.

In 1932, when I was eleven years old, she did it on her own. She duplicated Lindbergh's feat by flying the Atlantic alone—a first for a woman. She set a string of other records, too, including the woman's cross-country speed record, before she set out to realize her most challenging dream. In May 1937, she took off from Oakland, California, on a daring attempt to be the first woman to fly around the world.

Four weeks later, when she and her navigator, Fred Noonan, disappeared somewhere in the South Pacific, my mother and I were dumfounded. We could scarcely believe the news.

An unprecedented search by U.S. Navy planes and ships failed to discover any "trace of Amelia Earhart or Fred Noonan or their twin-engine ***Lockheed Electra.***

Over the years, many intriguing theories have surfaced around the disappearance of Amelia Earhart. The most probable story'. In a severe squall, they lost their way and crashed.

Still, her tragic disappearance remains a mystery.

***

After several practice runs around the neighborhood, I really learned to drive during a weekend outing at the ocean with my mother and my Aunt Phoebe. The inaugural took place on a remote, ten-mile stretch of hard-packed beach, north of Allwaco, Washington, near the turbulent mouth of the Columbia River.

When I first slipped behind the wheel, slammed the stick shift into gear and let go of the clutch ... ***whoa*** ... my head snapped back and the ***Hudson-Terraplane*** jerked and bucked like a wild, roundup bronco.

By the end of the day, however, I had developed a good enough feel for shifting the stick. And the next day, we went all-out. My mother and I took turns behind the wheel, roaring up and down miles of flat, empty beach, just for the hell of it.

Back in the city, I refined my driving techniques during more practice runs at dawn on empty streets around the neighborhood. Sometimes I drove Aunt Phoebe's old Dodge. Other times, I drove with my mother

in her yellow ***Hudson-Terraplane.***

***

My mother's influence on my character was deep and lasting. We enjoyed a loving relationship. However, I admit to jarring outbursts of discord occasionally, during my adolescent years. Not unexpectedly, I was feeling independent, rebellious. Occasionally, we argued and argued. What about exactly—I have long since forgotten. But she let me know in no uncertain terms that she wouldn't take any "back-talk." She told me I needed more discipline in my impertinent, young life.

She got her wish. When I enlisted in the CMTC, I experienced army, boot camp discipline for the first time.

***

The Citizens Military Training Camp, or CMTC, was a depression-era, U.S. Army training program for youths 16-20-years-old. It was a volunteer, four-year infantry reserve curriculum, similar to the ROTC, built around 12 weeks of active duty during the summers.

Emma Lindquist's latest boyfriend was a master sergeant in the regular Army, assigned to the headquarters unit of the CMTC at Vancouver Barracks in Vancouver, Washington. His name was Henry Karle. Emma called him "Hank." What a piece of work he was—piercing blue-gray eyes, neatly trimmed, sandy hair and a muscular, six-foot, two-inch frame, poured into a starched, sharply pressed Army uniform with ribbons on his chest and service stripes stacked up his sleeve. ***Wow!*** As a wide-eyed 15-year-old with a nose for adventure, I was duly impressed.

On the night when Emma brought the resplendent sergeant over to our fiat for dinner, along with Agnes and Eddie Daniels, he regaled the table with stories of army life. Later on, he beguiled me with the promise of a well-paid summer adventure and a toughening challenge.

But I was only 15? No problem, he promised. He could take care of that at headquarters. And he did.

By the end. of the evening, Sergeant Karle had recruited me into the CMTC. My mother, with a knowing gleam in her eye, said if I wanted to do it, go right ahead.

***

That's how it came about that at the end of my sophomore year in high school, I signed in as a raw recruit at Vancouver Barracks. Fort Vancouver was headquarters of the U.S. Seventh Infantry and site of the Army's CMTC for the Pacific Northwest.

***The Seventh Infantry commander at Vancouver was Brigadier General George C. Marshall, who went on to become U.S. Army chief of staff during World War II, our country's first five-star general, a distinguished secretary of state under President Truman, and winner of the 1953 Nobel Peace Prize for his 'Marshall Plan" contribution to European recovery.***

First year, basic training in the CMTC was boot camp, no more, no less. My grandmother clipped and saved for me an ***Oregonian*** newspaper feature in which the writer called CMTC basic training "a deliberately harsh introduction to military life, designed to mortify and motivate trainees." He claimed, "It fosters cohesion and discipline." Probably what my mother had in mind:

As a 15-year-old surrounded by guys 16-20-years-old, I soon discovered that I was the Company runt. But I was a determined runt. And I muddled through. Trying to recall basic training now, it's a jumbled blur of "physical hardening," marching, barked orders, standing at attention, close order drill, the manual of arms, early a.m. bugle calls, squared-off bed-making, obstacle courses, advanced drill, parades, tactical formations, field hikes and time on the rifle range.

I think we spent several days of "snapping in" work, practicing the various shooting positions, none of them comfortable. Then came the actual firing practice. No ***Daisy*** BB guns. We manhandled the Army's standard-issue Springfield rifle. I earned raw elbows and sore muscles on the firing range. In the end, I also earned a Marksmanship badge.

Basic 'training ended that summer with an overnight bivouac far out in the boondocks, including a grueling ten- mile hike under full backpack and equipment.

By this time, several of the older guys were vying to see who was the toughest. I was vying to see if I could stay on my feet, as I trudged into camp at the finish.

It's not that I knew I was going to make it. But I knew I wasn't going to give up until I did.

# TEN

## The Adolescents

In the beginning, I thought the worst part of my new job was crawling out of bed at three o'clock in the morning. Then came the vicious winter storms that year, howling in off the Gulf of Alaska, with wave after wave of rain and sleet that bit sharply into your face like a fist full of needles.

In the midst of the cold downpours, I did what the other "paper boys" in the city did that sodden winter. Weighted down fore and aft with a canvas bag stuffed full of newspapers, I crouched over the handlebars of my bike in the predawn darkness—and kept pedaling. My new job was delivering Portland's morning newspaper, ***The Oregonian.***

My route fanned out from the eastern end of the Burnside Bridge. In the back streets, I delivered papers to aging bungalows and rows of sagging fiats and rooming houses—while along lower Burnside Street, I covered shabby hotels, beer joints, storefront cafes, mom and pop shops, and the cheap apartment buildings of the tenderloin.

At the old Northern Hotel next to the bridge, I delivered two papers every morning to a whorehouse on the second floor. One morning, a thin, working girl with a sad, little smile on her lips presented me with a fat glazed doughnut. I had just plopped their two papers on a round table in the entrance. The doughnut was scrumptious.

To this day, I can recall the rich perfume of spaghetti sauce that saturated some of those old buildings, where I lugged papers up two or three flights of stairs. Other tenements, though, had a different feel to them. Gaunt shadows. And the smell of dank, dark hallways.

By five-thirty or six o'clock each morning, I usually made it back into bed, where I'd try for one more hour of sleep before crawling out again to get ready for school. I was in my junior year at Washington High.

***

***The Oregonian*** heralded the opening of San Francisco's magnificent Golden Gate Bridge with a horizontal photo spread across the front page,, all eight columns, It was a proud day for the entire nation.

The new Golden Gate was the world's longest suspension bridge with twin towers soaring 746 feet above the water (as high as a 65-story building). Today, this monumental example of sculptural art and engineering excellence is the most photographed man-made structure in the world.

One foolhardy ambition of mine a few years after the opening was to make a low-altitude run under the Golden Gate Bridge in a Marine Corps TBF. Never did I get a chance to pull it off.

***

As a teenager, I hated the sort of sedate travel book that celebrated a country's beauty and colorful people. I much preferred adventure, truthful adventure, even better if it happened to be an ordeal—say, a shipwreck, a marooning, a kidnapping by Bedouins in the desert, or an attack by pirates in the China Seas. Richard Halliburton was more to my youthful taste. I read his books with enormous relish. I earned an "A" from Miss Kohns for a book report I did on his rollicking best seller, ***Royal Road to Romance***.

Halliburton was a dare devil American author and adventurer during the '20s and '30s whose unabashed, enthusiastic style rankled the critics and delighted his youthful admirers. He wrote about his own spectacular feats in various parts of the world, as he embarked on dangerous adventures such as following the legendary routes of Ulysses, Cortes and Alexander the Great. At the age of thirty-nine, he disappeared while attempting to sail his own Chinese junk, the ***Sea Dragon***, from Hong Kong to San Francisco.

***

***Shanghai, 1930s, was like, a mystery wrapped in an enigma—at once ancient and utterly up-to-date. A paradoxical crossroad of East and West.***

***A raffish, cosmopolitan China Coast city of decadent cultures and current, international intrigue.***

That was the mystique of Shanghai. I had **always** found it alluring. However, the city as I envisioned it changed violently during my junior year, when waves of Japanese Mitsubishi bombers attacked the heart of Shanghai^ gutting the old districts along the Whangpoo River, and smashing into the famed International Settlement. In follow up action, a Japanese invasion force landed, eventually capturing the sprawling metropolis.

The attack was no surprise, Imperial Japans militaristic dream of a ***Rising Sun*** empire throughout Asia had been building for years. In 1931, Japanese armies had seized Manchuria. Worldwide condemnation followed, but Japan thumbed its nose at the rest of the world, set up a puppet state in Manchuria, and withdrew from the League of Nations.

In the autumn of 1937, the Nipponese launched the next phase in their plan for control of Asia, They launched all-out attacks up and down the China Coast. In quick succession, Japanese forces captured Peking,. Tientsin, Hangchow—and after a lengthy siege, the richest prize of them all, the City of Shanghai.

Then came Japan's brutal attack on Nanking, newly established capital of the Republic of China. When that city finally fell on December 13, 1937, Japanese soldiers began a massive orgy of gruesome atrocity seldom matched in the chronicles of human cruelty. Historians call it "The Rape of Nanking"

It was an ominous portent of things to come.

***

Until Frank Simmons came along, I'd never heard of a gyppo operator—or a. timber cruiser. I soon learned.

Frank Simmons was the new man in my mother's life. He was a quiet man. Amiable, Soft spoken. Yet there was an air of authority about him and a low-key ruggedness that grabbed people's attention, I liked him. He had worked in the woods all of his life. As a youth, he had risked death as a high climber, topping tall trees for Weyerhauser in the days before the proud title of logger became a term of disdain.

Early on, however, Frank quit working for somebody else and went out on. his own. He said that he scraped a little money together and became a gyppo operator, a trade he'd learned from his father. Gyppo was a slang

term for a tough breed of small, independent logging and sawmill operators who competed with the big boys.

It's a rare thing in the timber industry today for a man and an employee or two to fall, log, haul, mill and sell a stick of wood.

During the '30s and '40s, however, the Pacific Northwest woods were filled with these wily, self-reliant gyppos.

"Anybody with a 'dozer and a good saw or a portable mill and a little luck could set up and squeeze out a livin'—or even a fortune!' he told my grandfather, Jim Dewey. The two of them were kindred spirits and heavy coffee drinkers. They got along like a couple of old pals. Sometimes I would fade, into a corner and listen to them talk.

Frank said he still owned the remains of a downed sawmill, a cabin and some timberland in the foothills of Clackamas County. But he said his shoestring, gyppo days were over.

Now in his mid-fifties, Frank was one of an elite group of independent logging experts known as timber cruisers. The big lumber companies and logging outfits would hire these savvy, old pros to survey and evaluate stretches of uncut timberlands prior to buying or logging the land. Frank would "cruise" remote stands of timber, all alone, sometimes for weeks on end. Then he would come back with his notes and draft a written, mapped-out report on the timber resource—quality and quantity.

The companies respected his expertise and they paid him well for it, Frank Simmons remained a man who answered only to himself.

***

Jack Kerouac, chronicler of the beat generation, was a man of my time. We were both born early in 1922, early in the "Roaring Twenties." We both raced through adolescence during the bittersweet 1930s.

When I first read Kerouac's freewheeling book, ***On the Road***, I was struck by the simplicity of his narrative structure: the story of two guys hitchhiking across the country in search of something they don't really find, coming all the way back hopeful of something else. Inevitably, it pulled me back to my own summer of '38, when I went on the road with Cy. Nims.

A tall, gangly, good-looking guy with intense gray-blue eyes and a Viking's lust for adventure, Cyrus R. Nims was his name.

***

He was a year and a half older and a head taller than I. Already out of high school and looking for excitement in unfamiliar places, Cy hankered for a berth on a tramp steamer. Stringent maritime requirements postponed that dream. Then he began exploring with me the idea of spending the summer hitchhiking along the final leg of the historic Old Oregon Trail—in reverse. He wanted to back track through the spectacular Columbia River Gorge east from Portland all the way to the high country up around the Wallowa Wilderness Area.

"Maybe we can get a job picking fruit in Hood River or a job working the wheat harvest in La Grande. You know, that's where we could make some real money."

I, too, had an adventurous foot itch. After lining up a summer replacement on my paper route, I was rarin' to go. My mother warily agreed to the plan. When the time came, Cy's parents dumped us off on the outskirts of the city, along with our duffel bags and bedding rolls.

We left on one of those postcard-perfect June days in Portland when the rain stops and the. low-hanging cover of gray clouds gives way to sunshine and deep blue sky.

***

Hitchhiking on the road that summer, we came to know well the raw, windy backend of a flatbed fruit truck, or the jostling backend of a pickup truck whose rusted metal floor was strewn with a patina of dirt, sawdust and nails. And we came to appreciate the sagging back seat of an overloaded jalopy or the occasional back seat of an aging sedan.

Sometimes we stood by the road with thumbs held high for hours on end, as the cars and trucks chugged by. In desperation, once, we tried an old trick from the '20s. And. it worked. We hid our gear in the brush just off the road, A middle-aged couple stopped in a big Buick. Quickly, we grabbed our gear and hopped in before they could drive off.

They turned out to be a jovial pair. She talked, talked,

talked. Between the incessant chatter, he told us a few bad jokes.

East of Troutdale, where the river slashes through the Cascade Mountains, the historic, two-lane Columbia. River Highway climbed and curved its way high up along steep, craggy cliffs, through tunnels in the rock, over graceful, arched bridges and alongside one jubilant waterfall after another: Latourell, Bridal Veil Falls, Horsetail Falls, Mist Falls, Wahkeena Falls and the famed Multnomah Falls, highest of them all,

A young couple in a wheezing, old Ford picked us up and drove us over that narrow, cliff-hugging road, a marvel of early 2.Q$^{til}$ century engineering. When they stopped for a rest at Multnomah Falls, we walked down the trail together to the viewpoint at the base of the falls. As I stood there staring up into that mesmerizing, 600-foot drop of cascading water, a feeling of ***de ja vu*** stole over me. Across my mind flitted images of standing on that same ground as a small child, clutching tightly my dad's hand. I dimly remembered that we had trudged up a trail that curves around and across a footbridge spanning the deep chasm of the falls.

With the building of a fast, interstate highway at river level during the mid-1950s, much of the high, curving, Columbia River Highway was abandoned. Landslides buried parts of the road. Yet even today, most of the graceful bridges remain standing and quiet, mossy sections of the proud old road still lead to enthralling waterfalls. For me, they will always be the jewels of the Columbia River Gorge.

***

In the Hood River Valley, we had trouble finding a job. It was too early in the season for the apple harvest. Ugly "No Hiring" signs turned us back at one orchard after another. Finally, we landed a job picking cherries. The orchard boss put us to work immediately, along with a gang of migrant workers from California, We camped in the woods, on the edge of the migrant worker camp. And we cooked our pork and beans and boiled coffee over a small fire of our' own that we set in a clearing.

I think Cy and I were adequate cherry pickers, averaging more than a hundred pounds a day. One time, Cy picked almost 125 pounds. Yet at the end of each sweaty, daylong shift, we found ourselves credited on the books with tinder a dollar a day. I think the pay was less than a penny a pound.

No doubt about it, the last, painful throes of the Great Depression could still be felt up and down the agricultural valleys of the West.

Still, we remained in high spirits. The intoxicating feel of freedom on the road and the pride of making it on our own, day after day, was a heady mix. While working in the orchards, we even burst out in occasional song. Like many teenagers of the time, we knew the lyrics of just about every popular song of the day. High up in the trees, we'd challenge each other, One of us would shout out the name of a song. The other would respond with the opening verse or opening chorus line. The two of us would then flail away on the full chorus, lusty and loud.

***Nice Work If You Can Get It—The Dipsey Doodle—My Funny Valentine— You Must have been a Beautiful Baby—The Flat Foot Floogie—What's New?—I'm An Old Cowhand—Change Partners and Dance With Me—Two Sleepy People—Music, Maestro, Please***. We worked our way through all of them—and then some.

***

*Cy Nims was in love. He'd met a Grant High School beauty named Crystal Ayers during spring term. Every night or two, he scrawled a postcard to her, while I curled up close to the fire and squinted at one of the two paperbacks I'd tucked into my duffel bag. One was Jack London's* **White Fang,** *The other, I don't remember. Five years after that summer on the road, smack in the middle of World War II, Cy married Crystal Ayers—a joyful marriage that has lasted more than fifty-five years.*

***

One Saturday night, we hitched a ride into Hood River to look around. We weren't in town more than twenty minutes before two nondescript local girls picked us up in some kind of jazzed-up cabriolet. They said they were on their way to a swinging dance on the waterfront. A bit of

double talk and some kidding around on both sides resulted in their taking us to the dance and paying our way. The dance was held on the top deck of a decorated old barge anchored on the river, where a raggle-taggle Hood River band tried in vain all evening long to stay on the beat.

As closing time approached, the girls began talking about going out for something to eat. Cy and I had about two-bits in our jeans, between us, We were embarrassed,, but too proud to admit it,

That's when we went to the men's room and never came back. We ditched the girls and headed back to the campsite.

As I think back now on our behavior, it was shameful. Opprobrious!

***

When the Hood River job closed down, we drifted on to The Dalles, where the Columbia River rumbles through a narrow canyon on its way to the Pacific, It was here the ruts of the Oregon Trail came to a complete stop—blocked by the rugged Cascade Mountains. In the early years of the trail, before discovery of the Barlow Pass around ML Hood, there was only one solution. The emigrants floated their covered wagons down the Columbia River. Because of the swirling rapids, the trip down river was especially treacherous. A risky business.

On the outskirts of The Dalles, we camped in a hobo jungle located in a dump of trees not far from the railroad tracks. We camped with a few older, teenage hobos from somewhere in the east. They'd been riding the rails for months, living off odd jobs and handouts. And they introduced us to the remains of a Mulligan Stew, simmered over the campfire all day long in a gallon-sized can they called the Gumboat. What went in a Mulligan? Whatever any kid had scrounged up and stuffed in his pocket or his pack. Onions, potatoes, an ear of corn, edible greens, cabbage, dandelions, bits and pieces of meat or strips of chicken, a handful of navy beans, lentils, whatever.

Huddled around the campfire that night, Cy and. I talked about hopping a freight ourselves, for the long road back, once we got to wherever the hell we were going. One of the young hoboes, the one they called "Rusty," was

more open to talk than the others. He gave us good advice on how to keep from killing ourselves if we went for an open boxcar already rolling,

"You run along the left side of the open door. You reach up and grab the big latch handle on the side and, then, with a heave, you swing your legs up to the right and into the car, Got it?"

It sounded like a tricky move—one that I wanted to practice first on a sidetracked boxcar

***

East of the rain country, east of Mount Hood and the Cascade Mountains, we began hitchhiking across Oregon's hot dry lands, pushing our luck. One scorching day, we stood under the white-hot sun from dawn to dusk without a ride. That celestial night, with canteens almost empty, we slept in the sagebrush under immense rolling skies. Two ***naïf's*** in the desert.

The following day, a few miles further east, we were dropped off alongside a small creek, zig-zagging its way toward the Columbia. For us, that rippling little creek lined with spindly willow trees was a lush, longed-for, paradise in the desert. We spent several hours, memorable hours, bathing, scrubbing, keeping cool and just horsing around.

***

The long, straight stretch leading into Pendleton was flat and dark in the night, A trucker dropped us off in the old Round-Up town around midnight. We had no idea where to roll out in the dark. We settled on a low, brush-filled island in the Umatilla River, which runs through the town.

That was a mistake. The hour that followed was a nightmare, We found ourselves brushing away strange hordes of crawling, biting insects inside of our bedding, while swatting swarms of mosquitoes around our heads, We fought a losing battle. Sleep was impossible, Finally,, we packed up our gear and stumbled back into town.

For the remainder of the night,, itching, dirty and swollen with bites, we wandered aimlessly around the streets of Pendleton,, where it seemed that everybody in town was roaring drunk—except for stone-eyed girls,

insinuatingly decorated, who beckoned provocatively from dimly lit doorways.

***

When we pulled out of the old cow town, heading east, the gods were smiling. Shortly after dawn, on our first ride of the morning, a wheat farmer in a battered truck picked us up and took us all the way through the range lands of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, The tribal lands spread out around the base of the rugged. Blue Mountains. The farmer was an affable old geezer, but he had an ugly habit of chewing a wad of tobacco while driving. As we rolled down the highway, he would spit out the truck window between his thoughts.

He tossed cold water on our idea of working the wheat harvest and making good money. He informed us that we were too early for that year's harvest. Then, after shooting another gob of spit out the window, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and gave it to us straight. "Fellas," he said, "you also gotta understand. Most of the harvest crews hereabouts are regulars we've already got lined up. Ya know what I mean?"

We knew what he meant.

Beyond the Indian lands, he dropped us off at Emigrant Springs., which had been a popular campsite for emigrants on the Oregon Trail. We were bone tired, Settling in at the springs, we cleaned up, washed some clothes, set a fire for our fried spuds and boiled coffee, gnawed on some beef jerky and collapsed for a day or two.

***

I have trouble reconstructing how we made it to the very edge of the remote Wallowa Wilderness Area and a small town named Cove. I think we were already beyond the Blue Mountains, sitting on a park bench in the town of La Grande,, when we first heard rumors they needed fruit pickers in a valley further east, near the base of 10,000-foot Eagle Cap.

The searing heat in La Grande topped 113 degrees. I remember that we lavished a few of our remaining coins on two quarts of cool skim milk. Under a shade tree in a stifling city park, each of us chug-a-lugged down a full quart. Then we faced up to the bad news. Our meager,

duffle bag food supply was low. We were almost flat broke. Down to nickels and dimes. We needed work now, no fooling around. That's when we set out to chase dawn the job rumors—rumors that for once, turned out to be true. East of La Grande,, near the isolated town of Cove, we got a job picking raspberries.

This was it. In all of our youthful forays that summer, we never had it so good. We'd found our fairy godmother. I can't remember her name, but I remember she was a short, barrel-shaped woman with curly red hair. She owned a big berry farm with a fast ripening crop.

For some unexplained reason, she took an immediate liking to Cy and me. Close to a creek at the far end of her property, several of her migrant pickers and their families had set up a small encampment. But that wasn't for us. She said we could sleep in her barn and we could build our campfire in a small clearing next to her garden and her fresh water pump.

That was only the beginning, On the first night of our stay, she brought out to us a platter full of leftover meat loaf. Her own recipe, she said. ***And we hadn't even started working for her yet.*** That night, we attacked that meat loaf. We wolfed it down. Then we rolled out our bedding on a pile of hay in her barn and went to sleep with our bellies full for the first time in days. Strange noises from a cow nibbling at the hay near our bedding didn't bother us one bit.

Shortly after dawn there came another unexpected surprise. ***Fresh eggs!*** On that first morning and every morning of the berry harvest, our inexplicable, redheaded boss supplied us with fresh eggs for breakfast. With all that, we were still paid the going rate for picking berries.

In return, we worked hard for our keep. I think we did a good job, although I couldn't break a continuing habit of nibbling at ripe raspberries while I worked.

***

The town of Cove was an odd little place. It amounted to one main street, maybe six blocks long, located in a remote valley on the edge of the Wallowas. Yet it had a community park and modern, Olympic-sized swimming pool worthy of a Beverly Hills. In the summer heat, the pool attracted young and old from miles around.

Cy and I had no swim trunks with us. Besides, we

couldn't afford the thirty-cent fee. One weekend, we spent an hour sitting outside the iron fence just watching the human parade. Cy, with those sun-pale eyes of his, spotted her first. Climbing out of the pool, wet and glistening, in a clinging, almost transparent swimsuit, was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen in my life.

That was my enthusiastic opinion at that moment. She was dazzlingly endowed. It was a pleasure just to watch her breathe.

***

Cy celebrated his eighteenth birthday during our stay at the raspberry farm by sitting comfortably up in the hayloft, staring out the barn window, and writing Crystal.

We were both entranced by the awe-inspiring view out that window—a direct view of the wild Wallowa Mountains, looming east of the valley. Eagle Cap, Sacajawea Peak, China Cap, Chief Joseph Mountain, Aneroid and other jagged peaks stretched to the horizon, all capped with snow, all rising sharply to the sky.

A little-known mountain range for many years, the Wallowa Wilderness Area today is recognized as an American treasure.

***

The berry-picking job came to a close. And time was running out. We'd been on the road for almost two months and we had no idea how long it would take us to hitchhike all the way back to Portland, On our last day, we collected our pay, said farewell to our friendly, redheaded boss, shouldered our gear and headed out.

By the time we got to La Grande we'd decided that we would try to hop a freight and speed up our return trip. A worker on the railroad siding told us a westbound freight was due to stop in La Grande at midnight.

"But watch out for the bulls!' he warned. "They'll chase you off."

We hid in some tall, weedy grass a few hundred yards up track from the railroad station and sacked out for hours, awaiting the midnight call; Sometime before midnight, when I heard the distant whistle of a train approaching, my adrenals began pumping. We gathered

our gear, positioned ourselves and waited. Then, out of the night came the big freight, hurtling down the track toward us, whistle blowing, throttle wide open. In total frustration, we stood there and watched helplessly as the train roared through the station without stopping. Eventually, the flashing red light of the caboose disappeared around a curve.

I have no idea what went wrong. But we felt like damned fools. Early the following morning, we were back on the road, thumbs held high.

***

Sometime in early August, we made it home—dog tired, dirty, hungry, proudly independent, with about twenty hard-earned dollars still locked in our jeans.

***

Over the years, I've sometimes thought about what I gained out of that adolescent summer on the road, besides a batch of marvelous memories to share with Cy Nims and a twenty-dollar bill,

Foremost, I believe the experience helped to bolster my youthful self-confidence—much needed at a time when I was fused with teenage insecurities.

In addition, I gained an enormous, life-long respect for those brave and determined people who walked the full length of the Old Oregon Trail—a grueling and dangerous 2000-mile journey that ended in the fertile Willamette Valley where Cy and I were born.

***

The heart of Frank Simmons' broken down sawmill up in Clackamas County, on the edge of the Mt. Hood National Forest, was one of those old circular-saw-and-carriage contraptions—the kind you'd see the villains, tying hapless maidens to in the old-time melodramas. The improbable arrangement had broken down. Frank planned to sell the mill, nearby cabin and adjacent land.

Meanwhile, he could sell off piles of slab wood and scrap logs as firewood if they were cut to size. Frank had one fellow already hired on the site,, but he needed help. That's where Cy and I came in. Frank offered us a job for

the rest of the summer, sawing wood. The money looked good. We said, "Yes."

***

The third man in our crew was "Butch" something-or-other. He was a beefy, ex-football player and Gonzaga dropout from Spokane. Using a five-foot, two-handled, crosscut saw, the three of us went to work. We rotated jobs. Two of us on the saw. One of us stacking and resting in between.

The first day or two was pure hell. I was stiff. Hot. Sore. Aching, Sweat poured down in rivulets. For awhile there, I didn't think I could take it. Somehow, my teenage body got into the swing of it, however, and by the end of the first week, I hardened to the task.

We bunked in a small cabin on Frank's land, drawing water from a well next to the cabin. We shared cooking and cleaning chores. At night, we played rummy or pinochle or just stretched out and talked.

Cy Nims and I thoroughly enjoyed the ruminating talks we had on the road that summer. And what a wide and wild array of subjects we touched upon—

***What the future might hold, in store for us—Howard Hughes and his new round the world speed record—names of the constellations—baseball and the Portland Beavers' losing season—pretty girls—the Spanish Civil War— learning to fly—good movies and bad movies—Art Deco— juicy cheeseburgers—FDR and the Great Depression— Orson Welles' recent radio scare, "War of the Worlds"—modern architecture—Benny Goodman, the King of Swing—Adolph Hitler—the launching of the S.S. "Queen Elizabeth"—life cycle of the Chinook salmon—working at the Portland, Rose Festival—favorite books we'd read and some we hadn't—our parents—Don Budge's Grand Slam championships—adventure in the South Seas—Fascism vs. Communism—skiing at*** Mi. ***Hood—the University of Oregon Web foots—our favorite movie stars—Willamette riverboats—the blues and all that jazz—•and on and on and on.***

As for Butch.—he talked about football, pancakes and getting laid.

***C'est la vie!***

# ELEVEN

## The Adolescents II

The pursuit of girls took an awful lot of time and energy during my last two years of high school. Never did I have a steady girl friend. No high school sweetheart. Nothing more or less complicated than playing artful games, when I could afford it—dancing to the big bands at Jantzen Beach or McElroy's or the Uptown—swimming and picnicking at Blue Lake Park—taking a date to the movies—-hanging around Coon Chicken Inn afterward—necking in a parked car up on Rocky Butte.

I think it was the irascible Groucho Marx who once said, "Whoever called it necking was a poor judge of anatomy."

***

John Moore and I have enjoyed a close, 60-year friendship of unusual intimacy.

At the start, John and I were only casual friends. He was one year behind me at Washington High. But we became involved together in various campus projects and eventually became close friends and skiing buddies. I visited his home near Mt. Tabor several times. In later years, as bachelors, we also shared an apartment just off the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles.

John's parents were warm and welcoming people. Colonel Henry H. Moore, John's father, had retired from the US Army after spending some 25 years in the service. As a young officer, he had served with the famed Philippine Scouts at Arayat, Pampanga and Batangas in the early part of the century. He told spirited stories of fighting against the pulajanes in Samar. Later, he served at Corregidor Island. The Colonel was a devout family man, an officer and a gentleman. John was devoted to his father—and to his mother, a charming, twinkle-eyed lady who had known the life of a military wife in the Philippines before the outbreak of the First World War.

***

Most radio sets in both America and Europe were tuned in the night of the second Joe Louis-Max Schmeling fight in 1938. It had taken on political overtones far beyond a world heavyweight championship bout. It was "USA versus Nazi Germany." The buildup was intense.

Max Schmeling, the ex-champ, had surprised the boxing world in 1936 by beating a fast-rising, undefeated Joe Louis, His unexpected win made Schmeling the sporting hero of Nazi Germany. Decorated by Adolph Hitler, married to a German film star, entertained by the likes of Hermann Goering and other Nazi bigwigs, Schmeling became as big an icon in swinging, prewar Berlin as Marlene Dietrich.

In 1938 came the rematch. The previous year, Joe Louis had defeated James J. Braddock for the title and now, "The Brown Bomber" was ready.

A crowd of 80,000 crammed into Yankee Stadium for the event. But the wise guys and their blonde girlfriends at ringside had barely settled in their seats when Louis unleashed a vicious attack that sent Schmeling sprawling to the canvas five times. The last time, a powerful right hand punch, put the German down for good—scarcely two minutes into the first round. ***The first round!***

I was staying with my grandparents the night of that fight. I remember that I had just stretched out on the floor in front of the radio, getting comfortable with a pillow under my head, when it was all over. My grandmother and I stood up and cheered.

***

One reason "double dating" was popular in my youth was simply because so many of the fellows needed rides. Only a handful of high school "boomers" owned cars. Few families owned more than one car. Many families owned none at all. So borrowing the family car in order to take a girl out on a date was a familial struggle every weekend all around town. Many of the kids simply doubled up- two or three couples in one borrowed car.

***

I think it was shortly after my sixteenth birthday, maybe later, that my mother finally let me borrow the ***Hudson-Terraplane. A*** double date was not what I had in mind. I had lined up a date with a curvy, tousle-haired tease named Patricia Karasik. Better known as Patty.

My adolescent dream of a torrid Friday night turned into a fiasco. After cuddling our way through a meaningless movie, we drove out to a secluded, dead end lane I knew about, under the trees near Eastmoreland. It was an idyllic setting, frequented by young lovers.

The night was still young. A soft, steady rain was falling. Inside the ***Hudson-Terraplane***, it was steamy and mellow. I draped my arm around Patty as I wheeled in under the trees. Then, I made the wrong move. A couple in a pickup truck had parked in my favored spot, so I swerved sharply into an obscure opening on the left—into what turned out to be a sea of mud. I made a futile attempt to pull out of the muck, stepping down hard on the gas pedal. The wheels began spinning, digging deeper into the mud. Soon, we were stuck up to the hubcaps and going nowhere.

Outside, the rain dripped on.

"Whadda we do now?" Patty whined.

Clutching the steering wheel tightly with both hands, I glumly thought to myself, 'I'll be damned if I know."

Across the way, the lovers in the pickup were getting ready to pull out. They offered to give us a ride in the back end of their truck to the nearest phone—a wet, disagreeable idea, but I grabbed at the offer.

Getting through the mud to firmer ground was another matter. I tried to carry the petulant Patty in my arms, but she squirmed and I slipped and she howled as she landed on her behind—***splat***—in the middle of the wet mud.

I jerked her up on her feet.

She was a mess, of course. A, muddy mess—and spitting mad.

"Don't you touch me, goddammit," she yowled. And she went on and on like that, as we sloshed through the muck—over to the waiting pickup.

The rain dripped on.

I called home from a nearby, all-night gas station. Frank Simmons showed up a short time later in his own heavy-duty pickup, with a sturdy, tow chain, a couple of blankets, a tarp and maybe the hint of a grin on his face.

Maybe not. I don't remember. Back at the scene of the fiasco, he pulled the Hudson out of the mud in minutes.

Without another word between us, I took the bedraggled Patty Karasak home. Then I drove the Hudson back to our flat.

An entire month passed, at least, before I was allowed even to touch my mother's car a second time.- And Patty Karasak? She refused to go out with me ever again.

***

A Yugoslavian family named Borich lived in our neighborhood. I never learned for certain whether they were Serbian or Croatian. They proudly let it be known they were Yugoslavs—and the questions stopped there.

The youngest son, Dan Borich, was a classmate and sometimes buddy of mine in high school. His older brother, Nick, was a dockworker, avowed Marxist and incessant arguer. However, I remember Nick for a more prosaic reason. He played the accordion, badly.

Nick Borich didn't intend to be a comic. Far from it. He was a moody, beetle-browed, serious-minded fellow, who happened to be an awful accordion player. On Sunday afternoons, he liked to sit on the family's back steps in his undershirt and pump away on his squeeze box, thumbing the keys in a fierce, heavy-handed style I thought was hilarious. Dan told me that Nick's playing could even set the two hound dogs a howling.

Dan Borich didn't care much for the accordion. He didn't care much for his older brother, either.

***

Support for the Loyalist side during the Spanish Civil War turned into a passionate, leftist cause on college campuses across America in the late '30s. On occasion, that emotion seeped down to the high school level, too.

The fascist army of Generalissimo Francisco Franco, backed by right wing Spanish extremists and beefed up with massive military aid from Hitler and Mussolini, set out in 1936 to smash Spain's first ever, legally elected government.

The anti-fascist forces, made up of Loyalist troops alongside Spanish peasants and workers, fought back stubbornly against the specter of a military

dictatorship. Ensuing events led to a bloody, three-year civil war that turned into a Nazi staging ground for World War II.

As Franco's forces slowly burned and blasted their way across the Iberian Peninsula, aided by German planes, tanks and troops, an urgent call went out-around the world for workers to defend Spain's fledgling republic. *"No Pasaran!" "They shall not pass!"*

Response was the formation of the International Brigades, a hurried volunteer army of men and women from 53 different countries who traveled to Spain to fight for the Loyalist cause.

The American unit was called *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, a gutsy band of workers, adventurers, artists, college dropouts, radical intellectuals, technicians and youthful idealists that numbered eventually about 3,000, along with some 1,500 Canadians.

***

In the outcry following the horrific destruction of Guernica by the Luftwaffe in Spain's northern Basque country, Nick Borich persuaded Dan and me to go with him to a nighttime meeting of "The Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee" at Reed College in Southeast Portland. The speaker that night was a stocky, pockmarked veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. named Robert Sharral. He exuded the fervor of an evangelist. Recently returned from the bitter Pyrenees campaign, Sharral was back in the US to raise money for the cause and to sign up volunteers for the Brigade.

I didn't sign up that night to fight the fascists in Spain, although the pervasive power of the man was hypnotic. What I did do was corner Sharral after the meeting and interview him for our weekly high school newspaper, the *Washingtonian.* I had learned that I could interview people and do a relatively good job turning that interview into a story.

I felt good about the Sharral interview and the follow up story. Somewhere in my files, I still have a faded yellow dipping.

While it didn't make a helluva lot of difference

one way or the other, after my story was published I found out that the American Communist Party had sponsored that Reed College meeting.

***

As a result of my interview with Robert Sharral, I continued throughout my senior year to follow closely the troubling news from out of Spain.

During those final days of the republic, remnants of *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade* played a key role in a stubborn, guerrilla defense that held the fascists at bay in Barcelona and the craggy mountains of Catalonia. But it was a losing struggle, In January 1939, Franco and his henchmen took over the country. Spain fell under the fist of a repressive military dictatorship that was to last for more than forty years.

***

I've answered readily to three different nicknames in my lifetime. When I was a small youngster, my family called me "Billy." In high school and beyond, my classmates called me "By " Even in college, "Hi, By!." became a ubiquitous greeting.

A third nickname, "Packy," came a few years later in the islands of the South Pacific.

***

My mother delighted in wearing Coty's Emeraude, a heady, cloying perfume, which -I never liked. Still, on her birthday or at Christmas, I would usually buy her a bottle. That particular gift always made a colossal hit.

One spring, I dated a girl, Priscilla Fisher, who dabbed herself from head to toe with Coty's Emeraude. Every time I kissed her, it was like kissing my mother.

After the second or third date—that was enough. I couldn't get myself to tell her why, but I never took her out again.

***

In the late thirties, *The Lucky Strike Hit Parade,* featuring the top ten song hits of the week, was a wildly popular network radio program among teenagers. No surprise—Lucky Strike also became the popular brand among the gang of smokers around Washington High. Smoking was the cool thing to do. Sound familiar?

I tried it, did it, dropped it. Didn't like the taste and didn't like the smoke.

A few years later in the South Pacific, it was a different story. I became hooked on the habit and I smoked heavily for the next 20 years.

One late night in the sixties, after a poker game where I stupidly drank too much and smoked too much and lost too much, I threw away my crumpled pack of Lucky Strikes. And I haven't smoked a cigarette since.

***

Unlike cigarettes, drugs were something we seldom even thought about in high school. There must have been some involvement with drugs among youth on the margins at that time. There must have been. We were simply not aware of it. Now and then we heard rumors about opium dens in Chinatown. But among the guys I knew, the closest we ever came to drugs was sneaking away one afternoon to see the lurid film, *Reefer Madness.*

In no way did we face the astonishingly pervasive presence of drugs that exists in American society today.

***

Pete Zanetos was one hard-working Greek.

Pete had *The Oregonian* route next to mine. He never stopped hustling. His day started before dawn with the paper route. After school and some evenings, too, he worked in the steamy kitchen of his family's Greek restaurant on Southeast Grand Avenue. With any spare time, he practiced on his horn. And maybe did a little homework. Then, Friday and Saturday nights, he came alive, He played first trumpet in the "Babe" Binford band, the

hottest swing band going around Portland in the late thirties.

Pete's old-world father wanted him to be the first in the family to attend college.

Pete's own personal goal, lie often told me, was to land a job with, one of the big time dance bands. He never quite achieved his goal, although he did get a chance to sit in with the Benny Carter band during a three-night engagement at the Jantzen Beach ballroom. A few of us turned out with dates to see Pete up on the stand that weekend, blowing his horn. It was said he could make the angels sing.

When World War II broke out, Pete joined the army. After the war, he returned home and took over management of the family's thriving Greek restaurant. That's when Pete Zanetos packed away his horn for good. No regrets? I wonder.

***

After a night out dancing, we usually made a beeline for some lovers' lane, or we took our dates to a late night eatery. Or, sometimes both. "Hey, let's go get a hamburger and a Coke!"

One of the liveliest and most popular joints for teenagers on the eastside of town was the Coon Chicken Inn. *Coon Chicken Inn*—a descriptive, full-flavored name from a time when attitudes and stereotypes that would set off alarm bells today, once passed unnoticed.

Equally offensive by today's criteria would be the bizarre entrance to the place. A giant, round, cartoonish head of a laughing Negro jutted out from the center of the low-slung building, like the entrance to some grotesque, boardwalk fun house. You walked through the wide-open mouth of this caricature to get to the front door.

The pop-eyed Negro in the chicken coop was a cliché, of course, right out of black face-, vaudeville. Subtlety had nothing to do with it. Up until World War II, ethnic humor, sexual jokes and the free use of racial and sexual stereotypes were staples of popular humor—from sophisticated covers of magazines like *The New Yorker* all the way down to weekly zingers by an array of famous comedians on

national radio. It was another era.

I first met Vic Collin at Coon Chicken Inn. We were both feeding the flashy, "nickel in the slot" jukebox. Vic was a football star at Grant High School, where they called him "Ripper." Years later, Vic and I worked together in both Portland and Los Angeles.

***

Nobody expected the Reno wedding of Agnes Peterson and Eddie "Double Thumb" Daniels to last. Agnes and Eddie were a couple of tough, independent people.

"I give them six months, maybe less," Emma Lindquist had predicted.

"Maybe a year," my mother countered at the time.

Yet five years had passed since Agnes and Eddie returned from their boisterous Reno weekend. In their uptown Portland flat, they hosted a small party to celebrate their fifth anniversary. Throughout most of the evening, they clung together on the couch like a couple of newlyweds—still very much in love.

Do you suppose the fact that Eddie spent more than six months each year at sea had something to do with it?

***

Fast-talking Walter Winchell was at the peak of his popularity and power during my high school years, with his widely syndicated Broadway column and his 15- minute nightly radio show on the NBC Blue network.

When he made the cover of Time Magazine July 11, 1938, the editors called him a "national institution."

Later on, Winchell's vicious paranoia and the fadeout of "Cafe Society" led to the erosion of his fame and power. But in the late thirties, he was still at the top of his game. One afternoon, as we were putting the *Washingtonian* to bed for the week, Editor Fred Lang came up with the idea of my doing a weekly Winchellesque column for the paper.

I took on the challenge.

Fred Lang named the column *By's Bylines*. For the next nine months I banged out a weekly, uninhibited column loaded with gossip, opinions, predictions, doggerel poetry and even the latest knock knock jokes. These nutty, word-play diversions were the rage at that time.

"Knock. Knock."

"Who's there?"

"Euripides "

"Euripides who?"

"Euripides pants, I breaka your face!"

It was a sloppy column. As I look back on it, I am not proud of my attempt at three-dot journalism.

The column was popular with some of my compatriots, detested by others. Either way, it added a touch of spice to my senior year at Washington High.

***

In that final year, I was one of six Portland high school journalists invited to *The Oregonian* for an afternoon visit to the newspaper's editorial department. We were able to meet and talk with reporters and editors and view the newsroom in full operation. It was truly a memorable experience for me. I stood around bug-eyed as an associate editor took us from point to point, explaining what was going on.

No computers. The big, noisy room echoed the organized bedlam of loud, fast-talking reporters, clickety- click typewriters, scores of teletype machines seemingly all going at once, cluttered floors, the smell of ink, yells from the copy desk and people running around—straight out of *The Front Page*. Playwrights Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur apparently knew what they were writing about.

We also visited with the publisher, Palmer Hoyt, in his lofty, top floor office which had walls paneled in a beautiful matching veneer of rare Oregon Myrtlewood. (The use of the threatened Myrtlewood species for such paneling today is illegal.)

At the close of our meeting, with nothing to lose, I

came out and asked Palmer Hoyt for a job in his newsroom. Sitting casually on the edge of his desk, he was somewhat taken aback. Then he asked me my name.

"Byron Mayo, sir."

"Well, Byron, I'll tell you. If you go on to the School of Journalism at the University of Oregon and graduate with a good GPA and come back and see me, I promise I'll give you a job."

For a long time, I remembered that promise. But seven years were to pass before I was graduated from the University of Oregon Journalism School. By that time, Palmer Hoyt had moved on to become the celebrated publisher of *The Denver Post.*

***

Sometime late in '38, Emma Lindquist gave up on Portland. Reeling from the breakup of her latest love affair, the statuesque Emma decided she would move to San Francisco and begin life anew. She had a place to stay—sharing an apartment with a dancer friend who was living in San Francisco's North Beach. And she had a good chance of getting a job, she said, with the city's nearby Arthur Murray Studios. Meanwhile, she was staying in Portland with Agnes until the end of the year. Eddie was back out to sea.

During the Christmas holidays, Emma and I agreed on a goodbye "date" at the movies. "For old times sake," she said, as we laughingly recalled those nights over the years in which she had taken me out to the movies.

"Only this time, I'm buying the tickets," I told her emphatically. She went along with the game.

Myrna Loy was still Emma's favorite film star. And my favorite movies at the time seemed to be daredevil aviation films. So we put our heads together and easily agreed on going downtown to the Broadway theater, where they were showing *Test Pilot*, a fast-moving new film that heralded three winners, Clark Gable, Myrna Loy and Spencer Tracy.

Myrna Loy's work with William Powell in the highly successful *Thin Man* films made her a star.

But I always thought that *Test Pilot* was the best thing she ever did. In later years, I found out that she agreed with me.

***

After the movie, Emma and I walked out of the theater into a cold, unexpected, December downpour. With no umbrellas, we scurried around, the corner and ran down the block, where we found refuge in a warm and fragrant Yamhill Street coffeehouse with cramped, spindly chairs and sticky coffeecake. We were soaked. Emma unpinned and shook out her wet, ash-blonde hair, letting it hang wild and loose. Then, at a small, back-of-the-room table for two, we dried out and nurtured mugs of hot coffee. As I recall it, the coffee went in the first ten minutes and the rest was a happy after-taste of reminiscence.

*Test Pilot* had grabbed the both of us. We enjoyed it. And it started us talking about the world of flying. She reminded me that she had been in the co-pilot's seat the first time either one of us had ever flown—in the old Ford Trimotor with Dick Rankin at the controls. We went on from there. As I now try to piece together the fragments, I think we talked about the first movie we had seen together, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* Later, I know she teased me about the weeks, or was it months, that she had devoted to the task of teaching me to dance, we laughed about my boot camp misadventures at Vancouver Barracks, and we analyzed her former boyfriend, stiffly pressed, ramrod-straight, Master Sergeant Henry Karle.

At some point, the talk turned serious, too, as she described to me her troubled life in Spokane as a teenager, That's when I heard for the first time the full story behind the thin, pale scar that slanted down into her left eyebrow—the story of a brutal husband, the jagged edge of a broken bottle and a teenage marriage gone wrong.

I saw the sadness in her laugh, too, when she talked of that desperate, lonely year on her own with no job and no family. And the degrading pressures of the marathon dance contest.

As I listened to this wistful, enigmatic woman who had come in and out of my life so many times over the years, I admitted to myself something that I already knew: I had been infatuated with Emma Nielsen probably from the time I was ten years old.

***

The rain had dissipated to drizzle by the time we left the coffeehouse that night. When we arrived back at Agnes and Eddie's flat, we said our good-byes in the front hallway. I took her in my arms and I kissed her as if I'd been planning it for months—or years. Momentarily, she kissed back, hard. And I held her close, feeling the full length of her body.

Then she pulled back. She put her hands on both of my shoulders, looked me directly in the eyes and half- whispered, "Byron, do you realize what you're doing?"

I sort of gulped, grinned bravely and said, "Yes!"

She smiled, kissed me lightly on the end of my nose and quietly led me by the hand down the hallway to her bedroom at the back of the flat.

Seared into my memory is the picture of Emma by lamplight, as she wriggled out of her loosened dress, letting it fall softly to the floor.

***

Sometime later in the sweet aftermath, we were lying on her bed, locked in a barelegged embrace, when we heard the muted sound of the doorknob being turned. The door opened and there was Agnes, mouth agape, looking almost as shocked as we were, in our *flagrante delicto*. Agnes paused, suppressed a smile, and then backed out of the room, closing the door softly behind her without saying a word.

The next day, however, she did say a word. She told my mother, who exploded in disbelief. My mother was furious. She railed at Emma and at me and I think even at herself.

Eventually, dear Agnes, forever the personification of the positive, stepped back in and smoothed things over. My mother calmed down, although . I think her relationship with Emma

remained strained from that point on. The following day, she sat me down and gave me a stern lecture on venereal diseases and other such matters, all of which I knew already.

***

Was the time that Emma and I spent together in her bedroom that night amoral? Perhaps. She was twenty- nine years old at the time, maybe thirty. I was three weeks away from my seventeenth birthday.

Yet this I know and I know •it well—I have always felt fortunate to have received such an open and loving introduction to the joy of sex.

# TWELVE

## Fast Changing Times

When we were kids, we imitated him by holding pocket combs under our noses and stretching our arms out in a stiff salute. "Heal Hitler."

That was always good for a laugh—at first.

The laughter died about the time I entered high school. That's when Adolph Hitler set out on his maniacal quest to conquer Europe. In a thunderous speech to a jubilant crowd at the *Circus Krone* in Munich, he shouted, "It is the rightful destiny of the Aryan master race."

Under Hitler, Nazi Germany had built-up a massive war machine in the early '30s—the most powerful military force in the world at that time.

In 1936, he made his move. He sent troops into the demilitarized Rhineland, a buffer zone between France and Germany. Then, teaming up with Mussolini, the strutting Italian black shirt, Hitler proclaimed to the world a militant Rome-Berlin axis.

In 1937, the two axis powers tested their weapons on the side of Franco's fascist rebels during the tragic civil war in Spain. At the same time, Hitler intensified a cruel, diabolical pogrom against the Jews.

In 1938, Nazi Germany annexed Austria in a bloodless *coup d'état.* Nazi storm troops marched across the border and took over the country with little more than anguished hand wringing on the part of the British and the French. Hitler then threatened war as his forces occupied Sudetenland, the western half of Czechoslovakia.

In early 1939, he renounced a "peace with honor" pact signed previously in Munich with Britain and he seized the remainder of Czechoslovakia.

Each new crisis raised the stakes. A mounting apprehension spread throughout Europe—and the US.

On that sunny day in June 1939, when Dan Borich, Joe Volk, Pete Zanetos and I graduated from Washington High School, Europe reeled on the brink of war.

***

The truth hit me hard that summer. I had no money for college. If I wanted to attend the University of Oregon, I'd have to get a job, go to work, and save enough to make it on my own.

I combed a sprinkling of help wanted ads, jumped on every job rumor, talked with my Mother's friends, and friends of friends, and started making the rounds.

Aiming high at the start, I tried for a job as an apprentice to the fiery modernist architect, Pietro Belluschi, who had designed the Portland Art Museum. At the end of a brief, unsuccessful interview, one of his associates escorted me to the door. I auditioned for a disc jockey job at Radio Station KEX, I didn't even come close. As I left the booth, however, the obsequious station manager gave me a gleaming KEX Zippo cigarette lighter as a memento. It still sits in one of my old toolbox drawers. I tried for a copyboy job at *The Oregonian* and then at the *Oregon Journal.* Not a chance. Along with a dozen others, I waited in line to interview for one job opening in a West Side record store. I dimly remember the gum-chewing manager with slicked-back hair. But I didn't make the cut. I applied for a clerk's job at a friendly neighborhood bookstore on Hawthorne Avenue and at the sports shop next door. "Sorry, no openings." I filled out an application form at Meier & Frank's giant, downtown department store, where my mother once worked as an elevator operator. "Don't call us, we'll call you." I tried for a waiter's job at three, small, non-union restaurants. All three turned me down. I even tried to get my old bike messenger job back at Western Union, full-time. They curtly told me, "We're not hiring."

That's the way it went. Discouraging weeks. My spirits dragged the ground. Then came an

unexpected break. I received a call inviting me back for a second interview at Meier & Frank's, which lead to a battery of tests and an uncomfortable grilling. To my complete surprise, I came out of it with a job. M&F hired me on the spot and put me to work immediately in their entrance- level training program.

***

At the age of forty-one, my lonely mother longed for the love of an honest, decent man in her life.

I thought it would be Frank Simmons, but it didn't turn out that way. Sadly, I saw the two of them drifting apart. I think she saw the end coming when Frank's cruising jobs in the timberlands stretched out longer than ever. When he did return, he seemed to spend more time swapping stories with my grandfather than he did romancing my mother.

At heart, I think Frank was a genuine free spirit, never to be tied down. In the end, he quietly told my mother that he was taking on a contract in the Salmon River Mountains of Idaho. He packed his clothes and his pile of gear, said good-bye, climbed into his pickup and headed out. Just like that. He remained a man who answered only to himself.

Unlike the pain and anguish of past breakups, however, my mother and Frank Simmons remained friends—distant friends. Occasionally he would phone her from somewhere and they would talk. Later on, I learned it had been Frank who arranged for my mother to dazzle me with an astonishing graduation gift—beyond all expectations—the kind of gift most seventeen-or- eighteen-year-olds in 1939 could only dream about.

***

I became the proud, head-whirling owner of a nine- year-old 1931 Model A sports coupe. Closing my eyes now, I can still see it—a forest green beauty with black fenders, romantic rumble seat, green pinstripe interior, wire spoke wheels, running board step plates, rear wheel mudguards and side-

mounted spare tire.

When my dear mother hugged me and handed me the keys that memorable afternoon, I was taken aback, overwhelmed. I think I stammered out my heartfelt thanks in a kind of grateful daze. Eventually, I jammed a tweed cap on my head, climbed in behind the four-spoke steering wheel, squinted fearlessly off into the distance, and let my day dreams soar. Who was I? The great Rudi Caracciola in the final kilometer at Le Mans Grand Prix? Or, the Great Gatsby, running late for an afternoon rendezvous with Daisy?

That tough little Ford, with its reliable, 200-cubic inch, four-cylinder engine, had traveled almost 100,000 miles. Overhauled to the hilt, it was raring to go again.

By the time I sold it three years later, I'd put thousands of miles more on it and racked up an array of untold memories.

Once, hell-bent on my way to the Oregon coast with a buddy named Saul Barde, I recklessly pushed the old Model A up to almost 75 miles an hour on a wild stretch of pitted surface that cut through the charred hills of the Tillamook burn. Logging trucks ruled on that tortuous two-lane road. Rounding a turn, I faced a loaded logger, roaring down on us head-on, He blasted his horn. I swerved sharply, nicked a rear fender and spun around on the shoulder, headed the wrong way, We survived. But we sat there quietly for a few minutes, sweating.

On afternoons when dusk drizzled perpetually over the Willamette, I sometimes explored the back roads of the Cascade foothills by myself. All alone. The valley and the hills were always green. Wondrously so.

I remember sweet summer nights, too, with the split windshield tilted open, side windows down, the wind in my hair, and pretty girls with beguiling names like Lynn Lacy, Marcy Cherry, Virginia Valentine.

***

As the dog days of August slipped by, German

armies stood poised on the borders of Poland, awaiting Hitler's signal for a full-scale invasion—an unbelievable escalation in the *Fuehrer's* geopolitics. It was a time of frantic efforts by Poland, Britain and France for a settlement. A time of tense, continuing negotiation,

Totally defiant, Hitler ridiculed a personal appeal for peace from FDR and scorned dead-serious warnings from the British and the French against further aggression. The lines were drawn.

Scrambling eleventh-hour moves of the weary and exhausted diplomats proved to be completely futile.

At daybreak on September 1, 1939, German armies poured across the Polish frontier. Overhead, wave after wave of Stuka bombers attacked Polish military installations and open cities alike.

The unthinkable had become reality.

Hitler had plunged Europe into a six-year war that was to grow into the bloodiest conflict ever.

World War II had begun.

***

In the beginning, we all wondered—what will the war in Europe mean to us here? How can we keep out of it? That was an interminable question everybody seemed to be asking.

Coming out of the Great Depression, the mood of the country in 1939 was isolationist. "Let's stay out of any damned foreign entanglements." Along with most of my generation at that time, I shared such sentiments.

We carried on with our lives. But we would often turn to the radio for the latest bulletins from Europe.

***

I spent most of the year at Meier & Frank's—in advertising production and the credit authorization department. At times, the job was a deadly bore. But it paid enough for me to contribute to my room and board, get out on the town now and then, and still salt away some savings. The job offered a few perks, too. For one, M&F heir Jack Meier, manager of the

sports department, gave me a one-year guest pass to the Multnomah Athletic Club, perched on a hillside above Multnomah Stadium. That pass was worth more than a few weekly push-ups, On the back balcony, we had a good view of the Multnomah Kennel Club dog races—and an occasional Pac-10 football game.

***

Sometime in *39 or '40, during the San Francisco World's Fair, I received a fat envelope in the mail from Emma Lindquist, postmarked Honolulu, Hawaii.

In the envelope, along with her letter, Emma enclosed a glossy Pan-American Airways brochure, The cover featured a soul-stirring photograph of a China Clipper flying boat heading out over the Golden Gate Bridge on its way to Honolulu, Midway, Wake Island, Guam, Manila and beyond. "Wings to the Orient." That brochure became a memento I treasured for years.

***

In San Francisco Bay, on a narrow, knife-like shoal, politicians and engineers created a mile-long island that became the site for the 1939-40 *Golden Gate International Exposition,* San Francisco's own World's Fair.

The city fathers named the site *Treasure Island.*

The harbor at Treasure Island also became the American terminal for Pan-Am's graceful China Clippers. Those huge but stylish 21-ton flying boats were the largest aircraft in the skies at that time. And it was on a romantic China Clipper enroute to Honolulu that Emma Lindquist traveled in white linen luxury, headed for a two-week Hawaiian honeymoon.

In her letter, she told me of her marriage to an older man who owned a small chain of furniture stores in San Jose and along the San Francisco peninsula.

I'll be damned if I can remember his name.

***

I liked the lilt of her name, *Lynn Lacy*. Fascinated by the way she walked. She would sashay down the central aisle of Meier & Frank's main floor like some super model on a Paris runway. In reality, she was a vain, good looking, empty headed sales clerk in the M&F cosmetic department. I found out soon enough that she was also one flashy dancer.

I dated Lynn occasionally that year, usually when one of the big-name bands booked into McElroy's or Jantzen Beach Ballroom.

One sweltering summer night I remember best. Count Basie and his band were in town, playing at McElroy's, downtown. The Count was in his prime. You could feel the vibrancy of the beat as we cavorted to the sassy wail of Lester Young's tenor sax.

Then, toward the end of the night came the slow blues. Basie's gutsy, growling, low-down blues, On the darkened dance floor, you could feel the mood shifting.

In synch to the smoky, sensuous rhythm, we clung tightly and we swayed and we danced and we rubbed bodies together.

And in the corners of her smile, she hinted that she wouldn't mind messing around a bit.

***

About this time, thirteen-year-old Mary Bovee was catching holy hell from the nuns at St. Mary's Academy.

On rainy afternoons, she had a habit of skipping out on her ecclesiastical studies and holing up in the Portland central library. In that grand old building of Ionic design, she would immerse herself, sometimes for hours, in books and abstracts on classical Russian ballet—the dancers, choreographers, dance companies, impresarios, and the special life of Anna Pavlova, most celebrated prima ballerina of all time.

At some point in the afternoon, she would then

scurry on to the ice rink for daily ice skating lessons with her coach, Eileen Grell of England.

After several years of hard work in the study of ballet, Mary had converted her ballet training and talents to the excitement and disciplines of ice skating shortly before her family moved back from Seattle to Portland.

It is said that even at the height of her fame, Pavlova would practice her art fifteen hours a day. Perhaps such visions danced in Mary's head as she approached the rigors of ice skating with an intensity that her coach had never before seen in a student. At St. Mary's academy, however, the unyielding nuns would not put up with a school day cut short for ice skating, no matter how promising the student. Mary Bovee was determined. Her parents supported her goals. Eventually, she bid farewell to the nuns and transferred to Portland's Jefferson High School. At Jefferson, school officials understood her youthful goals and went along with an arduous training schedule that now began at one p.m., lasted through the afternoon and sometimes into the evening. .

***

Somebody, it may have been my grandmother, once told me that dancing never hurt anybody.

It was an era when we danced the nights away to some of the most magical and enchanting music America has ever known—great jazz, swing and the blues, along with a host of haunting and memorable ballads.

We had some schlock, too. But mostly, we lived and loved to the songs of Gershwin, Duke Ellington, Johnny Mercer, Hoagy Carmichael and the rest of the talented Tin Pan Alley gang.

It remains a musical legacy of humming material that will outlive, at the least, the past thirty or so Hollywood Oscar song winners.

What a glorious run of years it was, too. On the West Coast circuit, most of the big bands played Portland.

At McElroy's, downtown, you could dance to the

pulsating rhythm of Jimmie Lunceford, Count Basie, Chick Webb, Duke Ellington and other jazz masters. I never made it to the Duke's heralded stand that summer of 1939. But I was there at Chick Webb's opening night session, when his 21-year-old singing protégé, a young unknown named Ella Fitzgerald, mesmerized the crowd with the radiance and wonderful shadings of her voice.

McElroy's had the atmosphere of a down-to-earth dance hall. By comparison, Jantzen Beach was a paradigm of ballroom glamour, set on the banks of the Columbia River. It was the glittery setting for black-tie headliners such as Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, Harry James, Dick Jergens, Billy Butterfield, and even that lovable old reprobate, Ben Bernie. Do you remember Butterfield's dreamy theme song, *What's New?* I can never hear that song without thinking of a last dance at Jantzen with Virginia Valentine's drowsy head on my shoulder, and the slow-spinning mirrored ball sending a thousand trembly dots of light across the floor.

***

At the age of eighteen, maybe nineteen, I was riveted by *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* Ernest Hemingway's study of courage and compassion set against the terrors of the Spanish Civil War. It gave me a deeper understanding of the vehemence burning inside Robert Sharral, the pock marked veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade whom I had interviewed some two years before at Reed College.

Ernest Hemingway was an arrogant, self-promoting, charismatic, machismo man of action and in the end, a self-destructive alcoholic. But My God, at his peak, how the man could write.

His early books and short stories remain rock-hard diamonds. He wrote in a flat, true, realistic style that influenced countless modern writers to follow.

Along with the rest of my generation, I read and reread Hemingway. He was the icon of our youth.

He made of life an adventure, a glorious challenge, a test of self-discipline and courage and

honor. And through all of his writings, you encountered a measure of grace under pressure.

*Grace under pressure.* There is a quality I have aimed for in my own life—in work and play, in peace and war.

***

Somehow, my mother scraped together enough money for the down payment on a two-unit, Yamhill Street flat, a few blocks east of our old waterfront neighborhood. My grandparents moved upstairs, while my mother and I took the street-level flat below.

Finally, she had a home and garden of her own. This had long been a golden dream. We settled in quickly, and she was exuberant.

Two huge, overgrown pink rhododendrons stood guard on each side of the front steps, overpowering the tiny front yard. She called them "Pink Pearls." The back yard was an unplanted patch of weeds that my grandfather and I cleared out. We cut and dug out weeds and we turned over the dirt and we raked the surface and we dug shallow trenches and then my mother eventually transformed it into a flourishing vegetable garden.

***

By this time, my mother had retired her yellow *Hudson-Terraplane* and was driving a used, low-mileage, 1939 *Packard* sedan. She was proud of that gleaming gray *Packard.* Once in awhile she would let me use it for a special night out—something like a double-date, perhaps—but only if I washed and polished it in advance.

***

On nights when I stopped by for dinner with my dad and Eleanor, we always ate at the checked, oilcloth- covered table in the kitchen. Those were special times. Good talk and good food. The dinner always ended with one of Eleanor's fabulous fruit pies—apple, berry, rhubarb, peach, or sometimes

banana creme.

The happiness of their marriage continued after seven years together and in July 1941, Eleanor gave birth to a healthy little girl they named Judy. Dad was fifty-two years old. Eleanor was Thirty-two. And they were ecstatic.

***

Marcy Cherry was a cabaret singer who joined the "Babe" Binford band that year and became a minor sensation. There was a smoky sensuality about her husky voice that captured the dance crowd. When the lights dimmed and she stepped up to the mike, under one small spot, and slid into "Embrace me, my sweet embraceable you," she breathed a special quality of seeming to be singing right to you.

I met Marcy late one weekend night after a dance at the Uptown Ballroom. Pete Zanetos, still playing trumpet with Binford, introduced us. The three of us sat in a booth in the cafe downstairs, sipping icy lemon Cokes laced with rum from Pete's secreted pint of Bacardi. Marcy said little. But she was lovely to look at, And we off-handedly stared at each other.

In the weeks ahead, we had a few after-dates and then we fell clumsily into a short, absorbing and deeply irrational affair. By the end of summer, we were bored with each other. I quit my job at M&F at that point and went on to the University of Oregon in Eugene. Marcy went on to farther success with the "Babe" and somewhere down the line, she married the clarinet player.

***

The flames of war spread furiously across Europe, By the following spring, Poland, Denmark, Norway—one by one—had fallen to the Nazis. German armies then launched a swift, blitzkrieg assault on the Western front. They tore through Holland and Belgium and surged across France like a tidal wave.

The powerful German Wermacht seemed invincible. The French collapse came surprisingly quick.

On June 14, 1940, victorious Nazi troops surged into Paris. The great city, the glory of France, was occupied by the German army.

There were tears in the theatre that weekend in Portland as we viewed the newsreels, transfixed at the sight of German troops marching triumphantly down *des Champs Elyses*—and the swastika unfurled from the top of the Eiffel Tower.

***

**The last time I saw Paris,**
**Her heart was warm and gay,**
**I heard the laughter of her**
**heart,**
**In every street cafe.**
**The last time I saw Paris,**
**Her heart was young and gay ,**
**No matter how they change**
**her**
**I'll remember her that way**

**OSCAR HAMMEESTEINII, 1940**

# THIRTEEN

## On the Horizon

Adolf Hitler, the triumphal conqueror, now controlled the bulk of Western Europe-—from the Pyrenees to the Arctic Circle, from the Atlantic to beyond the Vistula.

Great Britain now stood alone.

***

*Until the late 1950s, more than half the students at West Coast universities were members of the "Greek" fraternity system. Today, only about 10 percent belong.*

At the University of Oregon in 1940, fraternities and sororities dominated student life on campus. It was the way to go. And one of the two most powerful fraternities at Oregon was the local chapter of Alpha Tau Omega, a curious mix of scholars, athletes, student politicians, ranchers' sons, California expatriates and cityside kids up from the crowd.

There was nothing snobbish about the ATOs, however, evidenced by their pledging two freshmen from Portland's lower eastside: Dan Borich and Byron Mayo.

We became ATOs, along with Vic Collin from Grant High School in Portland and "Ox" Wilson from The Dalles. Bob Ballard joined the SAEs.

Set on a knoll overlooking Eugene's Pioneer Cemetery, the ATO house was an awkward, two-story, Moorish-style structure with a dormitory wing on one side and a warren of small study rooms on the other.

On those groggy, god-awful mornings when I had an eight o'clock 'class, the cemetery provided a convenient, "forbidden" shortcut to the main campus.

***

My first dreaded eight o'clock was 20th Century

Literature, in a handsome old building near the millrace, at the far end of the lower campus.

The Dublin-born professor still packed an Irish brogue as he strode up and down, passionately defending the significance of James Joyce's labyrinthine novel, *Ulysses*—considered by many to be the greatest novel of the twentieth century and considered by many others to be the greatest unread novel of the twentieth century.

I couldn't get through the thing.

One week before final exams, I skipped to the last episode, mulled over Molly Bloom's famous stream-of-consciousness monologue, wrote a labored interpretation of her self-confessions, and squeezed through the term with a passing grade.

Because James Joyce had a strong influence on Wilham Faulkner, John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway, I may tussle with *Ulysses* again someday. But then again, life is short. And I may not.

***

That fall, Joe DiMaggio hit .350 with the New York Yankees and won the American League batting title. At the same time, Germany, Italy and Japan signed a "Tripartite Pact" that officially linked the three Axis powers in a worldwide military alliance. "In order to realize and establish a new order in the world," is how they proclaimed it.

On campus, we paid little heed to the news. But gathering storm clouds appeared on the horizon.

***

I was always in desperate need of money. During college, I took every part-time job I could get.

Dan Borich and I worked as "house boys" one term at Oregon's Delta Delta Delta Sorority house. We would rush from class, don white jackets, set the tables in the dining room, serve luncheons to some forty Tri-Delt coeds, and clear the dishes afterwards.

Back in the kitchen, we would then heap a pile

of food on our plates, wolf down a late lunch with fat Betty, the Negro cook, and head out.

It wasn't a bad job. It provided us with extra money and good lunches. The end came when the beady-eyed house manager decided to expand "house boy" duties.

She wanted, us to vacuum and dust the front den and living room twice a week, with a token increase in pay. We rebelled and refused the deal. The Tri-Delts fired us.

***

Down in Silicon Valley, Bill Joy of Sun Microsystems is considered a quiet genius and probably the finest computer scientist of his generation. Far different from the Bill Joy I knew in college, who was a simple, uncomplicated crab fisherman's son from Coos Bay.

For several months that year, Bill Joy and I worked two nights a week at The Eugene Daily News, the floundering number two newspaper in town. I majored in journalism and I'd been scrambling for any kind of job I could get in the newsroom. It was not to be. They put me to work as a "jogger" in the basement press room.

"Take it or leave it."

I took it.

When the papers came off the press, they slid pell-mell down a metal chute like a little kid on a playground slide. But the thick, weekend sections of the paper never lined up squarely. My job was to lift armfuls of papers from the bottom of the chute and "jog" them up and down sharply on a workbench until the edges were straight and the papers could be tied neatly into bundles.

Bill Joy and I alternated jogging bundles of papers, one after another, for three hours two nights a week. At the end of each shift, I would trudge back to the ATO house with aching muscles, a sore back, and filthy with the grime of newsprint.

***

The press room gang at The News drank sturdy black coffee—a lot of it. On election night in early November, however, when the paper's headline trumpeted FDR's unprecedented, third-term presidential victory, somebody broke out the Blitz-Weinhard Beer,

In that 1940 election, the Democrats had nominated Franklin D. Roosevelt on a non-interventionist platform. Roosevelt had assured voters that American boys would not be sent into any foreign wars.

The Republicans nominated Wendell L. Willkie, a rumpled, broad-grinning dark horse from Indiana.

The Socialist Party nominated its ever-ready candidate, Norman Thomas. The Communist Party nominated a fading firebrand, Earl Browder, And on the popular Burns and Allen radio show, George Burns nominated wife Gracie Allen.

"Down with Common Sense. Vote for Gracie."

As the candidate of "The Surprise Party," she brought a bit of wit and humor to presidential politics that year. A farcical Friday night "Vote for Gracie" rally on the Oregon campus—a rally I had to miss—drew a mob of singing, chanting students. As I recall it, Indian Summer ran a little late that year.

***

We had a popular ATO men's chorus for awhile, directed by "Ox" Wilson. We probably weren't very good. But I do recall our pride in one thunderous performance of the *Pilgrims' Chorus* from the Overture to Wagner's majestic *Tannhauser*.

***

The Battle of Britain continued to rage. Hitler hoped the Luftwaffe alone could bring Britain to her knees.

He was wrong.

Short on planes and pilots, the Royal Air Force put up a furious defense in the skies over Britain against daylight attacks by hordes of Messerschmitts and bombers. Goering pushed his Luftwaffe to the hilt, sending as many as a thousand

planes a day on the attack. But a few hundred young RAF pilots, flying Spitfires and Hurricanes, tore apart the Luftwaffe, spoiling Hitler's plans for invasion. This valiant RAF group included volunteers from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and America.

Winston Churchill called the RAF defense against the Luftwaffe, "Britain's finest hour."

An enraged Hitler then turned to massive all-night bombing attacks on Britain's cities. The "blitz." was underway.

London took a terrible pounding.

***

A wave of sympathy for Britain's dilemma swept across America. "Bundles for Britain" became a popular cause in the cities and in the towns and on college campuses, including the University of Oregon.

FDR pushed a lend-lease agreement through a reluctant congress. American military supplies, food, medicine and clothing began pouring into Britain.

Convoys of loaded American freighters ploughed across the icy Northern Atlantic. U-boats prowled on the attack.

German subs had already sunk one American freighter that year. Two more freighters and a US destroyer were torpedoed by the U-boats in September, killing 100 Americans. Then on the night of October 31, another US destroyer was torpedoed while on convoy duty, with a loss of 111 men including all seven officers. The year ended with an escalation of U-boat attacks.

Pressure mounted for America to enter the war.

***

Wrestling was one of the original Olympic sports. And most Pacific Northwest schools in those days were serious about their wrestling programs. Jim Wyatt, an ATO graduate who coached Freshman Wrestling at Oregon, lured several of us out onto the mats that year. What the hell, I knew I'd never

make the varsity. The training was tough and I didn't take it that serious. Still, the conditioning was good. I learned some nifty moves. And I thought it was a great way to earn mandatory PE credits.

In amateur Olympic wrestling, each match consists of three two-minute periods. You have two ways to win—by pinning or by points. If you pin your opponent's shoulder blades to the mat for two seconds, you win. Or, if you dominate by takedowns, escapes or reversals without a pin, you can still win by points.

At the start of training, Coach Wyatt made it clear that you don't have a chance to pin your man or even get any points until you get him off his feet. That's why he spent extra time drilling us on a dozen or so ways to get a man down from the neutral position. No stalling. No body slams. No choking.

My fraternity brothers wrangled me into entering the annual, week long, inter-mural competitions that year. I wrestled in the 145-pound division.

In the first match, my opponent and I grabbed warily at each other without much success until the start of the second period. That's when I successfully seized one of his wrists, twisted him off-balance, tripped him to the mat and pinned him, before either one of us quite knew what had happened.

I was startled by my success.

The next afternoon, my second opponent was not as easy. I went up against a guy I knew from the Phi Delt house. It was a close, hard-fought, wrestling match.

In all three of the two-minute periods, both of us went to the mat without a pin. Twice I thought I had him, but he escaped. In the third period he came close to pinning me, but I bridged up on my neck, twisted and turned over—a move I had practiced long and hard under the sharp eyes of the coach. That reversal made the difference. Time ran out and the judges gave me the win on points. My opponent and his Phi Delt supporters were not happy.

With two unexpected wins under my belt, I felt a surge of confidence as I readied for my third match. A boisterous gang from the ATO house turned out to

hoot and holler and cheer me on.

What they saw was a one-minute wipeout.

My opponent was a lanky kid about three inches taller than I with his 145 pounds distributed up and down an odd, angular frame. As I dimly remember it, he used his long legs for leverage. He knew what he was doing. He took me down to my knees in a matter of seconds, applied a Half Nelson that pushed me over on my back and with one knee jammed into a position that prevented me from bridging, he held my shoulder blades to the mat for two continuous seconds. That was it. The match was over.

***

When I met Billie Shaw, only four days remained before final exams and the end of a sunny spring term. We met at an Alpha Phi sorority party on the terrace overlooking the millrace.

She had the short, black, straight hair of a swimmer, As I recall it, she wore a simple white sheath that night, which highlighted the warm glow of her summer-brown skin. We met. We talked. We were intrigued, For the next three or four days, we were together almost constantly. Three or four days that have been locked in my memory far too long.

One night we listened to jazz and country at a smoky roadhouse in nearby Junction City. One afternoon we studied together at the University library. On another afternoon when the skies were clear and blue, we drove up the McKenzie River Highway a few miles to where the flowering Dogwood were in bloom, We spread a blanket in a small clearing next to the rushing waters of the McKenzie. The surrounding underbrush and ferns were thick and very green.

On our last night together, we talked late over coffee at the College Side Inn. My third cup of coffee was as good as the first. In a soft and melodious voice, she described for me life in her beloved islands.

When I asked her what single thing she enjoyed most about living in Hawaii, she looked me in the eye and laughingly replied, "Surfing the Kodak Reef."

She told me her parents were newly divorced and her mother was now living alone in the family home south of Honolulu, near the foot of Diamond Head. Her mother wanted her to return to Oahu and attend the University of Hawaii. Billie then revealed that she would not be returning to Oregon in the fall.

It was all a sweet but fleeting passage. We had so little time together. When we parted late that night, she wrote out for me her Oahu address. I wondered if we would ever meet again.

***

With German U-boats sinking ships in the Atlantic and Japan threatening in the Pacific, a stronger Merchant Marine became essential to America.

It was summer 1941. The business of building ships was picking up a full head of steam. Up and down the West Coast, shipyards sprang up in places like Portland, San Diego, Oakland, Alameda, even Sausalito,

Working around the clock, Henry J. Kaiser's Swan Island Shipyard in Portland launched a homely cargo ship every sixty days that year. They called these 9,000-ton, prefab freighters Liberty Ships. Several thousand were built on both coasts. Today, only one original, unaltered Liberty Ship still exists—the SS Jeremiah O'Brien, berthed at Pier 32 in San Francisco.

The other major shipyard in Portland at that time was the venerable Willamette Iron & Steel Company, which built tough, heavy-plated minelayers for the Navy.

***

Back in Portland for the summer, I faced the fact that I, too, would not be returning to the University of Oregon in the fall. I was broke. I needed a job, fast.

What I wanted was a high-paying job in the shipyards. So did several thousand other workers,

pouring in from around the country. Shipyard jobs were closed shop, union jobs. And Tommy Ray, hardheaded boss of the local Boilermakers, ran a tough guy union. Waiting lists were long. At the start of summer, the union wouldn't take new applications. So I was on the outside, looking in. Then my grandfather asked, "Why don't you call Andy Hawkins? See if he can help."

"Andy Hawkins? He's still alive?"

It turned out that old Andy Hawkins, retired, was not only still alive, he still pulled the strings behind the scenes at the AFL Laborers Union, Local 296. The word on the street, my grandfather said, was that he showed up at his office every day of the week, rain or shine,

"It's been years since I met Andy Hawkins. He wouldn't remember me."

"You're damned tootin' he'd remember you. Andy Hawkins remembers everybody he ever met. Go ahead, call him up. Remind him you're Jim Dewey's grandson. Go on now, do it."

To my amazement, Andy Hawkins did remember me. With a roaring laugh on the phone, he said he remembered me as a feisty nine or ten-year-old kid tagging along with his grandpa.

The vigor of his voice after ten years astonished me. The rasp was still there—a voice like a box of rocks.

We had a good talk. He was interested in the fact I had gone on to college. And he said he damned well understood my need for a job. We talked for about ten minutes as I remember it. Then he told me to call him back that afternoon.

When I called back, Hawkins told me to report in at Tommy Ray's office first thing in the morning, at the Boilermakers' headquarters.

I never met the man, Tommy Ray, that next morning or any morning. One of his henchmen signed me up and—just like that—I became a card-carrying member of the great International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders and Helpers of America, AFL, Local 72,

Three days later, they put me to work on the swing shift at the Willamette Iron & Steel Company

shipyards that sprawled along the North Portland waterfront. I began as a lowly helper. Within two months, however, I gained my license as a journeyman shipfitter, a job that paid almost three times what I'd been making during the year I spent at Meier & Frank's Department Store.

***

In the dry docks, under the hard light of the arc-lights, sat the hulls of three US Navy minelayers under construction. Firmly settled in their keel blocks, these were big, heavy-duty vessels, SF class, 450-feet long with a 60-foot beam. At night, in the light and shadow of scaffolding that rose high around the hulls, it all had the eerie look of some surrealistic stage set. Workers swarmed over the massive hulls, inside and out.

In the floodlit yards around the dry dock were stacked piles of steel, wiring, pipe, cable and other materials. A narrow-gauge railroad hauling sheets of steel plate threaded its way through the yard, past machine shops, electrical shops, carpentry shops and the loft, on its way to the giant fabrication building. In this cavernous structure, the size of a football field with a roof that soared sixty-five feet, steel plate was prepared for cutting, shaping and welding. Overhead cranes that could lift as much as thirty tons rolled ponderously along high tracks set along each side of the building near the interior line of the roof. In the rarified world of the crane operators, high up in their glass enclosed perches, men controlled enormous, dangling plates of three-and-a-half-inch thick steel with the touch of a finger, the twist of a wrist. A skilled operator would slowly and carefully inch the steel downward into position on to a network of broad workbenches at floor level. Kneeling in the middle of the steel plate or working at waist level along each side, with hammers and points, shipfitters prepared the steel for cutting, shaping and welding.

At the other end of the building in the big welding shop, continuous, white-hot flashes from welding torches punctuated the nightly panorama.

***

Our job was to clamp large, wood templates onto the steel plates, then go to work on the steel like sculptors attacking a block of granite. Using hammers and sharpened, inch-thick points and following the pattern of the templates, we'd pound deep-set dotted lines and curves for the welders and cutters to follow. It was like pounding out a giant jigsaw puzzle.

Usually we worked in pairs, one man on each side of a plate of steel or one on his knees in the middle. My partner was a stubble-bearded drifter from Mobile, Alabama. Lew was his name. He told me he had worked in shipyards in Mobile, San Diego and Richmond before coming up to Portland.

At the outset, I didn't like Lew. He had thin, rather cruel lips and the squinty, flat blue eyes of a gunner looking for trouble. But he surprised me. He worked hard and he worked fast. And I surprised him when he saw that I could keep up with him.

We never became great friends, but we became known as a pair of good, dependable shipfitters.

***

On the swing shift, I punched in at four-thirty in the afternoon and worked until eleven-thirty at night. Then the graveyard shift took over. Willamette Iron & Steel was an around-the-clock operation.

Sometimes after work I would join Lew for a couple of midnight beers at Bernie's Place, a workingman's tavern within hollering distance of the shipyard's front gates.

In the back room at Bernie's, there seemed to be a continuous, poker game underway. The place was a gritty hangout for shipyard workers. When we walked in, sweaty and grimy from hammering steel for seven hours, we were surrounded by guys we knew. And the bartender would shove a bottle of beer in front of me without giving it a second thought.

One night, Lew revealed his age—thirty-one. He

told me that he had a wife down in Mobile. But he wasn't going back.

One time only, I took an open seat in the late night poker game for an hour or two. It was an expensive lesson on when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em.

Damn, that was a long time ago.

***

In late summer that year, the dedicated work ethic and ballet beginnings of Mary Bovee paid off for her, and for her supportive parents, at the Pacific Northwest Figure Skating Championships in Seattle. Tiny, delicate and athletic, her tight spins and flawless jumps were a tour de force in the final night's free style performance. But in the eyes of the five judges, it was her artistry and grace that counted most.

According to the reports, she showed "a quality of expression rarely seen in young teens."

At the age of fifteen, Mary Bovee was crowned Pacific Northwest Junior Figure Skating Champion.

***

Although still revered by his people, Japan's Emperor Hirohito by this time was little more than a figurehead, his role largely ceremonial. General Hideki Tojo and the military cadre were in control of the country. And Japan continued its aggressive drive to create a dictatorial "Easing Sun" empire in Asia, linked by pact with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The brutal takeover of Chinese coastal areas continued unabated. Strategic new Japanese military bases were established in the islands of the South Pacific. Then Japan sent its armies down into South Indochina, attacking Malaya and Thailand without warning.

In an effort to halt the aggression, Roosevelt put an embargo on the shipment of US oil to Japan—a serious blow to further Japanese expansion,

In late November, the Japanese Imperial Cabinet sent a special envoy to Washington to negotiate "a peaceful understanding." Secretly, the Japanese had

already decided upon war, So-called negotiations were still underway the first week of December.

***

Off in the distance east of Portland are the hills, green and dark, and beyond the hills is the towering mountain. Snow-capped Mt, Hood, highest and most glorious peak in all of Oregon, dominates the horizon.

While we were still in high school, John Moore and I learned to ski high above the Mt. Hood timberline on a steep, open slope they called the "Magic Mile." In the beginning, we wore ill-fitting leather boots and we made our way down the mountain on waxed wooden skis, no metal edges. A classmate of ours, Dick Lewis, who was Pacific Northwest junior slalom champion at the time, nursed us through our first snowplows and basic Christies. Then we were on our own.

It wasn't until a few years later, however, during the year we both worked in the shipyards, that I mastered a fast parallel turn, more or less. Finally, I was able to carve my way down the mountain without breaking my neck, John Moore and Dick Lewis had landed jobs at the Swan Island Shipyards. I still, worked swing shift at Willamette Iron and Steel. During the ski season that year, every Sunday before dawn we would head up to the mountain in the Lewis family Ford V-8.

Somewhere east of Rhododendron, with the snow piled high on each side of the road, we usually stopped to put on chains. Then when we reached Government Camp, just short of the Barlow Pass, we turned sharply to the north up that torturous eight miles of steep trail road to Timberline Lodge.

Built in 1937 as part of Roosevelt's WPA program, Timberline Lodge was one of the grandest and most unique ski lodges in the country. It probably still is. Handmade by careful craftsmen and artisans, the attention to detail was nothing short of stunning.

Depending upon snow conditions, we always gave our skis one final waxing once we reached

Timberline. Then we would head out for the "Magic Mile."

Each of us usually brought along a little hard, cheddar cheese and a candy bar to munch on. But around midday, we would come in out of the cold for a bowl of hot chili in the lodge's popular Blue Ox Bar.

We followed our usual routine that fateful Sunday, December 7, 1941.

***

When we took off our skis, kicked the snow from our boots, and walked into the Blue Ox Bar, missing were the usual babble of voices and blaring of radio music. Skiers sitting at the tables talked in hushed tones and a small gang crowded around the radio at the end of the bar, listening to news reports.

That's the moment, frozen in my memory, when we heard the news that a fleet of Japanese planes had made a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Stunned, we listened to follow-up newscasts that reported on the near destruction of the US Pacific Fleet.

***

*In the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, five battleships were sunk. Eight battleships were badly damaged. Eleven cruisers and destroyers were badly damaged. More than two hundred planes were destroyed on the ground, and surrounding facilities were hit at Hickam Field, Kaneohe Airfield and Schofield Barracks. Two thousand three hundred eighty-eight military men and women were killed. Sixty-eight civilians died. More than a thousand other servicemen were badly wounded.*

***December 7, 1941 . . . A date that will live in infamy.***

**FDR**

# FOURTEEN

## After Pearl Harbor

Adolf Hitler made two enormous blunders that led eventually to the downfall of Nazi Germany. One was his ill-fated invasion of Russia, which brought the Soviet Union into the war on the side of Britain. The other was declaring war against the United States.

In a blustery address to the German Reichstag after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hitler hurled personal insults at Franklin D. Roosevelt and called for the Reichstag to support a declaration of war. The deputies leaped to their feet cheering.

In Rome the following day, Benito Mussolini proclaimed his own Fascist declaration of war against the United States. The tripartite circle was now complete.

The world was at war.

***

*In the first week of the war, Japanese planes sank two British battleships off the coast of Malaya. Along with the crippling American losses at Pearl Harbor, this blow gave the Japanese fleet complete supremacy in the Pacific, the China Seas and the Indian Ocean.*

***

America was stunned.

In the tumultuous weeks and months that followed, the nation lurched toward total mobilization. Thousands of young Americans enlisted in the armed forces without waiting for the draft.

January 1942, on the eve of becoming twenty, I announced to my mother that I wanted to try out for the Naval Aviation flight program. The washout rate was high, that I knew. But I wanted to be a

Navy pilot. I was determined to give it my best shot.

I suppose my childhood enthusiasm for airplanes and flying played a role in my going for the Wings of Gold.

But that goal was bolstered, I admit, by a strong sense of duty to my country—the kind of simple, unabashed patriotism that may be out of style in today's cynical environment.

During the bleak days following Pearl Harbor, we felt that the real issue in America was beat or be beaten. I felt a strong, personal responsibility to get involved.

It took careful cajoling to get my mother to go along. Eventually, she gave me her full support and I headed downtown to the US Navy recruiting office in Portland, where I was sworn in almost immediately as a lowly Seaman Second Class. The following day, they put me on a train to Seattle for two or three long days of physical and written exams at the Twelfth Naval District headquarters overlooking Puget Sound.

As I remember it now, several endless weeks passed before I learned the results. Finally, an official-looking envelope arrived in the mail from the Department of the Navy. Inside was a congratulatory letter from the chief of the Naval Air Training Command informing me that I had been accepted as an Aviation Cadet in the US Naval Aviation Flight Program. I was ordered to report in sixty days to the newly opened West Coast Pre-Flight School in Moraga, California, where the Navy had taken over the entire St. Mary's College campus.

***

For the next few weeks, I continued to work at the shipyards. I think I quit about the time a new boilermakers' union contract raised journeyman wages from $1.75 to $2.05 an hour. My working partner, Lew, surprised me by quitting at the same time. He said he was bailing out and heading back to the Southland. An inveterate Southerner, Lew couldn't live with the brooding mists that drift across the skies of the Willamette Valley sometimes for

weeks on end.

***

I remember very little of that last night across the road at Bernie's Place. "A send-off for the kid," I think Bernie called it. Or something like that. It was a blur of loud talk, explosive laughter, sweaty bodies crammed too closely together and raucous hollering back and forth across a crowded room. Clouds of cigarette smoke shrouded the air.

There I sat at a packed table somewhere in the middle of the uproar, crammed in with a bunch of genial, loudmouth roughnecks who insisted on buying me *Boilermakers*—shots of bourbon with beer chasers. How I got back home shall forever remain a mystery to me.

***

John Moore was bound for a US Army infantry officers' training camp. Dick Lewis had enlisted in the Army Air Corps. I had my orders for Naval Air.

In the brief time remaining, the three of us decided to pool our savings and embark on a ten-day fling, high in the mountains of Idaho.

Our destination was the fabled resort of Sun Valley.

***

In its fourth season, Sun Valley was at the peak of its fame as a remote alpine playground for the celebrity set, attracting the likes of Gary Cooper, Sonja Henie, Clark Gable, Barbara Hutton, Ernest Hemingway and Ingrid Bergman. During that first year of the war, it also became a popular haven for wealthy European refugees.

Sheltered on three sides by towering mountains, it boasted winter sunshine, dry corn snow, the world's first chair lift, an enchanting alpine village atmosphere, and some of America's most spectacular skiing.

As we stepped into the lobby of the big, brawny stone lodge, a welcoming fire was crackling in the

massive fireplace. I also vaguely remember the main dining room as a preposterous tiered affair with staircases like a theatre and key lit platforms and a grand piano. It had the improbable look of a Hollywood stage-set from some old Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musical.

We soon learned that playing the sophisticated scene at Sun Valley Lodge was far too grandiose and expensive for three twenty-year-olds from Portland's lower eastside. We ended up renting a narrow, four-bunk room in nearby Challenger Inn, a lively refuge for ski bums and seasonal workers. We felt right at home.

***

Fritz Uhrl was the name of our rugged Austrian ski instructor, the one with a taut, angular face. He was tough and he was teasing as he helped us unscramble our stiff, icy Mt. Hood style. By the end of our stay, he had turned us into better skiers, I think. At the very least, we were loose, more confident, more relaxed. I could ski the moguls, finally, without making a damn fool of myself.

"Bend zee knees ... bend zee knees," he'd shout over his shoulder as we followed downhill in his wake.

Every morning, the early spring sun would pour down on the slopes of Mt. Baldy. We reveled in it. There were only six or seven of us in the class. It was in that disparate group that I met Mac Stone from St. Charles, Illinois. J. McWilliams Stone. He was a big, balding "Daddy Warbucks" kind of guy in his early sixties, I guessed. He had a bellowing laugh and a beet red face topped by a signature black bowler.

And he was fearless.

When it came his turn to traverse his way downhill, with Fritz Uhrl on the side watching, he would jam the derby down on his head, punch his ski poles in the snow, give out a snort and shove off, hard. Sometimes his hearing aid would pop out, dangling behind over his shoulder as he whooped down the hill.

Mac and I became good friends. Our paths crossed

several times over the next two decades. He was a man of boundless enthusiasm who rode with Pancho Villa in the waning days of the Mexican revolution, started a portable radio company in 1922 and went bankrupt in 1929. An inventive engineer, he paid off his debts eventually and staged a comeback with his development of acoustic beacons and ultra sound devices, including the US Navy underwater "pingers" used during WWII. Mac died in the late sixties. Today, his DuKane Corporation, a global manufacturer of hi-tech communication systems, is still in the family and operated by his son, Jack.

***

The prettiest skier in our class was a petite Jewish teenager from the suburbs of Paris. How old was she? Seventeen? Eighteen?

Dark hair, high cheekbones, a rather tense smile. With the grace of a ballerina, she fairly floated across the snow. Early one afternoon, she joined me for coffee and doughnuts at a small cafe in the Village. I can't even remember her name, but the memory of that afternoon still lingers.

In a halting French-English accent, she told me of her family's escape to Switzerland ahead of the final Nazi push into Paris. She said her Papa had been a banker in the city. From Switzerland, they had made their way to Portugal, across to South America and then up to the United States.

Obviously, they had escaped with ample family funds. She said they were spending the season at Sun Valley.

As we left the cafe, I invited her on a sleigh ride at sunset along snowbound Silver Creek. She seemed enthralled with the idea. And we agreed to meet at the same cafe later in the afternoon.

I waited at the cafe until long after sundown, when the narrow valley turns dark green and purple with mountain shadows. But she never returned.

The following morning up on Baldy, a subdued young Parisian softly revealed that her Papa had firmly forbidden her to have anything to do with me.

Why?

That's a question she quietly refused to answer.

***

Ernest Hemingway loved the high meadows and mountains surrounding Sun Valley. Sometime prior to our visit, he spent four months in and out of a room at the lodge, finishing *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, a manuscript he had begun two years earlier in Cuba. And he returned again and again to Ketchum, the old mining town with sagging wooden sidewalks two miles down the road from Sun Valley village. Alongside Trail Creek on the backside of Ketchum, he built his final retreat.

Years later, despondent, broken in health and spirit, Hemingway took down a shotgun from the rack in his Trail Creek cabin and blew his brains out.

***

At night it was very cold in the Valley. The snow crusted hard. During our stay, we headed into Ketchum for hot dancing and mild hell raising at a raunchy joint called the Sawtooth Club.

A ski bum at Challenger Inn had tipped us off that Sawtooth was a hangout for western musicians, skiers, cowboys and good-looking girls,

One night, however, we switched the venue. We decided to test the expensive, rarified air of The Duchin Room in Sun Valley Lodge. When we sat down at our table, a trio may have been playing soft jazz. Maybe not. I don't remember.

What I do remember was the well-dressed crowd, an elegant atmosphere and classy Claudette Colbert sitting at a table directly across the dance floor from us.

Out of the blue, John Moore said that he was going to ask' her to dance. Dick Lewis and I ventured the well- considered opinion that he was out of his mind. John thought it over, stood up, braced himself, walked directly across the dance floor and approached her table, wearing his engaging Irish smile. About this time, Dick and I spotted her escort, a distinctive-looking gent with snowy white hair,

making his way back to her table. We watched with amusement from across the room to see how this screwball comedy would play out. We anticipated a slapstick finish.

To our complete surprise, we saw Claudette Colbert graciously offer John her hand as he introduced himself. A moment later, we saw what appeared to be John and the white-haired gent laughing and shaking hands. Then, unbelievably, we watched them invite John to join them at their table, where the three of them chatted for several minutes as if they were old Hollywood party pals. From across the room, Dick and I viewed this scene with disbelief, totally astonished.

John never did get to dance with Lily Claudette Chauchoin. But he returned to our table with a triumphant, ear-to-ear grin on his face. He reported that he had introduced himself, told her how much he admired her work in her latest film, asked a question or two and things just seemed to flow on from there. I think her latest film that year was called *The Palm Beach Story*— one I never did see.

John, of course, was elated. And his reputation among his buddies soared. In the ensuing years, John Moore has always proved to be a man who makes friends easily.

***

One afternoon, a tousle-headed kid who had been scampering in and around the Sun Valley ice sculptures, crashed into me and slipped to the ground on some ice. I guessed he was about seven or eight years old.

He bounded to his feet, stuck out his hand and introduced himself as Lance. In a moment or two, we had the start of a playful conversation going. And I held his attention with a little disappearing coin trick. Suddenly, however, his father came rushing over, grabbed the youngster by the arm and strode back toward the lodge. The kid squirmed around and waved goodbye.

It wasn't until later I learned that the concerned

father was Count Reventlow, Barbara Hutton's wealthy ex-husband. The count and young Lance were spending an early spring vacation together at Sun Valley.

Lance Reventlow grew up to become a handsome international playboy, famous for his fast Scarab racing cars and beautiful women. He was killed when the light plane he was flying crashed in a storm over the Rockies.

***

The Sun Valley Ski School Championships climaxed our ten-day fling. All guests enrolled in the ski school were invited to compete, Fritz Uhrl pushed hard for everybody in his small class to enter, but I think John and I were the only ones who took the challenge. We both signed up for the Giant Slalom. And I signed up for the Downhill Race. Dick Lewis had suffered a mild knee injury and decided to sit it out. The final number of entrees from all classes probably totaled about twenty.

On Dollar Mountain that crisp, clear morning, John decorously completed his run in the Giant Slalom without a fall. As I remember it, he even placed somewhere in the top five. My own attempt was a fiasco. As I charged into the second gate, my skis slid out from under me and I skidded down the hill ten feet or more, chewing snow all the way. Luckily, the only thing hurt was my pride.

Over on Mt, Baldy, the downhill race that afternoon was a different story. The course ran down an open bowl and then funneled into a narrow, bumpy, tree-lined trail called the River Run.

In no way was it a steep, Olympic caliber downhill course. Or was it? When I stood at the top of the run that afternoon and stared down at Ketchum, seemingly far below ... whoa ... it seemed to me like the real thing. No turning back. I was committed.

The handlers counted down the start of my run. I tensed for the shove off. Five ... four .., three ... two ... one... *bang*. Away I went, careening down the mountain with a double-diamond dose of adrenaline surging through my veins. I thought I was going too

fast. I felt on the edge, out of control. And I knew a wipeout could be disastrous. I went into a tuck. I tried to let the skis follow the course down the bowl. "Bend zee knees ... bend zee knees." I took a wide turn, swinging down into the River Run. Maybe too wide, I thought. But I stayed on course, down through the trees. My legs pumped like pistons over the washboards of the River Run. I came bursting out of the trees into the final turn. Split seconds down to the finish. Wide open. I crossed the line. A final Christie stop. And it was over. I'd made it down the mountain course without crashing. My heart pounded. My legs wobbled. I felt dizzy. But I was elated just to have made it down.

Then came the shock. Fritz Uhrl came running over to inform me that I was holding second place. An even greater shock followed later on, as the other skiers ended their runs. My second place finish held up. I had won the silver medal. I was overwhelmed.

We partied that night, our last night, at the Sawtooth Club in Ketchum.

***

For decades, the silver ski pin with its Sun Valley medallion which the officials presented to me on that final day in Idaho lay nestled in a dresser drawer, half forgotten. When I came across it a few years ago, I presented it to our grandson, Gabe, on his twelfth birthday. In the mountains of New Mexico, he is a far better skier than I ever was at any age.

***

Sometime that spring, before boarding a train for California and the Navy's pre-flight school, I received in the mail a surprise gift package from Mac Stone. It was a biography of John Paul Jones, the swashbuckling skipper of the *BonHomme Richard,* who helped to establish the fledgling U.S. Navy during the American Revolution.

On September 23, 1979, off the coast of Yorkshire, England, the *BonHomme Richard* and *HMS Serapis* fought a tenacious battle, with both

ships literally locked in combat. It was during this bloody battle that John Paul Jones, asked if he had surrendered, issued his immortal reply, "I have not yet begun to fight." In the end, it was the battered crew of the British warship that was defeated. Finally, the British captain tore down his colors and surrendered the *Serapis*.

It was an absorbing biography that found a permanent place in my bookcase at home.

***

*During those early months of 1942, news from out of the Far East was grim. The Japanese juggernaut continued to roll—beyond the South China Seas and into the South Pacific.*

*Japanese assault troops invaded the Philippines. In Northern Luzon, their eventual triumph over the American and Filipino survivors of Corregidor ended with the infamous, seventy-five-mile "Bataan Death March."*

*Japanese armies also poured down through Indochina, invaded Burma and Malaya and drove east toward the borders of India.*

*They advanced the length of the Malay Peninsula, cut through the Johor jungle and forced the British to surrender at Singapore.*

*Supported by the powerful Japanese fleet, they moved in on the oil-rich Dutch East Indies.*

*In the South Pacific, they captured New Britain, including the strategic port of Rabaul with its enormous natural harbor. There, the Japanese established the strongest, most important naval base in the South Pacific, ringed by five separate military air bases.*

*Beyond Rabaul, they took over the Solomon Islands. And they began bombing the Australian port of Darwin.*

*They further strengthened air and sea bases on Bougainville and Guadalcanal—closing in on Australia.*

*The position of Australia was perilous.*

***

At that time, all prospective U.S. naval aviators attended pre-flight school—three-months of intensive mental and physical conditioning, designed, it was said, to toughen up every candidate for the challenges ahead. It also provided the Navy and Marine Corps, right at the start, with a fast, efficient way of weeding out those who couldn't handle high pressure and physical stress.

"Shape up or ship out," was the word. And within the first three or four weeks, a surprising number of the fellows in my battalion were gone.

Today, my memory of that relentless pre-flight training is nothing more than a swirling kaleidoscope of barking, in-your-face discipline, calisthenics, close order drill, lifting weights, scrambling over obstacle courses, peripheral vision exercises, early morning sprints, mental gymnastics, hand-to-hand combat training, 10K runs in the heat, pushups, pull ups and Gawd knows what else I've mercifully forgotten.

We went at it six days a week, week after week, for three grueling summer months. I gritted my teeth and hung in there. By the time I finished pre-flight training, I was probably in the best shape of my entire life. But I'd had enough, more than enough. I wanted to fly.

***

The San Francisco experience is not an encounter you can enjoy in an hour or a day or perhaps even a lifetime.

My introduction to the City came on a morning when the sea breezes were blowing cold and salty from the northwest. I had taken the early Sunday morning liberty bus from Moraga to Oakland. There, I embarked on a ferry to San Francisco, across the bay.

I stood out on the deck,. still damp from the early morning mists. On the bay, tugs, barges, fishing boats, freighters and ferries moved across the choppy surface.

Off to the right, I saw Alcatraz, bright against a dark expanse of water. And there, straight ahead of

me, I saw for the first time that spectacular skyline, upthrust towers rising from the city's hills and valleys, clean and sharp. To this day, I am thrilled by that vista, even as bulky, new skyscrapers alter its classic lines.

***

My grandmother died that year, at the age of seventy. Josephine Martell Dewey. She was a generous, tough- minded woman who had an important influence in my young life. Probably her greatest legacy was her strong commitment to honesty. "Tell the truth," she said. And she never let me forget it.

Following her death, my grandfather, Jim Dewey, lived on in my mother's upstairs flat, alone.

About the same time, my mother and Aunt Phoebe put their restaurant experience to work by taking wartime jobs in the Swan Island Shipyard cafeteria.

One month after Pearl Harbor, Gatzner Wagoner's 629-acre ranch in California's Livermore Valley was taken over by the U.S. Navy. Old Gatzner wasn't happy about it. They paid him $75,265—about $120 an acre.

On Wagoner's sprawling piece of land, the Navy rushed to completion the Livermore Naval Air Station, one of several West Coast primary flight-training centers setup during WWIL

Later, in the early fifties, that same 629 acres became the site for the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. But when I reported in with my orders. October 1942, it was a bustling new air station boasting a variety of buildings, including a large aircraft hangar and two wooden barracks.

There at the Livermore NAS, I learned to fly.

***

I learned to fly in a Boeing-built Stearman N2S3, the Navy's famed biwing trainer. Painted bright

yellow, it was laughingly called "the yellow peril."

Despite its nickname, the Stearman N2S3 was a strong, well-balanced plane—a military version of the biwing planes used in the '30s and '40s for stunt flying and crop dusting.

It had two open cockpits, staggered 34-foot wings, exposed radial engine cylinder heads and a cruising speed of about 90 knots, or 103 miles per hour.

You can still see these nostalgic flying machines, lovingly restored and maintained, at occasional air shows. Only last year, I went up for an aerobatics flight with a local pilot in his yellow Stearman, which he stores in a hangar at the Sonoma Valley Airport. We did a few loops and rolls and assorted maneuvers. The memories, they came flooding back.

***

Primary flight training took a total of thirteen weeks. If a student pilot failed any of the flight tests along the way, he washed out. That was it—an end to the time and money the Navy was going to waste on him.

After five weeks of ground school and twelve hours of in-the-air dual flight instruction, I went up for a sweaty check flight with sharply dressed Ensign F. G. Wolf. About an hour later, after I brought the Stearman in for a rough but solid landing, he scrawled in my manila flight jacket, "Safe for solo."

At that point, I felt that he had one helluva lot more confidence in my readiness than I had.

On the afternoon that I strapped myself in the cockpit of the Stearman, carefully went through the startup checklist, taxied to the end of the strip, revved the engine, checked the mags, turned back into the wind, stared down the runway and eased the throttle forward for my first solo takeoff, I don't think I had spit enough to swallow.

Once I cleared the end of the runway and began to climb, however, I was scared but in control.

In the weeks ahead, I certainly had my share of problems. At that point, most of us did. My earliest flight records contain several painful notations from

instructors. "Pulls back on the stick in turns." "Doesn't control his slips well enough in small field procedure." "Excessive speed in his glides." "Poor use of rudder in climbing turns." "Wingovers too steep." "Permitted wind to drift him back over the pylons." "Taxiing too fast."

One stiff-necked Ensign named J. J. Hanley wrote in my flight jacket, "Cadet Mayo does not cooperate as he should. In another few months of Naval training he should be more cooperative."

With damned good instruction and more experience in the air, I did smooth out my handling of the Stearman. I gained more confidence. And I passed my check flight tests for takeoffs, precision landings, spin recovery, emergency control, crossovers and other categories, up and down the line.

I was especially pleased with an evaluation by Lieutenant John Sciarrino, a senior instructor, following my check in night flying. Giving me two thumbs up, he wrote in my flight jacket, "Handles plane extremely well in all phases. Take-offs very good."

***

In the final weeks of primary training we concentrated on aerobatics. We practiced and practiced a routine of snap rolls, barrel rolls, tight loops, hammerhead stalls, lazy loops, *Immelmens* and spins.

In flying a Stearman through a lazy loop, I thought it was fun to see the ground replace the sky momentarily and then to come out with wings level in the spot I departed. I found aerobatics exhilarating. But I soon learned that flying a full routine of snap rolls, tight loops and such was a gut-wrenching, demanding, physical experience. It required intense concentration and ability to endure high "G" forces. I was able to do it.

My favorite maneuver was an *Immelmann*—a combat maneuver invented by the German ace Max Immelman during World War I. You pick up speed and pull back sharply on the stick, shooting almost

straight up and over, until you're flying upside down. Then you quickly roll the plane horizontal, so you end up facing the opposite direction from the start.

***

***Ver-ti-go,*** *(vurᶠ te go'), n., a disordered condition in which a person feels that he or his surroundings are whirling about.*

***

I have to dig deep in my memory to recover the details of what happened that day in December 1942. It's something I always wanted to forget.

Several of us were practicing aerobatics in different sectors of the sky. In my sector to the west, I could see turbulent clouds and fog rolling in over the South Bay hills toward the valley, I returned to base and circled the field to see if we were to come in. No recall flag was flying from the tower. The landing strip at that point was clear.

Following procedure, I poured on the power and regained altitude, dodging some fast-moving clouds. As I approached my sector, the clouds grew thicker. The front moved in fast. A high bank of fog swept into the valley. Suddenly, I was in the thick of it. It surrounded me. Zero visibility. No horizon line. No way to orient the angle of my position. I couldn't even see my wing tips.

For several minutes I tried desperately to concentrate on needle, ball and air speed. Full power. I kept telling myself I had to keep from stalling out—and spinning in. I became disoriented. I was in a whirl. I couldn't see. I couldn't tell if I was right side up or upside down.

For one fraction of a second, I think I saw the hillside, instantaneous with the crash. My plane plowed into the side of a hill at a steep angle and cart wheeled down onto the rocky ground, inverted.

***

As a cloud of dust settled on the wreckage, I found myself dangling upside down in the cockpit. I

was numb. Unfeeling. Stunned to be alive. Suddenly realizing the danger of the situation, however, I jerked the release on my harness and dropped to the ground, still wearing my bulky parachute. Frantically, I crawled away from the smashed fuselage on my hands and knees. Any moment, I expected to see and to feel it explode into flames.

But the wreckage did not burn, The remaining fuel from the upper wing tank spread out onto the ground, away from the smoldering engine. The crumpled wings were in tatters. Yet the tail assembly seemed almost intact.

I felt myself carefully up and down, from head to toe. Unbelievably, I was alive, I kept telling myself.

I was probably in a daze. But I was apparently unhurt, except for a slightly bruised left shoulder.

Around the site of the crash, thick fog continued to swirl. It was surreal. I had no idea of my location or direction. I slowly began making my way downhill through heavy hillside brush, still packing for some reason that damned parachute.

After wandering for perhaps a half-hour, I heard a rooster crowing in the distance. Heading in that direction, still in the fog, I reached a fence line and a plowed hillside field and eventually a farmhouse.

As I mounted the high front steps, a startled farmer came to the door. He welcomed me inside, poured me a stiff cup of coffee, listened to my story and then drove me all the way back to the Livermore NAS in his old pickup.

At the main gate, the astonished Marine guards refused to let me enter. Who was this guy climbing out of a battered old pickup, walking up in winter flight gear with helmet and goggles and no written pass, carrying a full parachute pack under his arm?

They checked on the phone with somebody and within a minute or two, a jeep bearing a Navy lieutenant came roaring up. I was immediately taken to the CO's office for debriefing followed by a quick physical.

By nightfall, I learned the full and tragic impact of that day's fog-bound turmoil. Three other missing planes turned up safely, over in the San Joaquin Valley. One other plane was lost. Somewhere near

Mt. Diablo, one of our cadets spun in and was killed. A fellow named Chapman. The flight officer of the day faced a potential court martial.

Two days later, I was back in the air.

***

I went on to pass my aerobatics check flight. And in mid-January, with 92 hours of flight time in my log book, I completed my primary flight training and received orders for advanced training at the Naval Air Training Center in Corpus Christi, Texas.

My final flight in Livermore with check pilot A. G. Epp came on my 21st birthday, January 14, 1943.

***

# FIFTEEN

## Join the Marines

*The first American beachhead landing of World War II came in the early fall of 1942 when U.S. Marines stormed ashore at Guadalcanal. It marked the start of America's painful, inexorable struggle to push Tojo's Imperial forces back to Tokyo.*

*The Japanese—taking dead aim at Australia—had been constructing an airfield base on Guadalcanal, at the southern end of the Solomon Islands. Whoever held Guadalcanal held the key to the vital lifeline between the U.S. and Australia, last surviving Allied power in the South Pacific.*

*The Marines established a shaky perimeter on the island, capturing what later became Henderson Field.*

*Operating from bases on Bougainville and Rabaul and with heavy naval support, the Japanese furiously and, repeatedly counter-attacked for months on end, in a frenzied attempt to retake the entire island. They threw in heavy troop reinforcements, naval bombardments and waves of fighters and bombers coming down the slot of the Solomons. Exhausted Marine ground troops held on and expanded their perimeter under appalling conditions. And a grim, outnumbered band of weary Marine Corps flyers in their Grummans blasted incoming bombers and out-fought Mitsubishi Zeros overhead.*

*Suffering insurmountable losses, the Japanese military in February of 1943 finally abandoned their efforts to recapture Guadalcanal. Within the Corps, the names of Marine flyers like Robert Galer, John L. Smith, Joe Foss and Oregon's Marion Carl became the stuff of legends.*

***

The valor of the flyers in the skies over Guadalcanal, the honor and tradition of the Corps, and my brash and youthful eagerness at that time to get into the thick of the fight, led me during

advance flight training to try for a transfer into the Marine Corps.

What I didn't realize was that only the top ten percent of each flight class received, that choice—to stay in the Navy or join the Marines. I had my work cut out for me.

***

The fierce intensity of advanced flight training at Corpus Christi hit hard. It was total immersion, hour after hour, day after day, week after week.

Could I handle this?

On the ground, we studied aerodynamics, meteorology, VFR and instrument navigation, radio flight procedure, oxygen procedure, leadership principles, military flight rules and regulations, flight manuals. The pressure was relentless. I studied harder than ever before in my life. 3 kept telling myself that failure was out of the question. We spent time in the water, learning emergency water landing procedures and survival techniques. We learned how to send and receive Morse code, fast. We continued never-ending drills on instant plane and ship recognition—split second flashes on a screen. And we each learned how to fire, field strip and clean the Colt .45 automatic that was to become an integral part of our flight gear in the South Pacific.

In the air, we flew the Vultee SNV Valiant, a cantilevered, metal, low-wing monoplane with an enclosed cockpit, two-way radio for ground communications, hydraulic flaps and a Pratt & Whitney 450-hp radial engine. It was quite a jump from the biwing Stearman that I flew during primary training at Livermore.

The Vultee was a noisy, smelly, aerobatic transition trainer that introduced us to the instruments and feel of more complex and more powerful aircraft.

One intimidating problem with the Vultee: It had a tendency to shake violently as it approached its stall speed of 75 mph. And the canopy rattled and shuddered on the second or third turn of a spin, as if the plane was about to blow apart. In the Army, it

gained a reputation as a "Cadet Killer." In the Navy, it was nicknamed the Vultee "Vibrator."

The Vultee SNV was an unforgiving aircraft to fly. You had to pay attention in the cockpit, every second, or you could run into serious trouble. Perhaps that was a valuable lesson. It forced us to sharpen our flight skills.

After several hours in the air, getting familiar with the quirky SNV, concentrating on takeoffs and landings, I passed my key check ride. And I moved on to formation training, including basic three-plane sections, crossovers, peel-offs from six-plane echelons, formation takeoffs and other essentials that came with close formation work. We worked on precision formation drills, hour after hour, until they became second nature.

***

At the start of advanced instrument training, most of us considered the Link Trainer an instrument of torture. The subject was blind flying. Mounted on a stand, the Link Trainer looked somewhat like a mini-plane amusement park ride. You climbed in the black metal box and strapped yourself into a simulated cockpit. The instructor would then close the solid hood over your head. Suddenly, you were surrounded in a flat black and zinc chromatic green world. Arrayed around you, was every instrument, gage, switch, lever, handle, knob and button inside an SNV. And every instrument and flight control behaved exactly as those in the plane's cockpit.

The instructors hammered into us this adage: "When you're flying blind, you can't trust your senses. Trust your instruments."

The untold hours I spent in one of those black boxes helped jumpstart my confidence level in dealing with climbing and diving turns, stalls, spins and emergency procedures—while flying blind. And in a second phase, I finally became comfortable with flying beams and radio ranges—procedures for getting back to your base or carrier when the weather closed in.

By this time, I admit I began having fun in the

fearsome link Trainer. It was like playing around in a virtual reality video game. Only I was playing for keeps.

The final test, however, came in the air. I piled up 24 more hours flying blind in a hooded Vultee "Vibrator" with an instructor in the rear seat, keeping a close eye on every maneuver. Then came the final check ride.

When I came in for my landing, I knew I had passed the test. He gave me two thumbs up.

I think it might have been that same week that Eleanor Roosevelt had dinner with us in the cadet mess hall. She was on a two-day visit to Corpus Christi.

FDR's dynamic wife was probably the most active First Lady our country has ever known. Throughout the war, she had her own radio program and a syndicated newspaper column, *My Day*. She seemed to be constantly visiting hospitals and military bases. And throughout her life, she always acted as a strong advocate for women, children and the poor.

In her visit to Corpus Christi, she told us, "The important thing is that you never let down doing the best you are able to do."

***

Tragic news came in a letter from home. My mother reported that Eddie "Double Thumb" Daniels had perished at sea.

Merchant marine officials informed Agnes that in a convoy bound for England, Eddie's loaded freighter had been torpedoed by a German U-boat. The ship exploded and went under quickly in the waters of the North Atlantic. AH hands were lost.

For Agnes, it was an unbearable shock and a horrible coincidence. Twice, she had married for love. Twice, she had lost a husband to the sea.

My mother wrote that Agnes planned to leave Portland and return to her hometown in Minnesota, where her mother and two sisters still lived. In later years, my mother and Agnes continued to correspond. They remained life-long friends.

***

It was the first of April, the day of fools, when I took on torpedo bombers as my operational specialty in the final phase of advanced flight training at Corpus. I had requested fighters as my first choice, but at that time, there was a waiting list. I learned that I would have to wait about two months to get into the over-crowded fighter program, centered at the Kingsville NAS some 35 miles inland from the main base.

I thought that one over and said, "To hell with it.[1]' By this time, I wanted to get going. Really get going. So I followed Bob Ballard, Al Hunt, Clyde Hollenbeck and several other Oregon Webfoots into torpedo bombers.

***

Located near the southern tip of Texas on the Gulf of Mexico, Corpus Christi NAS was surrounded by several outlying fields for special training in torpedo bombers, fighters and dive bombers. Waldron Field, the newly opened center for torpedo squadron training, was named for the skipper of Midway's star-crossed Torpedo 8.

Within 48 hours of requesting a torpedo bomber assignment, the Navy had me out at Waldron Field getting checked out in a North American SNJ.

The SNJ was a hardcore, high performance, low-wing combat trainer, with a Pratt & Whitney 600 hp air-cooled engine, retractable wheels and a 42-foot wing span. In aerial performance, it was extremely agile, a quantum jump up from even the Vultee SNV.

My checkout in an SNJ provided me with a solid introduction to the basic cockpit layout for most WWII single engine combat planes. Beneath my left arm were the accessory controls—elevator, aileron and rudder trims as well as landing gear handle, tail wheel lock and flap actuators. Allof the electronic and radio goodies were in a console by my right arm. Fuel gauges were on the floor for a quick glance during flight. Straight ahead, of course, was the instrument panel, And as I straddled the stick with my legs stretched on either side, my feet rested on giant rudder pedals at the forward end.

It was a good plane. Consider this: We are about 50 years into the jet age and there are more than 500 of those old SNJ Warbirds still in action around the world. Some foreign governments use them as airforce trainers. In a few of Hollywood's Grade B thrillers, I've also spotted SNJs painted with the red "meatball" rising sun insignia, serving as simulated Zekes, (U.S. forces used male names for Japanese fighters, female names for Japanese bombers. Zeke was the U.S. designation for the Mitsubishi Zero.

***

At Waldron, we concentrated on Torpedo Squadron attack formations, which demanded close teamwork.

We moved on to gunnery with practice at the machine gun range, on into basic dive bombing, glide bombing and low level bombing techniques, plus more navigation practice, using the Mark III plotting board.

As we neared the end of training at Waldron, the pressure mounted. In the middle of a lengthy navigation hop, two of us blew off steam by flat-hatting across a section of the giant King Ranch—a totally forbidden maneuver. We swooped down below tree top level and streaked across the grassy prairie lands. As we roared over a rocky rise and skimmed down over a herd of longhorn cattle, we may have started a small stampede.

It was a stupid, dangerous, damned fool thing to do. Not only did we risk our lives, we risked getting tossed out of Corpus if they caught us. They didn't catch us.

About a week later, when the final lists were posted, I let out a whoop and a holler when I saw my name on the list of pilots accepted for transfer to the Marine Corps.

***

In the fifth month of my 21st year, I received Navy Department certification as a Naval Aviator and I was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps. As I stood in the hot Texas sun,

while they pinned on my chest the Wings of Gold, I couldn't help but reflect momentarily on that wintry day after Pearl Harbor, when I first told my mother that I was determined to go into Naval Aviation. Deep inside, I had never been certain during training whether or not I had the right stuff. But I doggedly kept at it.

Sure, I was proud. Proud to be in the Corps—proud to be a Marine Corps pilot.

I knew, however, there were severe tests to come.

Along with my wings and certification papers, Commander Fritter presented me with orders to report in ten days to the Commanding Officer of the Naval Air Station at Jacksonville, Florida, to go immediately into carrier qualification training.

I left Corpus Christi with 245 hours of flight time in the log books.

***

The intrigue and romance of New Orleans still captivates me, left over from my first visit that year as a guy from the West Coast who had never before breathed the moist, decadent air of the Mississippi delta country.

"The Big Easy" was a stopover on a lurching train ride across the South to Atlanta and down to Jacksonville. I stayed in New Orleans three days and three nights. Joining me on that R&R holiday was a former Corpus roommate and avid jazz fan named Dick Brubaker, from Bakersfield, California. Dick had remained in the Navy and was a newly commissioned Ensign.

We shared a room in some forgotten low-budget hostelry located on the St. Charles Streetcar line. But we spent most of our time rolling around the French Quarter, the *Vieux Carre,* where wrought iron balconies held up tottering facades—the beautiful and the decrepit. We reveled in the Quarter's wartime, carnivalian atmosphere.

The sounds of great jazz resonated up and down the streets. Before we were through, I think we hit every jazz joint in the Quarter. And most of the bars, too.

At The Old Absinthe House Bar—the same bar

where Otto Larsen and Eddie "Double Thumb" Daniels grabbed a fistful of matchbooks for me when I was about twelve years old—we downed bottles of Dixie Beer and gorged on freshly-shucked raw oysters from the Gulf-washed backwaters of southern Louisiana.

Early one evening, coming out of an ancient bar with peeling yellow walls, we asked a dusky, almond-eyed beauty if she'd like to join us for dinner. She caught us by surprise when she smiled and said, "Yes." A short time later, the three of us were happily drinking Ramos Fizzes and digging into bowls of steaming jambalaya in a romantic little outdoor courtyard restaurant which she had recommended. It was next door to a gaudily painted tattoo shop—an epitome of the *Vieux Carre*—the charming and the seedy, side by side.

At the end of an engaging dinner, Dick and I decided to invite our guest to listen to some good jazz with us. But it never happened. With little more than a winsome smile and a hurried, "Goodbye," she stood up and walked out on us. Literally.

She disappeared down a path through the overgrown foliage at the back of the garden. And she never came back. We were bewildered, mystified. As I remember it now, we hung around for awhile, shrugged it off, paid the bill and wandered next door to view wild designs on the wall of the tattoo shop.

I came close to taking a needle in my upper arm that night for a USMC globe-and-anchor tattoo, but I thought better of it. Instead, we rolled on to one more jazz and blues joint a couple of blocks up the street.

Late on our last night in New Orleans, Dick returned to the hotel while I set out on a long walk in the moonlight, alone. I strolled deep into the Quarter, where the din of Bourbon Street soon gave way to residential charm-narrow passageways behind wrought iron and mysterious patios glimpsed though the profusion of hidden gardens. And always, the moist sweetness of perfumed air.

That first visit to New Orleans was many years and thousands of miles ago. But even now, it makes

me smile to look back on it.

Inside the cavernous New Orleans train station, before boarding for Atlanta, I remember that we gulped strong New Orleans coffee and devoured deep-fried *beignets* sprinkled with powdered sugar, The station was crowded and noisy. Across the far end of the station stretched a giant banner with the message, *Loose Lips Sink Ships.*

***

Walking the streets of a city's old town district at night, alone, became a vicarious habit of mine in later years, especially during the sixties and seventies. After a dull business dinner, or a high-pressure business meeting, or sometimes just for the sheer intrigue of it, I would walk narrow cobblestone streets for an hour or so, enveloped in the atmosphere and architecture of the past. It was a head-clearing routine that I followed at various times in Geneva, Copenhagen, Athens, Paris, London, Tel Aviv, Barcelona and New York.

Today, of course, strolling alone late at night in the old town district of any one of these cities would probably be risky business, indeed.

***

*"You love a lot of things if you live around them, but there isn't any woman and there isn't any horse, nor any before nor any after, that is as lovely as a great airplane, and men who love them are faithful to them even though they leave them for others. A man has only one virginity to lose in a combat plane, and if it is a lovely plane he loses it to, there his heart will ever be."*

**ERNEST HEMINGWAY AUGUST 1944.**

At the Jacksonville Naval Air Station, when I first confronted a Grumman TBF Avenger, I thought it was a big, ugly, muscle-bound, unfriendly-looking monster. But in the months to come, I learned to love that plane.

A tough, all-metal, mid-wing aircraft with a powerful Wright 1,900 hp radial engine, immense 13-foot Hamilton prop and deep, oval, tapering fuselage, the rugged TBF Avenger bore a strong family

resemblance to Grumman's smaller F4F Wildcat.

Its 52-foot wingspan and 40-foot fuselage made the Avenger one of the largest single-engine planes flown by the Allies during WWII. Yet its rearward-folding wings enabled it to be packed tightly together and fit deck elevators on even the small jeep carriers.

It carried a three-man crew: the pilot in the single cockpit, a gunner in an electrically-driven ball turret to the rear of the greenhouse canopy, and a radioman with radar scope and controls in a compartment back of the internal bomb bay. That bomb bay packed one 2,000- pound torpedo or four 500-pound bombs or five 350-pound depth charges, controlled by the pilot.

The pilot also controlled one fixed-forward .30 caliber machine gun, later upgraded to two wing-mounted .50 caliber guns or eight 5-inch rockets. The turret gunner manned one .50 caliber gun. And the radioman controlled one .30 caliber gun in the ventral gun position.

After a study of the flight manual and a thorough checkout on the ground, I was cleared to take one of these babies aloft on a "fam" flight. As I shoved the throttle forward, picked up speed down the runway and roared into the air, I could feel the power of the 1,900-hp radial engine surging through the controls. This was flying!

***

At the outbreak of war, the International Olympic Committee had cancelled the 1940 Winter Olympic Games in Sapporo, Japan, and stopped all planning for the 1944 games, scheduled for Cortina d' Ampezzo, Italy.

This move by the IOC shattered any Olympic dreams that 17-year-old Mary Bovee may have held, after winning her Pacific Northwest Junior Figure Skating Championship. Instead, she turned pro. She accepted a second offer to join the famed Ice Capades.

Two days after graduating from Jefferson High School in the late spring of 1943, she said good-bye to her parents and boarded a night train in Portland, headed down the coast to California. She was bound for L.A. and future stardom on ice.

The show rehearsed in Los Angeles during part of

the summer. Then, the cast with mountains of luggage, props and scenery were crammed on to a slow, five-day train enroute to New York City for the grand opening night performance in Madison Square Garden.

It was a smash success.

At the end of a sold-out, three-week date at The Garden, Ice Capades went on the road. By the time the show played Montreal, young Mary Bovee had been pulled from the line and given a featured skating solo on top of her contract role as understudy to Donna Atwood. (A former U.S. national champion, Atwood was the show's featured star. Ice Capades owner John Harris ardently pursued her that year, too. Eventually, they married.)

Such was the beginning of Mary Bovee's 21-city, coast to coast Ice Capades tour in 1943. It was a whirlwind life of early morning rehearsals, nightly performances, two shows on Saturdays and Sundays, sell-out crowds, media interviews, photo sessions, catch up meals in late night restaurants, crowded hotels, rattling old trains, and a little daytime sight-seeing—along with extra help in the war effort.

In every city on the tour, the girls were booked for war bond drives, hospital visits with service men, blood bank donations, rolling bandages at local clubs for the Red Cross, knitting socks for overseas, and entertaining- the troops at USO centers.

That was show business—1943.

***

In the swamps and palmetto trees somewhere east of Jacksonville, the Navy created a mock-up of a carrier flight deck on a landing strip, complete with cables and markings. My log book shows that during eight weeks of training in Florida, I made 35 two-a-day flights to that isolated strip and completed 150 simulated carrier landings and take-offs. Call that thorough training? Maybe so. At the time, I thought it was overkill. After completing about a dozen landings, I thought most of us had a mastery of the technique. Coming into the landing circle, you lower the landing gear, you lower flaps and tail hook, and you approach the carrier flight deck from dead astern with nose up, tail down, fuel set for rich mixture, and power on just above stalling

speed. Guided by the LSO, the landing signal officer, you line-up on the flight deck and when he gives you the Cut signal, you cut your throttle and drop to the deck in what can only be described as a controlled stall.

***

Al Hunt was a mischievous, fun-loving guy. His claim to fame at Jacksonville came when he put the wheels and flaps down on an SNJ and flew it up and down over the giant roller coaster at Jacksonville Beach.

He wasn't booted out of the Corps. But he did face a disciplinary hearing. He ended up with a blemish on his record that cost him his promotion to Colonel in the reserves, many years later.

Almost two years passed before I met up with AL again. He joined our torpedo squadron in the Pacific as a replacement pilot, shortly before the action at Iwo Jima.

***

Reports of bizarre happenings and mysterious disappearances in the Bermuda Triangle have been recorded for centuries. Sometimes called the Devil's Triangle or the Twilight Zone or the Limbo of the Lost, it's a triangular area of the Atlantic bordered by Bermuda, Southern Florida and Puerto Rico.

We heard the weird stories. But we ignored them.

My flight group took several long flights far into the Bermuda Triangle. These were over-water, navigational flights and anti-sub drills. The TBF Avenger had a range of 1,200 miles. Flying in a loose formation of six planes, we would head out into the Atlantic on three-hour and sometimes four-hour assignments. Several times we flew through heavy rain squalls without a problem.

One year later, however, five Navy TBF Avengers on the same kind of over-water, navigational training flight, disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle without a trace. A PBM Mariner flying boat carrying thirteen crewmen and rescue equipment departed on a search for the missing TBFs. Ten minutes after take-off, the pilot checked in with the tower—and was never heard

from again.

***

On weekends in Jacksonville, pilots on the make headed for the Roosevelt Hotel. It had a good bar. Good dance music. Good room prices. Good-looking women.

My preference, however, became a resort town a few miles further south, where I had met the very friendly and beguiling Anne Entrekin. She had short, interesting- looking, curly blonde hair and a dark tan. She also had an old Chevy and a purse full of gas ration coupons.

We had a few casual, easy-going weekends together that summer, before I took off for Chicago. Usually, we would go swimming in the surf, laze around in the dunes under the sun, eat at one of the fish houses, finish the day with Stingers at some local joint that had live music, and spend the night together in the Innlet at Ponte Vedra.

It was a time of brief encounters.

***

On the choppy waters of Lake Michigan, north of Chicago, the Navy maintained a converted flat-top comparable to the fleet's 10,000 ton, "jeep" carriers. At that time, in order to gain a U.S. carrier qualification rating, every Navy and Marine Corps pilot who finished carrier training had to make eight successful landings and take-offs on this short deck carrier, the USS Sable, as a part of his "final exam."

My time came on a .gusty, windy day. In a six-plane formation, three and three, we flew out to meet the carrier from our NAS base at Glenview, Illinois. We began our approach at 7,500 feet and spiraled lower into the traffic circle. Even with many weeks of training and practice, I approached the carrier with an outsized feeling of trepidation. My stomach was doing flip-flops.

I concentrated everything I had on altitude, attitude, propeller pitch, throttle setting, landing gear, flaps, tail hook and the rapidly approaching Landing Signal Officer on the right aft corner of the flight deck.

I knew I was correctly lined up. The LSO held his

paddles straight out from his shoulders to signify I was "in the groove" and the approach was satisfactory, In the final seconds, as my Avenger came in several feet above the flight deck, the LSO slashed his right paddle across his throat and dropped his left arm to his side. That meant Cut. I immediately chopped back my throttle and held the stick—rock steady. A second later, my plane struck the flight deck. A three point landing. I felt the tail hook grab hold of the cable. My shoulder straps took the strain of the forward momentum, and the TBF lurched to a rapid stop with the tail hook still attached.

I had made my first carrier landing. And it was perfect. Deck crews hurriedly disengaged the hook and I was cleared for immediate take-off. I gunned the engine and pushed the throttle forward to gain lift-off speed.

I went on to complete successfully all eight of my required carrier landings and take-offs. The intense training and practice we put in at Jacksonville paid-off.

As each of the pilots in my flight felt their way into the groove that day, one after another, I think only one received a wave-off. He came in too high in relation to the deck. To pass the wave-off signal, the LSO simply waved both paddles over his head. That wave-off signal had the force of military law. Instructors had pounded that point home to us during training.

***

One of our pilots, K.J. Wilson, went AWOL. He shacked up with a local girl in a Chicago hotel room for several days—and nights. The MPs burst in on them. K.J. was manacled and sent off to the brig.

He came close to a full court marshal The Navy's major investment in wartime pilots, a special need for torpedo plane pilots, and K.J.'s strong desire to get overseas and serve—all combined to save him.

After Chicago, K.J. hurried home to Oklahoma on leave where he married Betty, a very pretty and very popular brunette.

***

Three of us spent a night on the town in Chicago

before leaving Glenview NAS. We covered the loop and then some. My only memory of that uproarious night is one south side club where we must have spent hours drinking watered-down bourbon and listening to the great trombonist J.C. Higgenbottom and his band. Every table, every bar stool, every square foot of floor space was filled. His Chicago jazz turned everybody on.

***

When I pulled out of Chicago on a train headed for Oregon, I carried written orders to report in thirty days to the Commanding Officer, Marine Air Wing, Pacific, headquartered in San Diego. From there, I anticipated shipping out as a replacement pilot for a squadron operating in the South Pacific.

***

During my time on leave that summer, I spent some precious hours with my Grandfather, Jim Dewey. In his late years, before his death, I found once more that intimacy which had made my childhood associations with him a pleasure and a deep memory. He was a tough, old bird. He taught me the value of hard work. His death a few months later from a heart attack was shattering.

***

That Portland visit gave me a feeling for how civilians were coping. My Mother, a true survivor, continued with her job at the Oregon shipyards, along with my Aunt Phoebe. The two of them worked hard on the home front.

They nurtured "victory" gardens. And they helped in the scrap drives and paper drives going on everywhere. Recycling was promoted on all sides.

*"Use it up—Wear it out—Make it do—Or do without."* A popular slogan of the day.

Most everybody seemed to support the strict rationing programs, too. All fats, rubber, heating fuels and gasoline were tightly rationed. People drove at the gas-saving "victory speed" of 35 miles per hour.

Adults were allowed up to twenty-eight ounces of

meat a week, ten ounces of sugar a week, one pound of butter a month, and one pound of coffee every five weeks. Coffee drinkers learned to re-brew their grounds. Canned goods were scarce. Shoes for civilians became even more scarce.

A shortage of paper resulted in small "pocket-size" paperbacks, a publishers' innovation that still flourishes.

No new cars were manufactured. No alarm clocks. No new equipment of almost any kind. The industrial might of America became totally geared to war production.

***

Silk stockings disappeared. Women's nylons, which were introduced at the 1939 New York World's Fair, disappeared along with them. I was told that some nylons were available on the black market at unbelievable prices, but most nylon went into the making of parachutes, rope and tents.

I dated the lovely Virginia Valentine during my stay in Portland. One night, I saw for the first time how women were coping without their nylons. They painted their legs with foundation makeup and used an eyebrow pencil to draw a "seam" up the back of the leg. I thought it was a hilarious gimmick. Virginia took it very seriously—as a part of her dressy, on-the-town make-up.

***

At the end of my leave, when I reported to the CO of the Marine Air Wing in San Diego, I learned that I would not be shipping out to the South Pacific. Not yet. I was one of twenty-two pilots selected to form a new Marine Torpedo Squadron at the El Centro Naval Air Station in California's Imperial Valley, south of the Salton Sea.

# SIXTEEN

## VMTB-242 I

The location turned out to be in barren desert country west of the Algodones dunes, a few miles outside the grubby, sun-baked town of El Centro.

There in the blazing heat of summer 1943, stocky, slab-jawed Maj. Bill Dean of Eden Prairie, Minnesota, skipper of newly commissioned VMTB-242, tackled the job of organizing and training what was to be the Marine Corp's sixth and last torpedo bombing squadron destined for combat in the Pacific.

He started out with five SNJ advanced trainers, three aging SBD Douglas dive bombers from the Solomons, a skeleton ground crew and one grizzled sergeant major named Russell L. Hopkins.

By the luck of the draw, he landed four solid, experienced combat pilots as senior flight leaders: Barney McShane, Bud Main, Bill Ritchey and George "Sahib" Nasif. All four had recently returned from the ongoing Guadalcanal campaign.

Next, Dean picked out 22 of us with advanced operational training as the squadron's initial cadre of pilots. At the same time, he added 68 enlisted men and a few essential ground officers to head up engineering, ordnance, radio and radar, intelligence, support material, plus a medical unit.

TBF Avengers began arriving early in August along with aircrews and additional pilots, including eleven junior pilots straight out of Pensacola and Corpus Christi. During the intensive air maneuvers that followed, it became apparent the eleven juniors could not perform at a level with the rest of us. They were transferred out to Goleta, a Marine Corps training base near Santa Barbara, for further seasoning.

More aircrews and ground crews reported in, more transfers ensued, bringing the new squadron in at full operational strength: 40 pilots, seven ground officers and 303 enlisted men.

***

Bill Dean was a consummate careerist, dedicated to the Corps, and gifted with strong organizational abilities. His sense of humor was non-existent, however, and he had little rapport with his pilots. He was not a popular commanding officer. Whether or not he was a first-rate combat pilot is something I never determined. He led few of the squadron's missions—none of the sorties in which I was involved.

***

Jake Nevans and I were among the first pilots to report in at El Centro. Jake was a ruddy, raw-boned six-footer from Colorado. In the heat of the night, we were issued our bedding and assigned to an empty, loosely framed BOQ building, inundated with dust and infested with black widow spiders.

Personal memory is such a slippery customer. As I recall it now, sometime in the early morning hours, I think Jake did a backward somersault out of bed with a blood-curdling yell. He'd spotted a fat, black widow spider on his sweaty sheet, next to his leg. In the turmoil that followed, I upended a chair and discovered two more widows, nestled in the bottom of the chair's seat.

A thorough room inspection revealed a glut of the deadly widows in hiding. The two of us searched them out and exterminated them. Scores of them. With deadly aim, we squashed every last one of them.

***

Over the years, Jake and I have maintained a lasting friendship, half a world apart. At the end of the war, he headed for the Philippines, where he spent many years as a manager with an old-line British trading company.

In the Philippines, Jake married Sally Saleeby, the vivacious daughter of an American scientist who played a major role in developing the Philippine hemp industry. Sally and her family had been prisoners of war during the Japanese occupation. Eventually, Jake and Sally moved down under to Australia where they still operate their sprawling "Dunraven Ranch" in New South Wales.

***

To my complete surprise, Ox Wilson, an ATO from Oregon, turned up in the second contingent of pilots to join the squadron. The last time we'd seen each other had been the end of spring term l941, when I left the University of Oregon, joined the boilermakers' union and went to work at Willamette Iron & Steel.

I had no idea that Ox had entered Naval flight training and had made it into the Marine Corps. He went through Pensacola, not Corpus Christi. Our paths had not crossed anywhere along the line—until that hot, suffocating afternoon when he came trudging into our dusty El Centro BOQ, lugging his newly-issued bedding.

That night over a couple of beers at the El Centro Officers' Club, Ox reported that another Oregon buddy, Vic Collin, was in training somewhere in the surrounding desert with the 104th Army Infantry Division, the "Timber Wolves." He said that Vic was a second lieutenant getting ready to ship out to Europe.

***

After a few days of familiarization flights, solo, out over the Sonoran Desert and Orocopia Mountains, all pilots assembled one morning for aircrew assignments. Capt. Barney McShane conducted the draw. Barney was the squadron's personable and very popular, Boston-Irish flight officer. He later became the squadron's executive officer, number two in command under Bill Dean.

For me, it was a lucky day. I was assigned two bright, alert, well-trained teenagers who flew with me for almost two years—throughout my tour in the Pacific. Following the war, we became long-distance, life-long friends.

Pfc. Ernest L. Linsmaier, an eager, young Marine from Ohio, brimming with enthusiasm, became my sharp-eyed, turret gunner. He sat coiled in the power turret during flight, manning a .50-caliber machine gun.

Pfc. Leon Wilmot, a rugged, young Marine from upstate New York, quiet and determined, became my radioman and radar operator. He occupied a bench seat in the belly tunnel facing a bulkhead of radio and radar gear. He also controlled one .30-caliber "stinger" gun in the aft position.

***

Grumman originally designed the versatile TBF as a torpedo bomber. VMTB-242 was officially designated a Marine Torpedo Bombing Squadron. But the Marine landing at Guadalcanal and the island hopping strategy that followed on the road to Tokyo shifted the emphasis for most Marine Avenger squadrons in the Pacific from torpedo attacks to low-level bombing, dive bombing, strafing and ground support missions.

Out to build a first-rate striking force, our serious-minded skipper launched a relentless combat training syllabus that included dive bombing, low-level skip bombing, both fixed and free gunnery, close air-ground support, navigation, night flying and anti-sub patrol, in addition to the latest torpedo tactics.

***

The squadron operated seven days a week with officers and enlisted men alike divided into alternating port and starboard liberty sections. Half the squadron took liberty Thursday afternoons through Friday. The other half took liberty Saturday afternoons through Sunday.

***

Navy and Marine Corps top brass had an odd name for dive-bombing without the perforated "Swiss cheese" dive brakes or flaps of an SBD. They called this technique "glide bombing." But any Marine TBF pilot in the middle of a 65-degree dive on target, approaching redline speed, knew damned well it was anything but a "glide."

Out on the Salton Sea, the Navy had constructed targets in a large U.S. gunnery range that stretched for miles. We practiced dive bombing, or "glide bombing," low level bombing and skip bombing on that Salton Sea range, hour after hour, day after day.

The TBF was a surprisingly accurate plane for dive bombing without a cockpit bomb sight. We would fly in echelon formation at about 7,000 feet with each plane peeling off into a steep dive at five-to-six-second intervals. We'd sight the target carefully alongside the nose during the dive. Then, when the target disappeared under the

wing-root, we'd release the dummy bomb at 1,500-2,500 feet and pull out fast in a climbing, high-G turn.

By the end of the combat training syllabus, several of us could place a bomb within a 40-foot target area, consistently. That was considered exceptional accuracy.

***

On simulated low-level attacks or on skip bombing runs, we would go into a shallow 35-degree dive at full throttle and follow that angle all the way to the release point. Or, we would level off and make a final run on the target at close to water level or ground level, depending upon the situation. We could achieve almost pin point accuracy with these low-level maneuvers. But we had to recognize that in combat, such low-level tactics were more vulnerable to AA fire.

A nearby U.S. Army tank-testing unit cooperated with us for awhile on low-level skip bombing maneuvers in the desert. They would send a medium tank crashing through the brush and gullies in a series of fast, evasive moves. Each pilot would head down in a shallow dive, angle into a low-level run on the tank, and skip a hundred-pound water-filled bomb at the target. In a nearby radio truck, an operator reported to each pilot his hits and misses.

We were hitting the tank about six out of eight times when the Army called off the maneuvers.

Doe-eyed Jim Chambris, we called him "Bambi," the mildest, most easy-natured pilot in the squadron, had come roaring in so low on one run that he hit the turret of the tank with his prop and broke off ten inches of a blade. An emergency landing followed. Fortunately, no crewman in the tank or in the plane was injured. But the Army called off further such maneuvers. Meanwhile, "Bambi" received credit for a direct hit.

***

The tortuous training flights continued, hour after hour, day after day, as we sharpened our skills to meet what Bill Dean called, "The demanding standards of the Marine Corps."

In his engaging, Boston-Irish accent, Barney McShane

put it differently. He told us, simply, "A well-practiced pilot flies better and lives longer."

***

Col. C. L. Jolly of Marine Fleet Air, West Coast, lived up to his name when he issued a directive that made it possible for the pilots and aircrews of VMTB-242 to escape briefly the angry, hard-biting heat of El Centro–and revel in the haunts of L.A. after dark.

He authorized Bill Dean to inaugurate TBF overnight liberty flights to Los Angeles. And he cajoled the Douglas Aircraft Company into allowing our planes to land at Mines Field, a privately owned facility near the Douglas plant in southwest L.A.

The Douglas people also graciously provided us with van transportation into the heart of Hollywood.

Holding to a schedule of alternating liberty sections, several TBFs were loaded to capacity with hell-raising "liberty hounds" each Thursday and Saturday afternoon and flown to L.A.—returning to the desert with hung-over cargo the next afternoon.

As I talk these words some sixty years later, I recall very little about those L.A. liberty flights. I do know that I was the pilot on two of the flights, maybe three. And I remember that even then, smog and haze could be a problem over L.A. I was flying CFR, contact flight rules. I had Linsmaier, Wilmot and two or three of our pilots crammed into the belly of my TBF. But when I let down over the San Gabriel Mountains into the sprawling L.A. basin, I couldn't see the damned airport. I groped my way through a thick haze—or was it smog? Quick decision: I flew out to the Pacific, circled back across Marina del Rey and there it was—Mines Field—right where it was supposed to be. No problem entering the landing circle. No problem landing.

***

Once they hit Hollywood, most aircrews headed for The Hollywood Canteen, located on a side street off Hollywood Boulevard. Movie stars such as Dorothy Lamour, Lana Turner, Heddy Lamarr, Dinah Shore, Betty Davis, and Betty Grable pitched in at the Canteen.

They entertained, waited on tables, washed the dishes and danced with the soldiers, sailors and Marines passing through.

Even Marlene Dietrich did her part for the boys at the Canteen. By request, she always sang "Lili Marlene," the haunting German war song that became so popular it was adopted by the troops on both sides.

Unfortunately, no commissioned officers were allowed in the Hollywood Canteen. So when VMTB-242 pilots landed in L.A., they would split in all directions. Three of the most popular hangouts were the main lobby bar at the Hollywood Hotel, the Zephyr Room at the Chapman Park Hotel and the Coconut Grove in the Ambassador Hotel. All three hangouts attracted women who seemed to have a visceral feeling for flyers. All three hotels offered pilots a low, low rate for a double room, overnight.

***

George Nasif's family background was Syrian. His outlook was tough-minded American. He was an excellent pilot and a thorough Marine—the only pilot in our squadron who served in the Marine Corps before the war as a non-commissioned ground officer—a first sergeant. He went on to earn his wings as a warrant officer. With the Marine Corps' buildup following Pearl Harbor, he was commissioned a second lieutenant.

Somewhere along the line, he earned the nickname "Sahib," an early East Indian or Arabian term of respect. A name he barely tolerated.

During one of those L.A. nights on the town, Nasif and I teamed up for a tour of assorted bars along Hollywood Boulevard. I remember only one of them: a swinging joint where the genial trombonist Jack Teagarden and his small jazz group were in total command. On a platform up back of the bar in his relaxed and bluesy style, Teagarden had the room mesmerized. Nasif and I had good "front row" bar seats.

We soon learned that our bartender was an ex-Marine. When we ordered "Scotch on the Rocks," he looked around carefully, unlocked a cabinet under the back-bar, lifted out a treasured, impossible-to-find bottle of single malt Scotch whiskey—and poured us a double.

"Semper fi, fellas," he said with a wink. "This one's on

me." He put the bottle away, locked the cabinet, and walked on down to the end of the bar where duty called.

***

Poker, Gin Rummy and Chess were three popular pastimes at El Centro. I played all three.

One night, in the middle of a low-stakes poker game, a few of us decided that Bugs Bunny had the makings of a gutsy and appropriate squadron insignia for VMTB-242. I forget who first came up with the idea

Tex Avery and Chuck Jones, the legendary Warner Bros. cartoonists and anarchist-animators, had created Bugs Bunny in 1940. He was sort of a cartoon Cagney—street-smart, crafty, pugnacious—the blasé hare who won every battle without ever mussing his aplomb. One raised eyebrow was all it took to illustrate his superiority to the carnage around him.

One of the pilots at the table that night, Frank Moses, bragged that he had connections at Warner Bros. That did it. Frank became our unofficial 242 delegate. During a liberty in L.A., Frank visited the studio.

We were surprised and properly impressed when he returned with a promise from "Looney Tunes" producer Leon Schlesinger that the studio would have Jones and Avery create a VMTB-242 Bugs Bunny insignia for us, compliments of Warner Bros.

The result was a full-color, original drawing of a cocky Bugs Bunny, carrot in hand, astride a live torpedo on its way to its target.

The pilots and crewmen took to the design, immediately. Our pompous skipper did not. He reluctantly agreed to go along, however, in the face of the squadron's enthusiastic reaction. 1st Lt. T. A. James, our hard-drinking procurement officer, placed an order for insignia patches and decals.

What happened next is murky.

According to the squadron intelligence officer's official report, issued sometime later, the Bureau of the Navy sent a letter to Bill Dean in which the bureau refused to authorize the Bugs Bunny design as the VMTB-242 insignia "because it was not original enough."

That differed from the word spread rampant around the squadron.

As we heard it, Dean still didn't like the design and never bothered to send the insignia in to Washington for approval and registration.

Either way, it was never officially registered.

Meanwhile, all hands began sporting patches of the Bugs Bunny insignia on field jackets and flight gear. Ground crews applied decals to plane fuselages. And that's the way things stood throughout the war.

Today, cartoonist connoisseurs consider Bugs Bunny one of the greatest animated characters ever created. And the outlawed VMTB-242 insignia remains a valuable collector's item.

***

We practiced free gunnery in three-plane formations.

A separate plane towing the target sleeve would weave from one side of the formation to the other, above and below. This gave each plane and gunner an angle of fire. And that's when I discovered that my turret gunner, Ernie Linsmaier, was good—very good.

The sleeve was a 12-foot marked banner at the end of a long 200-foot cable attached to the tow plane.

The drill got underway with the tow plane getting the long tow line and target sleeve into the air. Easier said than done. One of our senior pilots, I think it was Bud Main, twice failed to get the sleeve off the ground without dragging it beyond use.

Gutsy Jake Nevans was the next pilot scheduled and he laid it on the line. He told everybody within hearing distance that he would get the job done, period. That challenge, on the heels of Bud Main's earlier problems, prompted a few of us to hang around outside the ready room and watch the show.

Jake revved the engine, set off down the runway, lifted the nose, pulled the wheels up—*too soon, too soon*—and sure enough, the plane crashed back down, its belly screeching along the runway trailing sparks and parts and a tattered banner and tow line.

Back in the ready room, the skipper ordered Jake to write a full report on the incident for the colonel who commanded the base.

In disgust, Jake told us that he wrote, "Like a damned fool, I pulled the wheels up too early and stalled out the

aircraft. My actions were inexcusable." End of report.

That cryptic two-liner almost earned Jake a court martial. But Barney McShane interceded on Jake's behalf and offered him a few extra pointers for his second try the following afternoon.

Jake was a man of indomitable spirit. He made it on his second try.

My turn for the dreaded tow-plane assignment came a week or two later in an SNJ. Or was it an SBD? I don't remember. But with Barney's tips and Jake's mishap in mind, I know that I followed the startup checklist with more care than ever. "Check fuel—mixture rich—low blower—set prop—wings locked—cowl tabs open—check tabs—tail wheel." All O.K. Then I kept my feet on the brakes while I revved the engine up to a high rpm level, as in a carrier take-off. And I let 'er go. Nearing the end of the runway, I eased back on the stick and nursed the plane into the air, carefully. I probably didn't pull up the wheels until I reached a 1,000-foot altitude. And I felt the drag of that damned tow line all the way up to 7,000 feet.

***

Mexicali is a sprawling capital city today, swollen with *maguiladoras* or foreign-owned assembly plants, large hotels, industrial parks, banks, new government buildings, golf courses, giant warehouses, and more than 900,000 people. Far different from the Mexicali of sixty cockeyed years ago, when we knew it as the small, colonial capital of Baja California Norte, located in a dusty valley across the Mexican border, 12 miles south of El Centro.

At that time, Mexicali was a bordertown of unexpected contrasts. A jumbled collection of sleazy bars, juke joints, cafes and whorehouses clustered in the blocks below the guarded crossing between Calexico and Mexicali. Yet, in a shady plaza less than a mile away, across from "the governor's palace," young locals still promenaded under the trees on Sunday afternoons, the women on the inner circle, the men on the outer circle, moving in opposite directions, slowly.

In that shady plaza during Mexico's Independence Day celebration, September 16, 1943—a day locked in my memory far too long—I came face to face with the

beguiling Elva Arce. Her dark, dark eyes, huge—in a perfect oval face. Almost too perfect. Cream white Castilian skin. Her dark hair, long and lustrous. Who was she? A young Dolores Del Rio? I was fascinated.

We were strangers in a crowd, viewing an outdoor exhibit of Mexican art. I don't remember what I said to her as we stood close to each other in front of a wall hung with Mexican revolution-era paintings. But in response, she gave me a shy, wonderfully knowing smile. That was the beginning.

By late afternoon, we were strangers no more. We walked for awhile, wandering the plaza. We talked, while sitting at a table in an open-air cantina on the far corner.

To the intermittent sounds of *mariachi* in the distance, I set out to learn more about this captivating creature from south of the border. I soon found out that she had a keen appreciation for her rich Mexican culture and an avid interest in Mexican art—an interest she shared with her younger sister and an older brother.

In a soft, melodious voice, she told me of her first year away at college in Mexico City. She said that she was now at home in Mexicali helping in her father's business until the end of the year, when she planned to return to the University of Mexico.

She told me that her father owned Mexican handicraft stores in both Mexico and the southwestern U.S. Her older brother managed the largest of these, located on historic Olivera Street in Los Angeles.

She revealed, also, that her mother, whom I later met, affectionately called her Elvita. I liked that. With her laughing permission, I began calling her Elvita.

That afternoon was the beginning of many endearing times we shared in late 1943. Few of my squadron mates knew about it. I would slip away from the base and quietly head for Mexicali and Elvita whenever I could.

On our last, lingering evening together, she presented me with an enchanting photo of herself which I carried with me throughout my tour overseas.

***

Sometime during that period, Ox Wilson made contact with Vic Collin in the desert. The three of us rendezvoused one weekend in the bar of the De Anza Hotel in Calexico. We were half-tight when we carefully and stiffly walked across the border into Mexico. I wanted them both to meet Elva Arce. It didn't work out that way. We ended up raising hell that night in Mexicali and sleeping it off back across the border in Calexico.

***

*Those who hoot with the owls by night,*
*should not fly with the eagles by day,*

ANON. WORLD WAR I AVIATOR

# SEVENTEEN

## VMTB-242 II

Our squadron went on the attack in support of the Third U.S. War Bond Drive. We bombed El Centro with "Buy War Bonds" leaflets.

Mid-morning, we swept in from the West—wave after wave, in close formation—and we roared across El Centro at rooftop level. That rattled the windows and brought out the crowds.

Beyond the fringes of town, we fanned out in high climbing turns, regrouped, and swept back over the town again, this time dropping leaflets. We continued this escapade for awhile, crisscrossing El Centro, buzzing the rooftops with a roar.

Finally, our little War Bond disturbance ended. We wagged our wings and withdrew across the desert, returning to base.

A couple of days later, the Imperial Valley Press gave us a warm salute in their lead editorial. I didn't read the "Letters to the Editor" column.

***

At about the same time, I received my appointment as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps. That meant silver bars and a small increase in monthly pay.

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*"Always remember, you fly an airplane with your head, not your hands. Never let a plane take you somewhere your brain didn't get to minutes or even seconds earlier."*

An old Marine instructor barked out those words of advice during close formation training at Corpus Christi. Months later, I mulled over his words at El Centro, the long night following Ox Wilson's tragic accident.

Formation work is how most military flying is done. By this time in our final combat training, tight formation work was second nature.

We were experienced. We were confident. At the end of a simulated dive bombing attack, for example, we would climb rapidly back into a defensive formation. We would close in tight. Routine stuff.

On that ill-fated day over the Salton Sea, however, it was far from routine.

Regrouping after a fast skip bombing run, Ox Wilson had almost regained altitude and was moving into position on Jim O'Rourke's left wing when it happened. Ox slid into position too fast—too close.

Ox's prop cut into the fuel tank and sliced on into the cockpit of O'Rourke's plane—and into the Irishman's left leg. An immediate fireball explosion erupted. O'Rourke was blown clear. Both planes were aflame. And Ox bailed out of his fiery cockpit.

Three of us coming up into position from behind saw two parachutes open and drift down towards the shoreline. But the trapped crewmen went down with the flaming planes. The burning debris of both planes crashed into the Salton Sea.

On the ground, Ox was suffering from burns about the face and wrists, but he was saved from more serious injury by his helmet, flight gear, goggles and gloves. He immediately did what he could with a makeshift tourniquet to stem the flow of blood for O'Rourke until medical help arrived.

In the end, O'Rourke's left leg had to be amputated at the hip. He was transferred out of the squadron.

After a lengthy hospital stay, Ox returned to the squadron with lasting scars on his face—and in his heart. The remorse ran deep

***

At Corpus and at Jacksonville, we had been taught how to use navigational plotting boards, which were located immediately below the instrument panel in a TBF. We continued this training at El Centro, where we flew 150-mile geographic sectors out over the desert and mountains east of the Imperial Valley.

Our night navigational flights, however, were something else. While new navigational aids were rapidly coming into service, the technology in l943, including our radar, was still relatively unsophisticated and subject to

failure or damage. At El Centro, we concentrated our night flying practice on riding radio beams as backup.

A radio pulse sounding in our earphones told us where we were relative to a radio transmitter location on the ground or on a ship—the fixed navigation point. Flying off-course to the right or left of the beam brought forth variations in the tone—"dah-dit" for right and "dit-dah" for left. Heading away from the transmitter, the signal weakened. Flying nearer to the transmitter brought an increasingly stronger signal. It was a simple but effective method for finding a way back to the base on a dark night over the desert.

For a safe landing, however, there was no way to judge altitude by means of the radio signal. That required precision work with the altimeter, needle-ball gauge and the airspeed indicator. Sometimes at night that became a bit hairy.

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With the help of a nearby Army Searchlight Battalion, we also practiced flying through the confusion of searchlight beams while on a nighttime "glide bombing" or skip bombing run.

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On November 10, 1943, the Marine Corps observed its 168th anniversary—an appropriate time for ceremony in the middle of a relentless training schedule. By mid-morning, VMTB 242's Avengers were lined up side by side along the taxiway. The ramp was swept clean. All pilots, aircrews and ground crews were brought to attention in front of the planes. At a certain point, Maj. Bill Dean strode forward, turned smartly to face the formation, and commanded Capt. Bill Ritchey, 1st Lt. Bud Main, and 1st Lt. George Nasif to step forward.

Dean then read three individual citations for meritorious service on Guadalcanal and presented Ritchey, Main and Nasif with the U.S. Air Medal.

All I can remember about the revelry that night at the Officers' Club is a bunch of drunken pilots heading back to the BOQ, belting out a lusty Marine Corps Hymn.

*"From the halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli,*
*We fight our country's battles in the air, on land and sea.*
*First to fight for right and freedom, and to keep*
*our honor clean;*
*We are proud to claim the title of United States Marine."*

***

Throughout our six months in the desert, small groups of pilots and their crews left every few days for the North Island Naval Air Station on Coronado Island in San Diego Bay. There, each group received a week of intensive torpedo training.

Each pilot made several runs with live torpedoes that had been set with exercise heads. A Navy Yard vessel was used as the target. The "fish" were set to run deeper than the draft of the vessel, and a photographer in an SNJ hovering overhead recorded all drops at the time the "fish" passed under the target.

After all of the dry runs we had made over the months, this marked the first time most of us had ever dropped live torpedoes. We made the most of it. Our squadron received a special letter of commendation for our high percentage of hits.

We made the most of San Diego, too.

***

North Island Naval Air Station still dominates the northern end of Coronado Island. The legendary Hotel del Coronado anchors the southern end, where it fronts on the white sand beach. This 114-year-old *grande dame* still flourishes. She is an American treasure.

When we were at Coronado, a few of us were intrigued by the rickety charm and Victorian splendor of the old wooden structure. We spent a liberty day exploring the place, riding up and down in its ornate cage elevator, wandering through its great salons and its gardens, running along the surf, and lying around the pool in the late afternoon, drinking Stingers and goofing off with lonely Navy wives.

This was 16 years before Billy Wilder used the same location for his classic movie comedy, *Some Like it Hot,* with Marilyn Monroe.

***

A Marine fighter squadron, VMF-122, also was based at El Centro during our six-month bivouac in the desert. In the final weeks of our training, we practiced with VMF-122 on various inter-squadron tactics.

We would make diving runs against Salton Sea targets with a few of the fighters acting as cover while others tried to intercept. The fighters also made camera gunnery runs on our TBF formations, which gave our own aircrews good free gunnery practice.

VMF-122 pilots were flying the new F4U Corsair.

***

Old-time aviation buffs and legions of young model-makers consider Chance-Vought's gull-wing F4U Corsair the hottest, most awesome fighter plane of the WW II era. I go along with that. In the air, it was a dream machine. But on the ground—on takeoffs, landings and on taxiways—it was a devil to control. It restricted your visibility from the cockpit because of its long, nose-high, three-point attitude. And the rigid landing gear strut caused a potentially disastrous bounce in anything but a smooth touchdown.

The Navy's first squadron to get Corsairs suffered a rash of fatal training accidents, followed by serious problems in landing its new fighters on carrier flight decks. As a result, the Navy gave up on the F4U program and turned the flashy Corsair over to the Marine Corps, where it became eventually the Marines' most effective fighter ever, replacing the valiant F4F Wildcat.

***

*"Remembrance of things past."* In my mind's eye, I can see it now: The unmistakable, gull-wing silhouette of a lone Corsair approaching the El Centro runway from the east, a fair distance out.

Jake Nevans and I were on the runway watch that day. In the shimmering heat, the manner in which the pilot maneuvered that F4U grabbed our attention. The entire landing procedure was flawless. Perfectly controlled. He came around in a tight, carrier approach

with no wing adjustment at any point along the way, stalled the plane out tail first, inches above the runway, touched down, and turned off at the first taxiway. It was a masterful performance, although a complete departure from standard F4U procedure at that time, which called for landing tail high and touching the front wheels first. The standard TBF and F4F carrier landing procedure of stalling out with tail wheel touching first was considered too dangerous with the F4U.

The word spread quickly. The base was a buzz. The pilot of that solitary Corsair on that blistering afternoon in El Centro was my childhood idol, America's legendary "Lone Eagle," Charles A. Lindbergh.

***

Before Pearl Harbor, Lindbergh had worried over any American involvement in the European war. He became an outspoken leader in the "America First" movement, advocating steadfast neutrality. That put him in direct opposition to FDR and the president's lend-lease policy. Controversy between the two men deepened. Following a scathing public attack by FDR that questioned Lindy's loyalty to the United States, Lindbergh resigned his Army Air Corps commission in April 1941.

Pearl Harbor changed everything. Lindbergh realized that neutrality was no longer possible. The Axis powers had attacked us and declared war. Lindbergh applied immediately for reinstatement in the Army Air Corps.

President Roosevelt (a great man, one of our greatest presidents, but also a wily politician) made it clear there was no place in the Air Corps for Lindbergh. Personal appeals by Lindbergh to Air Force General Hap Arnold and Secretary of War Henry Stimson were fruitless.

Anxious to contribute in any way possible to the war effort, Lindbergh sought a position in private industry. Soon, he was helping Henry Ford solve B-24 production problems at Ford's Willow Run plant.

By 1943, he was testing high-altitude pressure chambers at the Mayo Clinic and test flying the new F4U Corsair for Chance Vought in Connecticut. One of his goals was to help get the landing bugs out of the F4U Corsair. He did that eventually by recommending that Chance Vought raise the plane's tail wheel and place a

small air-spoiler on the right wing, changing the plane's center of gravity.

When he stopped over at our El Centro base in l943, he was on his way to San Diego, where he quietly persuaded Marine Corps General Louis Wood to let him study USMC Corsair operations in the South Pacific. A few months later, as a 42-year-old civilian, Lindbergh was flying F4Us on combat missions with a Marine fighter squadron—covering TBF raids on Rabaul.

FDR and the American public knew nothing about it.

***

The 4th Marine Division had fought at Guadalcanal. The division was now in training on the central California coast for what would eventually be the invasion of Tinian and Saipan in the Marianas. Unknown at the time, the 4th Marine Division would also be a part of the amphibious force destined to lead the assault on Iwo Jima a year later.

The men of the 4th Marine Division were among the finest fighting men in the world.

At El Centro in mid-December 1943, twelve of us were selected to participate in a major close air-ground support exercise with the 4th Marine Division. We flew across the mountains to the El Toro Marine Air Station in Orange County and operated out of that base during the maneuvers. In the exercise plan, the 4th Division Marines had established a beachhead on a rugged section of the coast near Oceanside. And they were driving inland.

We were in the air as they moved forward. When ordered by radio control units "trapped" on the front line, we would make low-level bombing runs on "enemy" positions, knocking out pillboxes and attacking gun positions just ahead of the Marine infantrymen. No live ammunition or bombs were used. But during the exercise, we gained a valuable feel for the close coordination, control and tactics required during an actual landing.

***

I sometimes think that my mother had a penchant for alcoholics.

Vince Benoit was a French-Canadian gambler—an alcoholic—a man who smoked furiously. And he was the latest in my mother's legion of lovers. He was floor manager at a new, illegal gambling club in Portland. In today's big casinos, he'd be called a pit boss.

On the phone from home, my mother told me about her new love and his job. She assured me that the new gambling club was better connected, larger, and more inviting than the Chinese gambling joint we knew when I was a kid. She also maintained that Vince hadn't taken a drink in almost three years.

My mother and Vince drove down to El Centro for an enjoyable visit shortly before our squadron shoved off. We had a sentimental two days together.

I dearly loved my unconventional mother. During their visit to the base on a pass that I wangled through Barney McShane, they met several of my cohorts and they got a close look at a TBF Avenger and an F4U Corsair.

Vince Benoit was not a tall man, perhaps only a half a head taller than my mother. Dressed in dark jacket and tie, even in the heat, he presented a trim and sinewy figure. He had a thick, black thatch of wavy hair sprinkled with specks of gray. His face was angular. Heavy, razor-straight eyebrows crossed his brow. And his penetrating, blue eyes seemed ever watchful.

I was prepared to dislike the man.

Yet during his two-day visit to El Centro with my mother, I found him to be gracious, warm and personable—a quiet man of sharp insight and a wry sense of humor. With my mother, he seemed affectionate and always attentive.

I liked him.

***

During those final days in the desert, for reasons I can't even remember any more, I had access to one of the squadron SNJs. And for the sheer hell of it, I took my gunner, Ernie Linsmaier, up on an aerobatics flight. He was eager.

I climbed high, perhaps 10,000 feet, where it was safe and where nobody on the ground could see us. Once we

reached altitude, I picked up speed, kicked the SNJ into a snap roll followed by a loop, a split-S, a barrel roll, a couple of easy wingovers and I think I may have even done a full Immelman. Ernie's head was reeling. But he handled it well. No vomiting. No obvious fear.

At that point, I gave him another shock by allowing him to take over the stick for the next maneuver.

He was in the front cockpit. In the rear cockpit, I softly maintained control. I kept my feet lightly on the rudders, while I coached him through a simple, straight-ahead loop. With instructions, he followed the artificial horizon line, pulling gradually back on the stick. And away we went, up and over. He successfully completed the loop without knowing it. He said he was either too dumb or too scared to realize he was all the way around. Unknowingly, he had started into a second loop when I took over the controls.

Finishing with a flourish, I decided to test Ernie with a sudden taste of danger, the feeling of peril. I gunned the plane up into a vertical stall, letting the SNJ suddenly fall off into a spin, a fast tailspin headed straight down toward the ground. Seemingly out of control. I recovered, of course, and easily pulled it out at about 5,000 feet. The SNJ was a good plane for aerobatics.

It was time to go home.

Today in Alliance, Ohio, Ernie Linsmaier still talks of that flight as the most exhilarating experience he encountered in all of his six months at El Centro.

***

During the first week of my 22nd year, orders came through for VMTB-242 to prepare for immanent departure.

All TBF flights were secured. Our well-used planes, with Bugs Bunny insignia still attached, were transferred to the training unit at Santa Barbara. Mountains of other squadron equipment, aircraft parts and materials were loaded on a lineup of trucks. Our personal foot lockers and flight gear were packed and ready to go. Throughout the squadron, letters were written. Farewell calls were made to loved ones.

***

A night or two before departure, we held a final squadron dinner party at the Officers' Club.

White clothed tables were set end to end, forming a long banquet table, with all officers present along each side. Full bottles of cheap bourbon, coaxed from the Club's liquor locker, served as centerpieces. The simple menu was sizzling grilled steaks. What else? I don't remember. I do know, however, that near the end of dinner, the whiskey began flowing, along with toasts and tributes and bawdy songs from the combat zone.

Like him or not, Maj. Bill Dean had successfully put together one helluva TBF attack and patrol squadron during six grueling months in the desert. Most pilots recognized that. More than once that night, we held our glasses high and toasted our humorless skipper.

At one point, I recall also that we gave a standing ovation to Warrant Officer Fred Minden, the hard-muscled, pre-war regular Marine who commanded the squadron's engineering unit. He and his men had kept our planes flying in the heat and sands of the desert. And he had the profound respect of every man at the table.

You could feel it. A powerful *esprit de corps* permeated the room that night.

***

When the time came, we left for North Island, San Diego, in a truck convoy—the 450 officers and men of VMTB-242. We crossed the desert and climbed up through the coastal mountains, white from the late January snows. It was our last view of snow for a long time to come.

When the convoy reached North Island, the trucks headed directly to the loading docks where the flight deck of a CVE carrier, the *Kitkun Bay*, loomed ahead.

We boarded the *Kitkun Bay* that night. The next afternoon, January 28, l944, the carrier eased its way out of San Diego Bay and into the open sea, headed for an undisclosed destination in the South Pacific.

***

I was young. I loved my country. And I was determined, as a pilot in the Marine Corps, to help my country win the war against Japan.

After 18 months of Navy and Marine Corps flight training and 600 hours of logged flight time, I was ready.

# EIGHTEEN

## South Pacific

During our 17 days at sea, heading due south across the equator and west beyond the Fijis, the sun was high and burning hot, tempered by sweeping, afternoon rain storms. It was January in the tropics—the cyclone season. Our destination: Espiritu Santo.

There were times at night when a few of us would climb up on deck to view the Southern Cross and surrounding skies and talk about home. I sometimes wondered if I would ever return to Oregon.

I spent most of my time in the carrier's Ready Room, studying maps of the Solomons, reading tattered paperbacks, playing chess, or gin rummy, or taking an occasional seat in what seemed like a never-ending poker game. Up on top, the flight deck was jammed with tied-down F4U Corsairs and TBM Avengers, ready for delivery to the South Pacific combat zone.

TBF was the designation for the original Avengers made by Grumman. TBM was the designation for later models made to Grumman specs by General Motors. I think we just called them all TBFs.

***

About the time we were crossing the equator, word came through from the Marine base at Espiritu Santo that Gregory "Pappy" Boyington, flying an F4U Corsair, had been shot down that morning over Rabaul. The flamboyant Marine Corps ace and CO of the "Black Sheep Squadron" was reported missing in action.

Some months later—I don't remember when—Boyington turned up alive in a Japanese prison camp near Tokyo. He had landed in the waters off Rabaul, badly injured. Following a strafing by Jap fighter planes, he had struggled onto his rubber life raft, wounded, and

was later captured by a Jap submarine. Boyington spent 18 harrowing months in Japanese prison camps.

The Republic of Vanuatu is a chain of more than 80 Melanesian islands and underwater volcanoes set in the remote seas of the South Pacific—3,450 miles southwest of Honolulu, 1,300 miles north of Sydney, 555 miles southeast of Guadalcanal.

We knew Vanuatu during World War II as the sprawling New Hebrides, jointly administered by the French and the British. Espiritu Santo was the largest island in the chain. A steamy island of coastal plantations and dense interior jungle, Santo became the rear base and island headquarters for Marine Aviation in the South Pacific. It was selected by the Navy's crusty, Vice Admiral John S. McCain, Commander of Aircraft, South Pacific. He wanted to secure a base nearer to Guadalcanal than his distant headquarters at Port Vila on the capitol island of Efate, 707 miles further south.

The Navy Seabees tore into the wet jungle in an all out, gung-ho effort to complete the first of Santo's coral-topped air strips. Soon, the island became the launch point for pushing the Japs back up The Slot of the Solomons—a natural funnel from Guadalcanal up between a chain of islands with names like Bagga, Ranongga, Gizo, Munda, Kolombanagara, Rendova, Vangunu, Gatukai and Vella Lavella—up to the big, brooding island of Bougainville and nearby Buka. This was the beginning of an island-hopping, counter attack strategy that was to roll inexorably upward through the islands of the Pacific toward the homeland of Japan.

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As we approached Espiritu Santo, the *Kitkun Bay* slid carefully past rocky outcrops along the treacherous, northern end of the island and on down the western edge—a land of unexplored jungle. At that time, planes that crashed into Santo's green sea of thick, tropical jungle were never seen again. Minutes after the smoke cleared, a burnt plane was invisible.

The jungle contrasted starkly with the southern half of the island, which had become a bustling Marine Corps concentration. We disembarked by Higgins boat at Pallikula Bay.

Today, Espiritu Santo is probably best known as the island setting for James A. Michener's Pulitzer-winning classic, *Tales of the South Pacific.* He was stationed on Espiritu Santo during the war.

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Within hours, Ox Wilson and I unexpectedly ran into three University of Oregon Ducks: Bob Ballard, Clyde Hollenbeck and Ralph Hartzell. They were pilots in VMTB-134, another TBF squadron. Both squadrons were billeted in Dallas huts, set in a stand of coconut trees on an abandoned plantation, less than a quarter mile from the air strip. A nearby double Quonset Hut served as our mess hall and another double Quonset Hut, located down along the edge of the palm-fringed beach, served as an overcrowded Officers' Club. It was furnished with one large poker table and several chairs and benches, half-empty bookshelves, a few card tables and chairs and a busy full-length, stand-up bar serving Torpedo Juice and whatever beer was available. Torpedo Juice was the name South Pacific sailors and Marines gave early in the war to a lethal mix of high grain alcohol fuel stirred into canned grapefruit juice.

That night, the five of us had a wet reunion at the club. I have to dig deep in my memory to recover any details of that night. But as I recall it, we swapped college memories, second-guessed war strategies, talked about women, and argued about the U.S. presidential election coming up later that year—all washed down with a few beers and too much Torpedo Juice.

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*Using a military absentee ballot, I cast my first vote ever that year in a national presidential election.*

*Franklin D. Roosevelt, nearing the end of his third term as president, was a popular war-time incumbent in the 1944 U.S. elections. Probably two-thirds of the pilots in our squadron supported FDR, our commander-in-chief.*

*With Roosevelt's health deteriorating, many in the Democratic Party saw Vice President Henry Wallace as too far to the left to be so close to the presidency.*

*In the end, Roosevelt agreed to replace Wallace on the ticket with a tough, out-spoken senator from Missouri, Harry S. Truman.*

*Over on the Republican side, former prosecutor and New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey was making his first bid for the white House. He selected conservative Ohio Governor John W. Bricker as his running mate.*

*In the November election that followed, the Democrats won in a landslide, 53.4% to 45.9%—and Franklin D. Roosevelt became the only U.S. president ever to be elected to a fourth term.*

***

At a briefing after our arrival on Santo, we were introduced by Maj. Bill Dean to the squadron's newly-assigned Combat Operations Officer, Capt. Henry W. Hise. He took over. During the next two weeks, he put us through night-and-day survival drills and a concentrated review of our diving and bombing skills.

With more than 600 hours of flight time and six months in TBF operations at El Centro, I felt overtrained. I was eager to get into the action. Self-confident and maybe a little too cocky, I was 22 years old.

***

A lanky, sun-baked Texan—surprisingly soft-spoken— Hank Hise was well-liked and highly-respected in the Marine Aviation cadre. He had served in the first Marine squadron to land on Guadalcanal after the invasion, he had commanded what was left of Marine dive-bomber squadron VMSB-232 as the Canal was secured, and he had been awarded the DFC for his action during a series of TBF air attacks on New Guinea in 1943.

We were curious and surprised to see such a seasoned hand join our outfit. And I think our CO, Bill Dean, was jealous. The word up and down the line was that Dean resented Hise's assignment to VMTB-242. We wondered if our skipper also sensed the fact that most of the pilots would have welcomed Capt. Hank Hise as commanding officer.

Hise was the kind of Marine officer who expressed his leadership thru calm, experienced direction and unflinching example. He commanded our respect immediately.

***

One of Maj. Bill Dean's own exploits during his initial Solomons tour lived on as an acerbic South Pacific barroom tale. It happened during anti-sub patrol, a few miles east of Espiritu Santo.

On the third leg of a long triangular search, our skipper excitedly reported to his crew, "We have a Jap sub below at 10 o'clock." He opened his bomb bay and made a diving pass over the target, slightly off position. Pulling up, he circled again, made a second pass and a perfect drop. The two depth charges straddled the "sub" and detonated with a powerful upheaval of the sea.

Dean excitedly instructed his radio gunner to radio the base, identify their plane, give their location, and report, "Sighted sub, sank same,"—a line stolen from a sub-killer episode in the Atlantic, earlier in the war.

The moment his radio gunner was about to transmit the message, however, Dean suddenly screamed, "Wait! Wait! Wait!" He then made another low pass over the target and saw the results of his marksmanship—chunks of a huge killer whale floating in a bloody sea of red.

The remains of that whale floated in the sea for days in full view of derisive pilots heading into the Espiritu Santo flight pattern from the East.

***

During those early days on Santo, we ate loads of fat mutton from Australia, seemingly night after night. We had a routine of mutton meat loaf, mutton stew or creamed mutton on toast. We called that the SOS dish—"Shit on a Shingle." I gagged on the musty taste. To this day, I can't face up to mutton on the menu, no matter how it's prepared. A slab of *Spam* or even the C-Rations we later devoured on Bougainville was far more palatable.

And a C-Ration pack included a bonus: four cigarettes and some toilet paper.

***

My memories of Bougainville and Rabaul may be distorted by more than sixty intervening years. But the most salient facts cut through the mist, supported by log books, Ernie Linsmaier's illegal wartime diary, valuable letters from Jake Nevans, scribbled notes from Frank Moses, and a few aging Marine Corps records from Hank Hise.

***

We were put on alert. The squadron was moving up The Slot to Bougainville.

Guadalcanal anchored the bottom end of the Solomons. The big, forbidding island of Bougainville stretched out at the top, close to the equator. About 125 miles long and forty or fifty miles wide, Bougainville was a place of startling contrasts—thick, mist-enshrouded jungles, mangrove swamps, active volcanoes, high, crashing waterfalls, torrential rains, millions of insects, mosquitoes, insufferable humidity—and black Melanesian natives who lived wild, secluded fives.

The Imperial Japanese forces had invaded Bougainville early on in their dead-aim drive toward Australia. They established two bases on the island: One in the south at Buin and one in the north on the adjoining island of Buka.

In a major 1943 attack, assault elements of the U.S. 3rd and 9th Marine Divisions, supported by the 1st Marine Air Wing and strong Naval forces, made a surprise landing midway up the island's west coast at Cape Torokina on Empress Augusta Bay. After 40 days of bitter fighting, the Marines held fast to a heavily guarded perimeter, four miles deep and five miles wide. The continued presence of about 60,000 Japanese troops was spread across the rest of the island.

The tireless Seabees carved out three air strips in the jungle enclave. One near the beach for fighter squadrons and dive bombers. One near the interior front lines for torpedo bomber squadrons. And one parallel strip for the Anzacs—gutsy Australian and New Zealand squadrons that operated with us.

From out of that twenty square mile hole in the Bougainville jungle, surrounded on three sides by high mountains with peaks of up to ten thousand feet, infested with Japanese troops and armaments, Com. Air SoPac set out to strangle the mighty bastion of Rabaul, 250 miles to the north.

***

As I turn over the litter of memory, I'm certain that we skipped "Shit on a Shingle" that dark, final morning at Espiritu Santo. Instead, I think we loaded up with some foul-tasting, dehydrated scrambled eggs and canned baked beans.

We manned our planes at dawn, started the engines, checked the mags, and worked our way on down the TBF preflight check list. At the signal for takeoff, we roared down the runway and climbed out over the sea—two-plane sections at a time. Circling into a loose formation led by Maj. Bill Dean, we took a northwest heading at 10,000 feet altitude. Some four hours later, we let down, entering into the landing pattern at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. On the Canal, we refueled and holed up for the night. The next day, we had an uneventful three-hour flight straight up The Slot.

Flying along the edges of Bougainville, it was hard to ignore the wild, dark beauty of the big island. We flew alongside jagged mountain peaks, all jungle green with occasional outcroppings of stone. Dense foliage spilled all the way down to the water line.

In the final flight pattern at Torokina's *Piva Yoke* air strip, we could see in the distance white clouds of steam rising from two, live, Bougainville volcanoes, blending with a mass of dark, threatening, cumulus clouds. A heavy, torrent of tropical rain opened up on us as the last few planes groped their way in. That night and for several nights to come, we also heard the sounds of sporadic shellfire in the jungle.

Marine C-47 transports followed a day later with our ground crews, duffel bags and equipment. Meanwhile, VMTB-232's weary ground echelon, still waiting to be relieved, welcomed us to Bougainville in the rain.

I shared a four-man tent with George Manning, Bill Batten and Capt. Hank Hise.

Two days later, I was in the air over Rabaul on our first strike of the war.

***

*It was apparent to U.S. military planners that Bougainville was an important objective not because the island had any true military value but simply because it was needed to isolate and deal with Rabaul.*

*To put it another way—there was one reason and one reason alone for the American invasion of Bougainville. It was to get airfields within a short flight range of the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul. Short range, hard-hitting SBDs and TBFs were far more valuable for precision bombing than the big, long-range, high-altitude bombers flown by the Air Force.*

*Located on a wide peninsula at the Northern end of New Britain and curving around a broad natural harbor, the Australian garrison of Rabaul had been overwhelmed by Jap forces at the outbreak of the war. After occupation, the Japs developed Rabaul into the most formidable fortress and supply base in the South Pacific. All Japanese invasions in the Solomons, including Bougainville and Guadalcanal, were launched and supplied from Rabaul.*

*At one time in 1943 there were almost 140,000 Japanese troops massed there. Using captured Australians and gaunt POWs captured at Singapore as labor, the Japanese built and rebuilt several fortified air bases on the Rabaul peninsula. The bases included heavy anti-aircraft gun installations and miles of underground tunnels and bunkers in the pumice hills.*

*On the heels of the Guadalcanal campaign, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to avoid the kind of bloody, overpowering commitment it would have taken to invade Rabaul. The strategists concluded it wasn't necessary. Instead, the Allies set out to strangle Rabaul by battering its airfields and wiping out its fading air power and cutting off its supply lines.*

*The Siege of Rabaul was well underway.*

*Rabaul became our primary target*

***

Over the years, most of our strikes on Rabaul have faded into a blur. But our first strike—that very first strike—was one that I will always remember.

I was on the flight list that included six Anzac pilots and 18 Yanks, plus crews. We were going in with a strike force of 24 TBF Avengers, each plane loaded with four 500-lb. bombs set with delay fuses.

The night before take-off, we were briefed by Lt. A. J. Ludwig, squadron intelligence officer, and Capt. Hank Hise, the designated flight leader. Believe me, we gave them both our full attention. I was eager, but apprehensive. They identified the target: military supply areas along the western slope of Rabaul's Simpson Harbor. They reported on the latest weather conditions. Hank Hise followed up with directional headings, flight formations, attack strategy, a strong reminder of what to do if we had to bail out and some final words of encouragement.

We took off with the first streaks of dawn, when the surrounding jungle and hills were still dark and dripping wet. With our props trailing mist and exhaust stacks belching flame, we thundered down the runway matting, two planes at a time. Out over Empress Augusta Bay, we climbed in a circle to 14,000 feet, joined in formation, and made a beeline for Rabaul.

***

Flying high above us in a relentless weaving pattern, a flight of F4U Corsairs from VMF-115 provided flight cover, whether we needed it or not. While we expected heavy anti-aircraft fire at Rabaul, we didn't anticipate any significant fighter opposition.

Maj. Joe Foss, America's leading ace at that time, was the skipper of VMF-11&—on his second tour in the South Pacific war zone. He arrived at Espiritu Santo with his new squadron on the CVE carrier *Copahee* in early 1944, shortly before we came in on the *Kitkun Bay*.

A few nights before we were called up to Bougainville, I watched Foss win a pile of money in a high- stakes poker game at the Santo officer's club. Was it a sign of good luck? Cradling stacks of chips and clutching a fist full of hundred dollar bills, Foss kept his cards close to his belly

and chewed on a soggy cigar throughout the game.

***

On the horizon, we could see the volcanoes, North Daughter and South Daughter, on the windward side of Simpson Harbor. We were fast approaching Rabaul. Soon, we began to pick up anti-aircraft fire. It was high and behind us. Inaccurate. We spread our formation in a high-speed descent to 7,500 feet, coming straight in. Now the flak became heavy—ugly, black, puffs bursting around us. We peeled off into our dives. I homed in on the target, rolled into a split-S, hit the trim tabs, opened the bomb bay, and plunged through the deadly flak in a 65 degree dive. Everything was pumping inside me, my heart beating rapidly, my mouth dry.

Was I scared? You bet I was. Fear is an inevitable and natural response to shells and bullets coming at you. I think all of us on our first strike felt primal fear to one degree or another. But we learned to fly through our fears. Most of us did, anyway. Most of the time.

Frank Moses was coming down behind me on my right—a little too close. We were both hurtling down on ammunition dumps at the south end of the harbor ... 6,000 feet ... 4,000 feet ... 2000 feet .... No room to miss. I hit the button, released the bombs, and sharply banked to the left in an evasive breakaway. I pulled out of the dive with both hands on the stick and a heavy push on the rudder pedal to cope with the strong load on the controls. I felt high Gs pull at my face. Closing the bomb bay, I shoved the throttle forward, full-power, picking up speed. I got the hell out of there—fast.

Behind me I felt a loud explosion. My turret gunner, Ernie Linsmaier, let out a triumphant yell on the intercom. I made a climbing turn and as I looked back, I saw a series of ammunition dumps go up. Spires of flame shot several hundred feet into the air, subsided, and then sprang higher.

Other TBFs were tearing up industrial sites along one edge of the harbor. Loaded warehouses were blowing apart. Fires were burning.

On the way out, I caught up with the others on the back side of North Daughter, where we set our headings for Torokina. Back to Bougainville.

One Anzac reported he had been hit on the way down and had to pull out before dropping his bombs. Four or five other TBFs suffered flak damage, but remained airborne. All planes made it back to Torokina.

Mission accomplished.

***

As I lit a cigarette and walked into the Strike Command tent for debriefing, somebody handed me a small bottle of brandy. It was good for two or three fiery gulps. Marine Corps policy provided every pilot overseas with a few slugs of alcohol after every combat mission—to help calm raw nerves.

The liquor that day was LeJon Brandy, provided to The Corps by the Gallo Wine Company of Modesto, California. And the brand fives on. Cheap LeJon Brandy is still available on the shelves of liquor stores and markets throughout California.

***

In a 45-degree, glide-bombing dive, the TBF Avenger was red-lined at 315 knots, or 370 miles per hour. But over Rabaul, we adopted a dive bombing mode we had practiced during operations over the Salton Sea. We sighted the target closely along the left edge of the nose. Then, the moment the target disappeared under the wing root, we rolled into a split-S maneuver and plunged down on target in a steep 65 degree dive. This maneuver gave us greater accuracy and less exposure to anti-aircraft fire.

In our dives at Rabaul, we sometimes pushed the TBF Avenger to 370 knots or 425 miles per hour. Thank God "The Grumman Iron Works" built them strong.

***

Our strike on Rabaul's Vanukanau air base was another that remains vivid in my memory—only because of the extraordinary Kiwi briefing performance the night before.

Built prior to the war by Australians, Vunakanau

bordered the northern edge of Empress Augusta Bay. It was rebuilt and enlarged by the Japanese, using American POWs as labor. The airstrip consisted of two parallel runways, each 5,199 feet long, plus scores of revetments and taxiways that fanned out from every side of the runways. A hidden entrenchment of antiaircraft defenses included 15 heavy, 14 medium and 12 light guns, according to postwar records. Whatever the number, Vanakanau was one of Rahaul's strongest and most important air bases.

Our strike force of 24 TBFs was divided between 12 planes from New Zealand's NZTB-30 and 12 planes from VMTB-242, each plane loaded with four 500-pound bombs with delay fuses.

The New Zealanders led the way on this one. At the briefing the night before, we were confronted by the Kiwi's burly, flight leader, F/LT. M. G. Stubbs, RNZAF. His squadron mates called him Old Tank. Stroking a thick, heavy mustache with the back of his hand, he glared at us, then cut loose.

"Gentlemen," he bellowed. "Our takeoff is 0500. And Yanks, I don't mean 0504. We proceed to squadron rendezvous over Point Obo at 0535. And Yanks, I damn well don't mean 0539.

"When we close in on the south end of Simpson Harbor, I may alter the course sharply away from the harbor, at which time I don't want to hear some Yank break radio silence with a wiseass remark, like where is this stupid bastard taking us? For your information, Yanks, I will be employing something called *tactics* that were practiced successfully by Alexander and Hannibal and the Roman commanders and, belatedly, by Napoleon himself. Such will bring us to a point of attack from the fan side of the Mother and Two Daughters instead of the customary Mother and nearest daughter approach up the channel."

He rolled on like this for several minutes. We resisted breaking out in raucous laughter and applause. But it was a grand performance. We just grinned, stifled our laughs, and gave him our full attention.

The following day, Old Tank proved to be a man of his word. With Rabaul looming ahead, he led us off course and around the back side of the Mother and Two Daughters. When we banked out from behind the volcanoes on attack, the antiaircraft guns came alive.

Flak started to fly. The flash of shell bursts spread below us. We came down in a slanted, high speed approach. At about 8,000 feet, we split the formation, peeled off into our dives, and hurtled down on Vanukanau through a spreading firestorm.

George "Tiny" Thompson and I were the "Tail-end-Charlies" on this attack. Up in the lead, one Anzac pilot veered to the right in the middle of his dive and went after the Vanukanau control tower. One of his bombs brought the tower to the ground. A direct hit. Those Kiwis were good.

I homed in on the far end of the left runway. A good, straight-line target. Two of my bombs hit beyond the runway, outside the assigned target area. But the other two blasted the entire end section of the runway and several nearby revetments. On target.

Coming out of my dive, I rolled away in a high-G, horizontal turn, strafing with both ,50-cal wing guns while Linsmaier swung his .50-cal turret gun into action. Strafing to the side, he was able to suppress some dangerous incoming ground fire. Further south, I escaped with minor flak damage and a couple of bullet holes in my right wing.

Other planes endured damage during this strike. One Anzac had his center hatch shot away. Shrapnel fragments cracked the front windscreen of Jake Nevans' plane. A close call. Bob Gilardi lost his plane's left wing flap to AA fire. Ed Lupton took several bullet holes in the skin of one wing. And similar holes showed up in the fuselage of others.

***

Francis E. Lee, one sweet-talking southerner in our squadron, suffered the most traumatic problem that day over Vanakanau. Lee's plane was hit by two, maybe three 40 mm shells during his final dive.

He was down to 4,000 feet at the time and immediately tried to pull out. One shell shattered the corner post of the windscreen and blew away the radio antenna. It cut off all radio communication. Another hit the accessory section and ruptured the oil system. Oil came bursting into the cockpit around the firewall, covering the instrument panel and spraying into Lee's

face. Partially blinded, Lee still managed to keep his plane airborne. He flew south beyond Cape St. George. His radioman donated his flight pants, which Lee stuffed around the plotting board holders to help stop the spray. South of Rabaul, he sighted our TBFs and he joined up on the formation. No radio contact. We were on our way back to Torokina.

Finally, the rugged R2,600 Wright engine gave out. And Lee cautiously brought his TBF down into a flaps-down, tail-down, water landing without power. He and his two crewmen quickly unbuckled, crawled out on the wing and scrambled into the plane's inflatable rubber life raft—within the two-minute Grumman safety margin. From the raft, they watched their plane sink slowly underwater, down to the ocean bottom.

Two of our planes dropped smoke bombs to mark the location and circled as long as their fuel allowed. A short time later, Lee and his crewmen were pulled from the water by a PBY "Bumbo" rescue flying boat that had homed in on emergency IFF signals from one of the circling TBF's.

All three men were plied with whiskey, flown to Green Island, and returned to Torokina the following day.

***

The indomitable spirit of Jake Nevans prevailed when he made a dangerous landing in choppy ocean waters during our return from a raid on Rabaul's Lakunai airfield and the causeway to Matupi Island. Jake slowly and carefully brought his disabled plane down alongside a U.S. destroyer escort that was slicing through the heavy sea on its way back to its base in the Treasury Islands.

The destroyer escort's crew rescued Jake and his men and hauled them aboard. The three Marines settled in. They enjoyed a few days of good chow, hot showers and traditional Navy hospitality. Jake later reported that the skipper was a most engaging New Englander.

Eventually, the Navy returned Jake and his two crewmen to Bougainville.

***

A third water landing during this period took place when Capt. Bud Main, leading a second strike on Rabaul's Simpson Harbor installations, dropped out of formation with a bad oil leak. Recognizing he could never make it back to Torokina, he jettisoned his unexploded bombs, turned back, and made a safe water landing in the ocean near a Navy PT Boat that had been damaged slightly during a nocturnal prowl up St. George's Channel.

Main and his crew were picked up by a "Dumbo" PBY and returned directly to our Torokina base.

***

Going down in the open sea was a threat we all learned to live with. Surviving a crash landing in the water, or getting lost in the open sea, or fending off shark attacks were all a part of the drill, along with one overriding danger we seldom talked about. That was the spectre of getting captured by the Japs.

The brutal Japanese atrocities in Nanking, Singapore, Bataan and Guadalcanal were still fresh in our minds. And the infamous "Tunnel Hill Incident" at Rabaul had taken place shortly before our arrival on Bougainville. That was when the Japanese Secret Police, the Sixth Field Kempei Tai, executed a group of Allied POWs who had been forced to work on the maze of tunnels and caves in the surrounding Simpson Harbor hillsides.

*Allied POW data released in 1945 gave credence to our wartime concerns. Almost 38 percent of all military POWs in the hands of the Japanese during WWII died in captivity, compared with less than 2 percent of all military POWs in the hands of the Germans.*

***

After suffering heavy losses in the *Battle of Piva Yoke* and after several unsuccessful attempts to penetrate the Marine defenses at the Torokina perimeter, the hungry remnants of the Japanese forces in the Empress Augusta Bay area settled for continuous harassment.

Working their way through the jungle and over tortuous mountain trails, the persistent Japs packed some

artillery and ammunition from Buin at the southern end of Bougainville, all the way up into the mountains overlooking our perimeter. From somewhere up in those mountainous jungles, the Jap artillery would sporadically shell our airstrips at night. Just after dark, the shells would start falling—blasting craters which were quickly refilled. Damage was moderate. A few planes were hit and a few shells exploded perilously close to our tent area. That kept us on edge, for sure. And it led to many sleepless nights.

It was thought the Japs had their guns on rails that were hidden under jungle cover. At night they would roll them out, drop a few shells, and move back under cover. We were unable to pinpoint their remote jungle locations.

To counter this problem, the Bougainville Command ordered a relay of two-hour, artillery spotting patrols, all-night long, around the perimeter. Two planes at a time. Two hours at a time. The assignment went to our squadron—and it was unpopular duty. Very unpopular.

Yet the strategy was successful.

As soon as we launched night-time patrols, the Jap gunners became wise to what we were doing. They wouldn't fire when any plane was in their sector, for fear the muzzle flash would reveal the position of their guns. So we achieved our objective. As long as we continued nighttime air surveillance around the perimeter, there was almost no further shelling of the air strips. And we gained some semblance of sleep before taking off at dawn for another strike on Rabaul.

***

Marine pilots in the South Pacific flew any plane they could get. It wasn't like the Air Force in Europe, where each pilot had a personal plane and supporting crew. At the end of a thin supply line, largely dependent upon Navy logistics, dedicating specific planes to specific pilots was a luxury the Marines just didn't have.

That was one big reason why our plane captains and maintenance crews and engineering teams under Warrant Officer Fred Minden commanded the respect of every pilot in the squadron. Fred was a tough old salt—a pre-war Marine who knew how to handle men and machines.

The TBF was a strong and reliable plane. But our TBFs at Bougainville took a beating. Yet Minden's men kept them flying under unbelievably stressful conditions.

***

Pounding Rabaul continued to be our primary mission. But the Bougainville Command also called on our squadron for help in ground support missions—bombing and strafing Japanese gun positions and other Jap installations on both sides of the big island.

Most of these were low-level raids in six-plane formations. Three two-plane sections. And we took advantage of low flying clouds to conceal our approach. We'd fly in across the jungle at almost tree-top level, under the mist and low-hanging clouds that piled up against the mountains.

Numa Numa, Buka Passage, Mamagata, Sorum, Burako and the east bank of the Jaba River—all were targets we hit at one time or another.

On one of these raids, I missed the primary target area and wiped out a big, thriving Japanese vegetable garden. On another, towering explosions erupted from a fuel dump totally hidden in a coconut grove. And after one low-level raid, I returned with palm fronds in my bomb bay. The most hazardous of these Bougainville missions for me, however, was our attack on the guns at Buka Passage.

***

A key channel between the Jap-held island of Buka and the northern tip of Bougainville, Buka Passage had a deadly concentration of Japanese firepower.

During our first week on Bougainville alone, the gunners at Buka Passage shot down two US fighter planes, killing both pilots. And they heavily damaged a fast-moving, US Navy PT Boat, severely injuring the skipper and several crewmen.

Firm orders from the Bougainville Command came down to VMTB-242: *"Destroy the guns at Buka Passage*

The job went to Capt. Hank Hise,

Hise planned a fast-moving, four-plane attack—each

plane carrying a powerful, 2,000-pound bomb with delay fuse. He selected his three tent mates to join him on the mission. I was picked as Hise's wingman. George "Tonto" Manning and Bill Batten formed the second section.

We took off at dawn and headed straight into trouble as we neared the far upper end of Bougainville. We had reports of rain squalls and heavy clouds. But we hadn't expected the kind of appalling weather that had built up overnight. We faced huge tropical thunderheads that towered well over 40,000 feet, with blinding flashes of lightning. Violent down and up drafts began breaking up our formation. Then came the blinding, torrential rain.

Hank Hise smartly aborted the mission. We turned back and returned safely to Torokina.

On that same morning, our skipper, Maj. Bill Dean, was leading a 24-plane strike on Rabaul. They met the same dangerous weather head-on. But Dean bravely or stupidly didn't turn back. He tried to push through the front, resulting in 24 TBFs scattered all over the sky. Three planes made it to Green Island. The others straggled back to Torokina on their own. Amazingly, no planes were lost.

Two days later, we were in the air again. Although the most violent weather had passed, stacks of low clouds remained. The ceiling at Buka Passage was about 1,500 feet. Hank Hise abruptly changed our approach. Instead of coming in from the hills and dive bombing the gun emplacements, we flew in under the fringes of the low-hanging clouds and then dropped down on the deck for the final run, low over the water. .

As the angry, antiaircraft fire erupted, we attacked in a staggered column, aiming at the center of the guns.

Again, my memory of what happened next may be distorted by the intervening years. I know that I saw the flashes of the guns—and shells coming in my direction. And I saw tracers streaking past my cockpit on the right. Everything else at the time was blocked out of my mind. I totally concentrated on the guns firing at us, except for one startling moment when I glimpsed the bomb from Hank Hise's plane arcing down into the water. Too soon. A miss. Off target.

Now, more than ever, I focused on the center of the gun emplacements. I had to make it. Straight ahead. I continued in with both wing guns blazing. And a few seconds later, I was in perfect position for the release. I

sent my 2000-pound bomb on its way—crashing into the center of the multi-gun installations.

Fragments of Buka Passage guns exploded in all directions.

Batten and Manning followed, delivering their payload successfully on the north side of the gun positions. I think Batten's bomb hit in the target area. Manning's bomb went to the left, but within range. The entire gun emplacement area was blasted.

The guns at Buka Passage were destroyed.

Batten's plane was hit by a 40 mm. in the right wing, knocking out the right aileron control and the air speed indicator. Manning's plane was riddled by shell fragments with one gaping hole in the right wing. Miraculously, Hise and I dodged the tracers by the skin of our teeth. We came through unscathed.

All four planes made it back to Torokina.

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In a September 1995 speech on Marine Aviation in World War II, at the National Air and Space Museum, Brigadier General Henry W. Hise, USMC (Ret.), told the story of our attack on the guns at Buka Passage. And he briefly had this to say about his bomb hitting the water:

*"My plan was to destroy the guns by a low level attack, sliding or arcing 2000-pound bombs with delay fuses into the Jap emplacements. In the final approach, I shifted our flight formation into a staggered column, going in on the target from over the water.*

*'I opened the bomb bay, armed the bomb and the aircraft's two 50 cal wing guns. I had just got squared away in the run, going directly for the target, when a double string of 12.7 mm tracers began going over my aircraft's nose—coming from dead ahead. I had been shot at many times. But this was the first time nose to nose. If the gunner had dropped his aim a little he would- have hit me in the teeth. I found this somewhat unsettling. And I decided to strafe the target. I squeezed the gun trigger on the stick and in my haste I also hit the bomb button.*

*"My strafing suppressed the guns, but my bomb fell in*

*the water with a mighty blast. I was greatly embarrassed.*

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My faithful turret gunner, Ernie Linsmaier, remembered our run on the guns at Buka Passage, too, when he sent me a long letter in 1993—on the fiftieth anniversary of our tour at Bougainville.

"Those damned tracers were passing close, right along side my turret," he wrote. "A few inches to the right and we'd of had it. Did you ever think of that?"

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The Japs played some kind of strange but futile game with us at Rapopo.

Located inland, a few miles south of Rabaul's Simpson Harbor, Rapapo was a single, concrete fighter strip 5,000 feet long, 100 feet wide. It was surrounded by a circle of solid revetments and anti-aircraft defenses. Outside that circle were taxiways and clusters of hangars and aircraft storage facilities.

One bright day, air surveillance photos showed what appeared to be Zeke fighter planes in many of the Rapopo revetments. That captured the immediate attention of the Bougainville command.

When the photos were enlarged and studied carefully, however, by Marine Intelligence, it became clear that it was all a sham. The Zekes were patched-over hulks, some with propped up wings, some without wheels, a few without engines.

Nevertheless, we were sent on a full-scale mission to Rapopo. Capt. Barney McShane, a genial Irishman from Boston, led the strike. Barney was VMTB-242's popular executive officer. All 24 planes in the strike force came out of our squadron pool.

As we approached Rapopo, the antiaircraft fire was surprisingly light. At about 7,500 feet we peeled off into our dives, coming down in four-plane sections. Six sections, wave after wave. And we hit Rapopo hard, very hard. It was an easy target.

We destroyed Rapopo. The concrete strip was blasted

apart, in fragments. The revetments, the tower, the surrounding buildings were rubble. Nothing standing. Nothing left.

It was my last flight to Rabaul.

By the end of our tour at Bougainville, flying a mission to Rabaul had become a routine "milk run." The antiaircraft fire had thinned out. Most of the airfields were bombed out and destroyed. The few Jap planes remaining were trapped on the ground—hidden in jungle revetments. Incoming supplies were cutoff.

The Allies' military strategy had worked. Rabaul was successfully throttled. The mighty fortress had become useless. In their ongoing drive toward Japan, the Allies simply bypassed the remnants of Rabaul.

The trapped and hungry Japanese stubbornly held on in their former stronghold, however. Sporadic but meaningless strikes on Rabaul by the Aussies and the US Air Force continued until the end of the war in August 1945.

***

The long, two-year Solomons Campaign was over. At Bougainville, the Marine Corps' job was finished. Maj. General Roy S. Geiger, the original top commander on the big island and head of the First Marine Amphibious Corps, had moved on to the Central Pacific. Marine ground forces were pulled out of the perimeter defense positions, replaced by Australian and US Army troops, VMF-116 and VMTB-242 were pulled back to Espiritu Santo for reassignment.

Our landing back at Santo was cause for celebration, a hot shower, a bottle of Scotch, a good night's sleep, and the welcome news that all of the squadron's pilots and flight crews would receive one week of R&R, rest and relaxation, in Sydney, Australia.

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Our squadron's next deployment—unknown.

This is as far as Byron W. Mayo got with his Memoires
I've sketched some broad strokes of his life in the
Afterward which follows.
[Byron R. Mayo ~ Dec. 8, 2012]

Afterward by Byron R. Mayo, Nov. 10, 2012

*I am borrowing heavily from Dad's obituary to fill in the pieces here and added some additional material. It is also a good idea to read both his resume and the biography of Byron by Lee Kerry that appeared in AdWeek magazine in 1996. Both documents are available elsewhere on this site.*

In the Spring of 1942, Byron joined the Navy and tried out for the tough Navy Pilot Training School. He made the grade and spent the next 2 years in training at locations ranging from bases in California to Texas to Florida to aircraft carrier landings off the stormy waters of Illinois. In Florida he flew training missions on the same route, in the same aircraft type over the Bermuda Triangle as the infamous Flight 19 that disappeared without a trace in December 1945. With his Navy training done, Byron swapped services to get advanced training as a US Marine Pilot. Ultimately he and 21 other advanced Marine Pilots formed a new Marine Torpedo Squadron and finally shipped out in February1944 as Marine Torpedo Bombing Squadron 242 (VMTB-242).

The service record of VMTB-242 is well documented on the internet. Byron flew the Grumman Avenger TBF Torpedo Bomber in aggressive action in the skies over Bougainville and Rabaul, through the Marianas and the Iwo Jima campaigns. He was awarded the U.S. Navy Distinguished Flying Cross for "Extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight from 20 March 1945 to 27 March 1945". His service also awarded him three Air Medals during those campaigns.

After the war, Byron returned to the University of Oregon and finished his degree in Journalism with a new emphasis on marketing. His resume shows many

positions and achievements, but Foote, Cone& Belding, and Sea and Ski were the two jobs that consumed most of his career in advertising and marketing.

Along the way, Byron met Mary Bovee, also from Portland. She was a beautiful and equally charming soloist performer in the Ice Capades. She had been training for the Olympics, but the advent of WWII dashed her hopes for The Gold. It was a perfect match, a romance that lasted a lifetime. Byron and Mary were wed in Las Vegas and received special treatment at Bugsy Segal's new Flamingo Hotel.

Mary and Byron had a lot in common, especially their appreciation of creative arts of all kinds. Together through the years they both spent time sculpting, painting, doing pottery and always had some project going. They loved visiting Mexico and brought back many pieces of native Mexican art. In the 80's Mary did weaving and had many art showings as well as finding there was a market for her talents doing custom tile creations for several houses. Mary's true forte though was gardening. Her father was a horticulturist who owned and lived in a nursery of Rhododendrons and Azaleas in the Portland hills. Mary's green thumb became legendary and wherever Mary and Byron moved, which they did many times, Mary would create a new garden and spend part of each day working in it.

They loved San Francisco and first settled across the Golden Gate Bridge in Sausalito, Marin County. Marin is where they raised their two children and extended their circle of associations in the arts. Wherever they went, they always came back to Marin. They loved exploring the Northern California coasts and the inland wine country of Sonoma and Napa counties. Together they found a love of the town of Sonoma and in 1983 they bought a house close to the Town Square and Byron retired. But for Byron, there really wasn't such a thing as retirement. He was soon thoroughly wrapped up in local community growth, becoming a Member of the board of directors of the Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers, and a Member of the board of directors of the Sonoma Valley Visitors & Convention Bureau.

Then came Petanque.

What do Snoopy, Charles Schulz, Bill Cosby, Byron W. Mayo and Mick Jagger have in common? Petanque. It's the National Game of France. Those who know it love it, those who don't should check it out. It's an addiction. Back in 1988, Byron fell in with a loose circle of French locals and became an enthusiast of Petanque. In 1990 a cadre of locals got together and created the Valley of the Moon Petanque Club (VOMPC). Due to the large population of French living among the Vineyards of Sonoma Valley, the growth of the club quickly filled with both beginners and seasoned players, Byron among them. Byron loved the sport. He played several times a week, played often in tournaments, acted as club President in 1995, and volunteered to gather material and edit the club newsletter, a labor of love that he continued for 7 years. Byron also became one of the greatest recruiters of new players. He is generally credited with having a large influence on swelling the club to 150 players, sitting on club boards, helping to create the rules of conduct and being probably the most charming and gracious booster of the game in the club. It created a fitting final chapter for Byron. A new career actively enjoyed in his retirement years. Something that always made him smile.

Byron is survived by his lovely wife Mary (86), daughter Cathye (66) in Santa Fe, NM, and son Byron Robert (61) In Beverly Hills, CA. Mary and Byron also had two grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. Mary has moved to Sante Fe to be near Cathye and enjoy the city which Mary and Byron had often visited.