

EVERLASTING LIFE

by

Margaret E. Beardmore

TO

Carla
Cathy
John
Joe
Tom
Rob
Mark
Todd

THE NUCLEUS

INTRODUCTION

Because I wish to leave my children a legacy of family history, I have written this chronicle of my life, including pedigree charts. Information made available to me through family contacts and Temple records at Salt Lake City lends credence to the "family tree." Although my memoirs vacillate from the sublime to the ridiculous, they are also factual and intimate.

The following pages I will call Volume I, and is my gift to you for Christmas 2004. It includes the first ten chapters, covering my birth in 1924 through November 1941.

"Like our shadows,
Our wishes lengthen as our sun declines."

Edward Young
Night Thoughts

Effie Lou Leydig and Ray Delos Ellsworth grew up in a rural community near Formoso, Kansas, and in 1914 were married at neighboring Concordia, Kansas on October 10, 1914. I am Margaret Raye Ellsworth (Beardmore), born April 25, 1924, their youngest daughter. My sisters are (Lenora) June, now Mrs. Peter A. Duerksen, born July 12, 1917, and (Laura) Ruth now Mrs. Gerald Kier, born September 25, 1920. We were all born on various farms our parents rented, over their years near Formoso. According to the story told me, everyone was hoping for a boy baby when I was born. I must have been eager to make my debut, for I arrived before Dr. Dorothy D. Allen could get there to lend assistance. In the murky hours of pre-dawn, Grandma and Grandpa Ellsworth came by horse and wagon to help out, but were so disappointed I was another girl that they unhitched the horse and returned to their home! In despair of ever having a boy child, my parents named me after my father.

And so, mediocre as my earthly beginnings were, my life has been interesting and I hope that you, my progeny, will enjoy the story I have to tell. My earliest recollections originate from my birthplace, a farm located a few miles southeast of Formoso.

My Mother had dark hair, blue eyes and ruddy skin. About five feet, three inches tall and weighing about 140 pounds, she possessed a keen mind and nimble fingers, but never seemed fully happy with her station in life. I have always suspected Mother spent a life of frustration because she was gifted with so much raw intelligence, but was never able to exploit it to the fullest. She was the second child of Laura (Burns) and Charles Newton Leydig, who were farmers. Other children were Guy, Lenora (Hanna), and Archie. Uncle Guy and Aunt Josephine (a deaf and nearly blind lady) came to visit us occasionally from their home in Kansas City, and, being childless, they always brought us gifts. I soon learned to look forward to their arrival and the anticipated presents.

My Dad was about five feet, ten inches tall, very thin, and he had blue eyes, also. He didn't have more than an 8th grade education, but was generally happy, despite adversity. Even though he was not a learned man, he was an affable soul and was a friend to all who knew him. His parents were Laura (Johnson) and (Frank) Elmer Ellsworth, also farmers. My father had an older brother whose name was Roy, and his sisters, who married brothers, were Millie (Doxon) and Merle (Doxon), plus a third sister, Pearl (Higbee).

Mother married Dad shortly after her high school graduation. The story was that he had managed to save up sufficient money to buy her a fair-sized diamond engagement ring-but he succumbed to the allure of a shiny new trombone in a store window, leaving only enough money for one-eighth of a carat.

Grandma Leydig apparently was tyrannical, and I always suspected Mother married, partially to escape Grandma's tantrums. Because of Grandma's disposition and unpleasant confrontations he had experienced with her, Dad held no love for his mother-in-law. But, as fate would have it, it became Mother's and Dad's responsibility to care for her in her old age, after Grandpa and the other children had either died or abandoned her.

June was the eldest of us girls, seven years my senior, with Ruth being about half-way between. June was always aggressive and strong. Ruth was timid, and cried easily. I can remember that June and I would tease Ruth until she cried, and we took gleeful delight in watching her nose run! Stemming from this, a painful accident occurred one time when June and I ran from Ruth and locked ourselves in June's and Ruth's bedroom. I hid under the bed. Ruth tattled to our Dad, and he forced June to open the door. As he playfully pulled me, feet first, from beneath the bed, I snagged a splinter in my scalp which required a trip to the doctor. I was frightened out of my wits, so Dad bribed me with a promise of an ice cream cone if I would allow the doctor to remove the splinter. I can still relish how good that ice cream cone tasted.

Dad was a Mason and Mother belonged to the O.E.S. (Order of the Eastern Star). They attended dances in the lodge hall, and since baby-sitters were unheard of in those days, they took us girls along and we were allowed to watch the gaiety until we fell asleep on the side-line benches, our heads on folded coats. I can remember Dad carrying me to the car for our return trip home. It was always dreamily pleasant, feeling so drowsy and secure, in his arms.

I suspect that being the "baby," I was somewhat pampered. I was endearingly called pet names, such as "Dolly" and "Marcie," and both Ruth and June were often prevailed upon to help take care of me. One regular assignment was the "potty detail." Now, ours was a very typical outside privy, and because Mother and Dad were fearful I might fall in, they always recruited one of the girls to go with me. Never has there been a pleasant outdoor toilet, and ours was no exception. It was either freezing cold-with snow on the seat, even, its door flapping open with the wintry winds-or it was hot, smelly and could even have bugs, snakes, rats, or any combination of these. Ruth usually had the "detail," and I can recall her hanging onto one of my arms while I braced a foot against the toilet's wall, and I am sure I can still hear her admonishing me to "Hurry up!" Later, when I was a bigger girl, I took refuge from chores in the house by going to the toilet, where I sat and leisurely browsed the catalogs we used for toilet paper. On one such venture, I took scissors along so I could cut out paper dolls from them. Somehow, I accidentally dropped Mother's best scissors down the hole-a secret I kept locked in my heart for many, many years!

A chore I wasn't able to avoid often enough was one I shared with Ruth, and which required gathering cobs for burning in the stove. It was a completely unsavory task, for the cobs were collected from the barnyard where the livestock plopped their body wastes at random. Too, the animals were often very close by, and keeping a wary eye on them hindered careful selection of clean cobs. I wasn't particularly afraid of the cows and their doleful bovine stares, but the skittish horses had been known to kick. Most intimidating was the bull. When one was there, I always covered any red in my clothing before entering the barnyard from the side farthest from him. However, one snort and one stomp from the treacherous taurine sent me flying back over the fence for safety on the other side, abandoning the half-filled tub for a later try. (I have since been told bulls are color blind, but I'm not sure anyone has told them that, so I would not give them the benefit of the doubt to this very day!

Gathering cobs in the pig pen was even worse, for not only did the pigs have deplorable bathroom habits, they were also consistently rude. Often, they overpowered me with their clamorous jostling, and I was repulsed by the slime and stench they seemed to enjoy.

A much more pleasant recollection is that of the stick horses Dad made for me to "ride," sometimes complete with a carved head which magically made my horse gallop faster than plain ones. Ruth preferred the wooden whirligigs which were also Dad's handiwork. Over and over again, she ran her course which took her out the driveway near the house, down the dirt road "a piece," returning via an implement access driveway near the barn, to a path leading back to her point of origin. On a good, blustery day, the wind could create a fascinating "whirr" of the propeller, and the imagination could soar to heights unlimited.

All three of us girls began our elementary education at a tiny country school nearby. During cold weather, our Mother insisted that we wear long underwear. It was itchy and lumpy under our long cotton lisle stockings so, master-minded by June, we stopped out-of-sight from the house where we furtively rolled the stockings to big fat doughnuts around our ankles, and folded the bulky underwear up, until hidden under our skirts. Enroute home from school, we reversed the procedure. Tell-tale evidence was in the stretched-out underwear legs which I am sure didn't fool our Mother one bit.

June and I experienced no academic problems in school, but oftentimes Ruth cried over her arithmetic. June and I were more outgoing than Ruth, both of us quite gregarious by nature. We all were afforded piano lessons and, typically, June and I were the "showboats," while Ruth was inclined to forget a place in her recital piece, and to return to her seat in tears. Given the same set of circumstances, June or I "bluffed" our ways through! It is an interesting observation that today, as I write this, Ruth is responsible for the business accounting of a large ladies' ready-to-wear store, and is extremely efficient and respected. Neither June nor I could begin to do what Ruth is doing now.

It was quite ordinary, in those days, for brighter students to take two grades in one year. All three of us girls did so, my combination being first and second grades. However, during that year, we moved to a farm on Highway 36 just north of Formoso, so that I attended town school-a brick building which housed all twelve grades. My new teacher, Hattie Lutz, didn't believe in such promotions, so she put me back in first grade. I can remember that I was most humiliated about this, and was terribly awed by the number in my class (even though, by today's standards, very small), and actually being kind of "struck dumb" in my new surroundings.

After we moved to the Highway 36 farm, Dad ventured into dairying, in addition to farming. June helped him milk the cows and Ruth and I helped him deliver milk. Riding on the running-boards of the car, we delivered milk door-to-door in glass bottles, for something like ten cents a quart – the cream line at the bulge of the bottle.

From this time on, I have more vivid recollections of the grand-parents, as the Ellsworth ones had retired from their farm south of town to a small home in town, and the Leydig grandparents lived just a half-mile north of us on their "home place."

Grandma Leydig was a fierce person – a large woman whose jet-black hair refused to grey. (We always suspected she dyed it!) I cannot remember loving her. In fact, she was so formidable, I was somewhat afraid of her. I do remember eating crackers and peanut butter there, though, and I remember to this day just where she kept it. I was more comfortable with Grandpa Leydig. He was a quiet and kind man and he, too, seemed a very large person-with snow-white hair and beautiful blue eyes. Etched in my memory is a recollection of him whittling-his snowy moustache streaked with juices from the tobacco he chewed. They owned a Model-T Ford and Grandma drove it with great determination! We all stayed out of her way, as she blatantly ignored highway "Stop" signs.

Although Grandpa was of Lutheran heritage, Grandma and the children were Episcopalians, but later Grandma and Lenora left that faith to become Christian Scientists. Lenora resisted doctors and medicine and died of tuberculosis when she was about thirty. Guy died, as a result of a self-inflicted gun wound, after discovering he had a tumor on the brain. Arch was handsome and traveled a professional baseball circuit for a number of years. Mother felt animosity toward Arch because she believed he was over-indulged and drained my grandparents of what would have been adequate finances. Arch died in California while still relatively young, leaving a wife and three children. He and Mother did not keep in touch, although he was still living after Grandpa, Guy and Lenora had succumbed – and it became Mother's responsibility to care for Grandma who, by then, was blind, destitute and in a rest-home in Belleville.

Grandma Ellsworth was a rotund little lady and her tummy "shook like a bowlful of jelly" when she laughed. Grandpa Ellsworth was a wizened little man whose deafness progressed with age. I remember him cupping a hand over his ear and saying "Eh?"

Both sets of my grandparents lived to celebrate their golden wedding anniversaries, and I believe Grandma and Grandpa Ellsworth even celebrated their sixtieth! Of their children, Roy and Pearl died of cancer. Merle died of old age, after years of gradual deterioration in a hospital. At this writing, Millie is still alive and resides in a nursing home near Tacoma, Washington.

These past paragraphs give you an insight into my very earliest memories. We have only just begun!

II

CIRCUMSTANCES

The early 1930s found our country in the throes of The Great Depression. The sharp fall in the prices of farm products forced many persons to a state of poverty. Industrial workers in the cities lost their jobs. Millions of people lost their homes or were about to lose them, because they had no money to pay taxes and interest on their loans.

Our family felt the economic "crunch" along with everyone else. Dad had struggled constantly to support our family until later years when the times and circumstances made things easier for him. Drought, pestilences, the depression and just plain bad luck were his adversaries. However, I never heard Dad despair, even though there must have been times when he was near his wits' end with the overwhelming burden of meeting financial obligations. Throughout all the difficult years, Dad remained optimistic – perhaps with a bit of a "Pollyanna" attitude that everything would be all right.

Mother didn't cope as well. In addition to the deep financial worries, I am sure she must have been suffering from other deep-seated physical and emotional problems. She precipitated quarrels with Dad, often forcing him to seek refuge in the barn, just to escape her scathing remarks. Often, Mother talked aloud to herself and didn't realize we girls heard her plaintive sighs and wails of lament. Looking back, it seems Mother was the worrier for the family, and our strained finances probably affected her entire life. Their relationship became even more critical when Mother accused Dad of being unfaithful to her. Since I had not outgrown an early childhood habit of sleeping with them, I feigned sleep while I listened to their bitter exchanges. I understood the whole sordid situation. Even though I was deeply troubled, I shared my concerns with no one – not even my sisters. I remember it was summertime, and Mother and Dad slept apart – Mother in their bedroom, and Dad on the floor by the front door. With fierce loyalty to each, I alternated between them, lying with Mother first, then later with Dad, patting each of them, and feeling terrified that one of them might leave home. Many years later, I learned from my sisters that they had heard all this from their upstairs bedroom. They, too, had kept sealed lips, but we all agreed the entire situation was most likely a figment of Mother's imagination, and that Dad just was not a "lover boy" type – and certainly not an adulterer.

Mother vigorously opposed the use of liquor, and although Dad was no "boozer," he enjoyed an occasional "beer with the guys" and also kept a pint of whiskey out in the barn "for medicinal purposes." However, if Mother chanced to find it, she furiously broke the bottle to bits, then lashed out at Dad for having it.

The one time I ever knew Dad to have been drunk was during the trying depression years. One morning, I sensed Mother was unusually mad at Dad, and her icy silence attested to earlier fireworks. I couldn't understand it, for he had stayed in bed later than usual, and I thought he was ill. I learned, much later, that

he had come home from a stag the night before, quite drunk. To add insult to injury, some of his cohorts had played a prank on him, packing his pockets with foul smelling limburger cheese. As though that weren't enough to ignite Mother's fuse, Dad had proceeded to become quite sick in bed. Mother stubbornly refused to clean up the mess, and June was the one who finally came to his assistance.

Everyday housekeeping chores must have been drudgery for Mother. Our kitchen stove was a huge black monster of a range which used either wood or cobs for fuel. I took Mother's cooking for granted, but it must have been difficult to keep the stove properly fired and regulated for any semblance of good cooking and baking skills. This stove was also used to heat the flatirons Mother used for ironing. I recall flares of her temper when the handle would fail to latch securely and, midway between the stove and the ironing board, the scorching hot iron would plummet to the floor. The searing scar made on our worn linoleum was emphasized by Mother's hotly scathing exclamations. Later, Mother had a gas iron, but it was temperamental, as well as dangerous. Washday presented a challenge, too, for the water had to be carried in from the cistern or well, then heated in cumbersome boilers on the stove. The wringer-type washing machine was a gas-powered, belt-driven contraption that refused to start easily. Mother vented fury as she stomped repeatedly on the kick-starter, but often had to prevail upon Dad for mechanical "know how" before it would pop and sputter into operational rhythm. Wash water was drained out through a hose and was often reused to scrub floors, since water was always a scarce commodity on the farm. Soap was home-made, and I always dreaded when Dad butchered a hog, for Mother routinely made soap from the renderings, and the putrid odor enveloped our house and the premises. However, the soap's cleansing qualities far surpassed any of today's "miracle" detergents, since a major ingredient was lye. Using this soap guaranteed a sparkling clean laundry, but was an anathema to the user's hands! Once the laundry was finished, it was hung on the outside lines to billow dry in warm air, or freeze dry, as determined by the season. When the laundry froze stiff, it looked ludicrous – as though rigor mortis had set in for sure – and had to be forcibly folded like flattening a cardboard box, to be brought into the house in baskets. There never were enough clotheslines and Mother often draped the fences with the less particular pieces. I always wondered why they didn't blow away.

Our major source of light was from kerosene lamps, and Dad used kerosene lanterns so he could tend to evening chores after dark. On special occasions, we had a "Ray-O" lamp in which a mantle, instead of a wick, was ignited. However, this was rather impractical, as insects often flew into the mantle, puncturing it and rendering it useless.

As I related earlier, these were oppressed years, during which people were so poverty-stricken that they were often forced to leave their homes. It was not unusual to see an entire family hitchhiking their way past our house, their meager possessions strapped on their backs. Frequently, they stopped at our house to beg for food and shelter for the night. On these occasions, Mother fed them some of our simple fare out on the porch, and Dad allowed them to sleep in our hayloft. For the most part, these people were good, honest victims of the

depression who wouldn't steal, as the gypsies were known to do. Also purported to have kidnapped children, the nomadic gypsies were easily identified by their darkened skin and colorful clothing. When they appeared in the area, residents locked their doors and pretended to be gone, hoping the gypsies would go away. On these occasions, Mother hid us children and admonished us to be very quiet until the gypsies left.

After they were gone, Mother would call the neighbors on the telephone to forewarn them of the gypsies proximity.

Our telephones, at that time, were large wooden boxes that were attached to the wall. Several families were on one "party line" and by cranking it a certain number of rings, everyone on the line was alerted to pick up the receiver to hear emergency information. It was also possible to "listen in" on other people's conversations, a pastime enjoyed by all, but admitted by no one!

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected to succeed Herbert Hoover as President in 1933, both Mother and Dad rejoiced. Not only were they Democrats, they also believed President Roosevelt would lead our country out of the depression. Authorities still disagree as to the wisdom of Roosevelt's measures for dealing with the depression. Nonetheless, our family did experience an improvement in living conditions during the years he was in office.

III

THE SIBLINGS

During The Great Depression years, June blossomed into a beautiful girl with auburn hair and sparkling brown eyes. Bursting with ambition and spirit, June was a leader in her class. She was also an outstanding pianist and often competed for honors against the school superintendent's daughter. Mother deeply resented any occasion when she felt June had been outdone because of discrimination between the two girls. Even though Mother was quick to defend June, the two did not get along well at home, and they actually engaged in some hair-pulling fights. Always suspicious of June, Mother placed close surveillance over June's activities, her boyfriends, and once burned a shorts outfit June had made because she thought it was immodest. June often protested vehemently, creating a clash that was both verbal and physical. Although I sympathized with June, I have empathy for Mother, knowing that she must have been under such duress that she lost self-control easily.

Despite this conflict, June was a great help at home. Inside, she helped with the housework – washing, ironing, vigorously attacking the never-ceasing accumulation of dirt with broom and mop. When Mother was not able, June sewed a Martha Washington costume for me to wear when I performed in a minuet dance group. She baked oatmeal cookies on the wood-burning range, so delicious that I have never been able to duplicate their taste.

Outside, June helped Dad try to eke out a living from the marginal land. She worked in the fields, milked cows, and even arose before daylight to assist Dad in spraying the fields during the grasshopper plague. When she was graduated from high school in 1934, there were no immediate funds for college, so she remained home a year where she continued to help Mother and Dad.

The following fall, June enrolled at Kansas Wesleyan College, at Salina, Kansas, where she procured a job as a live-in maid in a private home, to help defray college expenses. It was during that year she met Peter Duerksen, who was a basketball star at the college. Peter was from a substantial German Mennonite family from Buhler, Kansas, and it must have been love at first sight, for they were married the following summer, on July 19, 1936.

The wedding was in the living-room of our house, and although I was at such an impressionable age that I thought it beautifully romantic, it must have been a rather pathetic occasion, since Mother felt we were inadequate and would not invite Peter's parents to the wedding.

Peter taught school and coached for a year in Kensington, Kansas, then pursued further education at the University of Michigan, ultimately becoming a Certified Public Accountant. He has had a very successful career, with a lot of credit going to June, who has surely been a stimulating force to him always. Culminating with an executive position with a major steel corporation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Peter has since retired. He and June enjoy leisurely living in Whispering Pines, North Carolina. Their children include Roger (a doctor), Dennis (also a certified public accountant), and Diana (Spring), whose degree is in elementary education.

Ruth was barely a teenager when the depression years began. Blessed with the most classic features of all three of us girls, Ruth had lovely high cheekbones and an aristocratic nose. Further enhanced with honest brown eyes and a beautifully shaped mouth and teeth, she was a strikingly handsome brunette. In contrast to June's small frame, Ruth had the bone structure of a larger person, even though she was extremely slender. Always flat-tummied and thin, her hip-bones prominent, Ruth was somewhat embarrassed by her very ample bust! Ruth was not as assertive as June, and so her mild manners allowed her an agreeable relationship with Mother.

Ruth was graduated in 1937 from Formoso High School, after which she went to Kansas City where she attended Central Business College. Later, she obtained a clerical position in Kansas City, during which time she helped financially, to keep Dad's insurance premiums paid. A subsequent job in Manhattan, Kansas, led to the renewal of her earlier acquaintance with Gerald Kier. Jerry was from Mankato, Kansas, and was attending Kansas State College in Manhattan.

On March 16, 1940, Ruth and Jerry were married in a simple ceremony at our home. Jerry's brother, Wilbur, and I were attendants. Ruth and Jerry lived in Mankato where they owned a large supermarket until 1976. They now reside in Topeka, Kansas. Their three daughters are Karolyn (Rask), Jane (Powell), and Susan (Eissinger). All three girls are college graduates. Karolyn is a registered nurse and both Jane and Susan hold degrees in elementary education.

IV

GROWING PAINS

During all this time I was growing, too, and I cannot remember ever being unhappy, though we didn't have a lot. Looking back on my childhood, we must have been very poor, yet I cannot remember feeling deprived. The only thing I wanted, but never had, was a bicycle. There weren't too many places I could have ridden a bike on a farm, anyway. One of my favorite pastimes was to perform astounding feats on an apricot tree outside our house. My dress cascading down over my head, I swung for hours upside down – until my "knee pits" were raw. I remember Dad finally wrapped my favorite tree limbs with strips of cloth to help ease my pain when I was performing as an acrobatic star.

I was quite blonde, average in size and, I suspect, took advantage of being the "baby" of the family. My penchant for sleeping between Mother and Dad lasted for years, then somehow, either I became embarrassed or they convinced me to sleep alone upstairs in the room assigned to me, next to the larger room belonging to Ruth and June. Often I could hear them whispering to one another, just loudly enough that I could hear them, but couldn't hear what they were saying. Because I was a curious little girl and wanted to know everything, I'd pester and whimper, then finally call out to Mother and Dad downstairs to tattle on them until they were reprimanded to be quiet. My sisters probably were trying to get even for having to help "baby sister" with the earlier, distasteful "potty detail"!

Like most children, I adored pets. Cats were my favorite, and I was permitted them because they kept the mouse population at a minimum, plus they didn't cost anything. I was fascinated as I watched Dad milk the cows, pausing occasionally to give my cat a drink from the teat he squirted toward its mouth. Dad always laughed when he did this, and I joined him, for it was a funny sight, indeed!

However, every cat I ever had died a horrible death. Some were run over by cars on the adjacent highway, while others were stomped by the cows. After a cat's demise, I always grieved copiously until Dad got me another. I lived in dread of what horrible fate might befall each succeeding pet, and learned it was easier not to ask, when one disappeared. One particular cat vanished after having been in the house one wintry night. Although I was puzzled and concerned over its disappearance, some "sixth sense" told me to ask nothing. I didn't notice that the rest of the family had flagging appetites for several days. It was sometime later that I learned the whole, grisly story. In order to keep the kitchen warm, Mother had left the oven door open when we went to bed. Dad had gone to his lodge meeting that particular night, and when he came home, he carefully banked the fire and closed the oven door. What he didn't see was that my cat had sought warmth in the oven and was snugly snoozing in a corner of it. Needless to say, discovering the cat was sickening to the rest of the family. Furthermore, they were mortified that news of the untimely demise of my cat reached the *Topeka Daily Capital* where the story was in print for state-wide circulation!

During nice weather, going to town on Saturday nights was routine and considered the "social" thing to do. We milled around in the stores and on the sidewalks, sometimes sitting on store-provided benches, sometimes even just

sitting in our cars, watching people go by. Saturday nights during the winter, we stayed home. With water heated on the kitchen stove, we took our baths in the galvanized tub behind the heating stove in the dining room. The bath itself was somewhat of an athletic feat, since there was no way to get all of one's body in the round tub at one time! I couldn't complain, though, since, at least, my status as youngest in the family allowed me to be first to use the water. A degree of privacy was afforded by a makeshift clothesline across the corners, from which the laundered underwear was hung to dry, near the stove.

While we girls took turns in the tub, Mother, Dad or June made fudge and popcorn for after-bath refreshments. Fudge was always made with cocoa, and in a heavy, black cast-iron skillet. While we waited for the panned-out candy to cool enough to be cut in squares, Ruth and I "licked the pan." Ceremoniously, we "drew" a line across the bottom and up the sides of the skillet with our spoons, fairly establishing equal halves of the sweet and sticky residue remaining in it. Somehow, that little "bonus treat" always seemed to taste even better than the glossy squares we later ate with the popcorn.

Sunday, of course, was always Sunday School day. Although Dad was a Methodist, a faith Mother affiliated with also, Dad and Mother seldom attended church services, partially because of farming and dairying chores. However, they saw to it that we girls attended.

Once a year we attended the fair in Belleville. This event was anticipated weeks in advance and meant an all-day excursion, for Belleville was over twenty miles away. Mother packed a picnic lunch for the exciting day that would include carnival rides, sideshows and races. Even though I was always eager to go, I was also afraid of getting lost among the crowd, so I stuck like glue to Mother and Dad. Cars, in those days, were not always dependable and ours, for sure, was not a recent model. En route to the fair one year, our car broke down near Courtland. Disgruntled, but determined to complete the day's plans, Dad bargained and traded for a newer and better car at Babe Ingwall's in Courtland, and we continued on our way. A 11 in all, it was a thrilling day!

We seldom socialized with any of our close relatives, although both Aunt Pearl, Aunt Merle and their families lived in Formoso, as well as both sets of grandparents. Instead, Mother and Dad had a circle of friends with whom we occasionally had potluck dinners on Sundays. The children ate out on the porches, picnic-style, and I remember disliking one boy who was cross-eyed, and so mean that he deliberately stepped in my butterscotch pie.

Probably one of the most memorable recollections of my early childhood was that of our first radio. Since we had no electricity, it was a battery-powered Atwater Kent, and its purchase was enough to send me running down the road to meet Ruth and June as they came home from school, to share the good news. Back at home, I stretched out on my tummy on the floor and peered intently into the speaker, for I just knew that if I looked hard and long enough, I would be able to see the performers!

Intimate discussions between parents and children were not a common practice, so I had many distorted ideas and misconceptions during my early childhood. My knowledge about sex, including childbirth, was vague and gleaned only from eavesdropping bits and pieces from my sisters. A secret concern of mine, for a time, was that I was adopted. Probably triggered by accidentally learning that a neighbor girl was adopted, and having been sternly admonished by Mother never to reveal this unusual circumstance to anyone, I began to have doubts about my own origin. Anxiously, I studied family features to confirm my resemblance. Mother was scrupulously modest, but a few furtive glimpses I managed to steal revealed a long and purplish scar down her stomach. All my concern was dissipated, for I deduced her scar was the result of bursting open to give birth to me! I was an adult before I learned she had had a hysterectomy while I was still a baby.

My limited storehouse of knowledge increased with the advent of movies. The first I saw were of the "silent" type, in Formoso's Opera House. They were a real test for the viewer, for one had to be quick to read the description and dialogue printed at the lower edge of the screen and also take in the action of the picture. While awaiting "curtain time," a man pumped out tinkling tunes on a player piano at the front of the theater. The movie equipment often malfunctioned, so the piano tunes were rendered again, in order to quell the impatient crowd. During hot weather, movies were shown outside, on a lot next to the theater. We sat on wooden benches, intermittently swatting mosquitoes while munching popcorn and drinking Nehi soda pop.

The very peak of Formoso's entertainment was when the Chautauqua came to town. The Chick Boyes Players were professional actors and actresses who traveled on a circuit, and their pending appearances in Formoso were heralded with great excitement. One of their productions was "Ten Nights in a Barroom," and because their troupe included only adults, they arranged with each town, in advance, for a local child to assume the juvenile role in the play. Wonder of wonders, I was chosen to be Formoso's celebrity for the bit part of the child who enters the barroom to beg her father to come home. I cannot imagine I was very impressive as an ingénue, for fear seized me and they had to literally shove me out of the wings and onto the stage!

One night while we were enjoying a Chick Boyes play, a dust storm moved into the area. Dust storms were prevalent at that time, but this one was the worst of all. The play was curtailed and the audience was advised to make haste toward homes. We lived only a mile outside town, but the density of the storm made the return to our house impossible. Choking and stifling with the dust that clogged our eyes, noses, ears and mouths, we struggled as far as Aunt Bertha Johnson's house, where we spent the night. After the storm abated, we went home the next day. Our house was like everyone else's--incredibly veneered with powdered grime. Lifting a crocheted doily off the dresser, I was fascinated by the "dust stencil" design on the dresser top.

When I was in the third grade, my teacher, Wilma Walters, called my parents for a conference. Ruth and June terrorized me by suggesting I had been a bad girl in school. However, Miss Walters and the music teacher, Marcene MacLaren, informed my parents they had chosen me for the leading part in the

grade school's operetta, "Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs." I became a prima donna overnight and really thought I was pretty spectacular in the production. I sang loudly! I emoted! Even when Snow-White wasn't on stage, I continued to sing with the chorus from the wings so everyone would recognize I knew it all! My costume was a white gauze gown, trimmed in gold Christmas tinsel. How glamorous can a 9-year-old be! My family exuded pride, and I bubbled – even though the prince who gave me my very first kiss was my own first cousin, John Doxon!

Another honor befell me when one year I was elected from all the female elementary students in Jewell County to be "Fall Festival Queen." As such, I rode a "float" in a parade down the streets of Mankato, Jewell County's county seat. Reigning as queen from my "throne," precariously perched upon a hayrack magically transformed into a "royal carriage," my attendants sitting at my feet, I felt very "queenly" indeed! Mother bought me a real "store-bought" dress for the occasion. It was pink, and over it I wore my royal robe – lavender with cotton batting trim to simulate ermine – and, glory of glories, a sparkling crown perched on top of my head! Even though I was terrified I might lose my parents in the crowd, I was proud to be queen. The only blemish for the occasion was the fact that Mother made me wear long white stockings and a very uncomfortable garter belt that kept slipping down off my slender hips. Even then, I was acutely aware that sagging white socks were not becoming to me – much less the Jewell County Fall Festival Queen!

Spelling was a favorite subject of mine, and Mother spent many evenings with the speller and me, drilling me on words, by the light of the kerosene lamp. Not complacent that I could glibly spell any word of my grade level, Mother prodded, pushed and encouraged me to spell several levels beyond. Spelling bees were an every day occurrence at school, and if indeed I was not chosen by the teacher to be a captain of a side, I most certainly was among the first selected by a captain to be on a side. Standing opposite, the two teams had a "spell down." As words were misspelled, team members had to return to their desk, and I was usually the last one standing. Consequently, I was a representative every year at the county spelling contest held in Mankato. One of my earliest embarrassments related to spelling competition. When the word "box" was pronounced for spelling, I was painfully mortified, for I was not aware it was a word used only by our family for a box-like receptacle we used for #2 when inclement weather made using our outdoor toilet unfeasible!

Mother and Dad always provided encouragement and helped me in any way they could. My first piano lesson occurred when I substituted at Ruth's and June's regular lesson time while they were visiting Uncle Guy's. The teacher was a spinster whose name was Olive Ritter. "Olive Drab" would have been more fitting, for she was the typical old maid of that era – very primly dressed in an outmoded dark dress, and not at all attractive to me. As she huddled next to me on the piano bench, I recoiled from her bad breath. But, respond to her instruction, I did. Piano lessons became a "must" for me and I learned quickly. Sight-reading was "a natural" (not a pun!) for me, and Miss Ritter advanced me much too rapidly, so that soon I was playing difficult pieces without having developed the necessary techniques. It thus befell me to become our church's

pianist at a very early age. My first acquaintance with "The Hallelujah Chorus" was from the church's piano bench – much too heavy an assignment for one so young. I must have played the difficult choir accompaniment poorly, yet I don't recall that I ever felt inadequate to the task.

Mr. Reasoner came to the Formoso schools to organize a band. Since Mother and Dad could not afford to buy me an instrument, I joined the band to play the school-provided snare drum. I wasn't very good, but beat the drum as the music read – with no embellishments, no real instruction – but with the youthful enjoyment of being a part of what must have been a motley group of musicians.

Academically, I was now vying for honors with a boy named Jim Gavin. He and I had a continuous contest to see which of us had more assignments worked in advance of schedule. I enjoyed competition and particularly relished the sweet taste of victory.

ADOLESCENT MISS-ADVENTURE

Mother was exceptionally clever, and made all of my dresses from "scraps" - sometimes even from a particularly colorful feed sack. She was also adept at "making over," from another garment. She could see a dress in a store's window, memorizing with her keen eyes how it was made, then go home and reproduce that same dress for far less money, usually with no pattern at all. For more intricately designed garments, she occasionally made her own pattern out of newspaper, holding it against my torso, as she cut the shape and size with scissors. I reveled in the smart costumes Mother made me, especially the ones made from June's cast-off college clothes. I felt glamorous in a green and brown plaid ensemble with a cape just like movie stars wore; also, a rust-colored crepe dress with ties at the neck that had real fur balls on the ends! On the rare occasions when my folks bought me a new coat, it was always several sizes too large so that I could wear it several years. One heavy-duty maroon coat I shall never forget! Surely made for durability more than beauty, it was cumbersome and heavy – and hung nearly to my ankles – this, during the years when long coats were NOT in fashion! To make bad matters worse, the coat came with a ridiculous tam-o-shanter cap, to the top of which Mother attached an enormous white yarn pom-pom!

My feet always posed a problem, as they were extremely narrow and Mother and Dad drove me to towns a distance away, in an effort to find proper fitting shoes. The purchased ones were seldom ones I liked, but instead, ones that FIT! Buoyed by confidence that surely had begun in the home, I had an insatiable curiosity about the world around me. I had good relationships with my classmates and friends, and I was happy. Still at the "too-little-to-be-big-but-too-big-to-belittle" stage, I sought out Orlene Vance as my best friend. Orlene's mother and step-father had moved to Formoso to operate a cafe. The family lived in a makeshift apartment at the rear of the building. Outside, and just across the alley, was a barn nearly full of baled hay. At the south end of the barn there was just enough room for Orlene and me to sequester a sort of "play house," using boxes and crates for furniture. On the pretext of "playing house," we actually used it as an "experimental lab," and began to exploit the forbidden art of smoking. Compounding one transgression with another, Orlene filched tobacco and cigarette papers from the cafe for our clandestine "Operation Smoke." Though "rolling your own" was a common practice among less affluent men and I had seen my father skillfully perform this feat many times, when he couldn't afford ready-made "Wings," Orlene's and my attempts proved discouraging. The papers collapsed and we spilled the pilfered tobacco all over. Together, we devised an ingenious alternative. Using a pencil as a spindle, we first wrapped the paper around, licking the gummed edges together so we had perfect tubes. The pencil slid out easily, and one end of the paper tube was twisted closed. With steady and devious little hands, we funneled the tobacco in, poured from the can until the tube was full and secured at the remaining open end.

Our venture an enormously exciting success, Orlene and I made box after box of "fags," which we hid among the hay bales. We smoked some, too, and it was deliciously naughty-also dangerous, since we could easily have burned the barn down, and maybe the whole town! Subsequent experiences smoking were brazen attempts at street smoking, done on darkened side streets on Saturday nights. My first try at inhaling nearly did me in, for I was of the mistaken idea one had to swallow the smoke. My pallor would have blended well with the hay in the barn!

There were other girlfriends, though I preferred the ones who were more adventuresome. Barbara Ann Teeple was one of my favorites. Her mother, Ruth, and my dad were first cousins, so, although Barbara and I were only distant cousins, in many ways we were closely akin. We were the same age, and we liked one another a lot. Barbara Ann lived with her parents in Mankato, but occasionally came to Formoso to visit her grandparents, Rosa and J.O. Ellsworth. I always looked forward to her visits with a sense of pending adventure and excitement.

One such visit was particularly memorable, for Formoso had an epidemic of scarlet fever, and as Barbara's visit approached, I was quite aware I had a slightly sore throat and some fever, sure signs of the disease. Since several youngsters had been critically ill with the dreaded fever, I knew I dare not reveal my symptoms because my parents would surely put me to bed and I would not get to see Barbara Ann.

It was a Saturday, and Barbara Ann and I rode together on our horse, named "Peggy." Although I didn't feel good, Barbara Ann's merriment was contagious as we galloped around in the pasture, then into the yard. Suddenly, Peggy bucked and off Barbara Ann and I flew – right into a pile of cobs! We weren't hurt; in fact, we successfully begged Dad to take us roller skating at Courtland's rink that night.

A week or so later, Mother discovered my stomach was scaling. A quick trip to the doctor confirmed I had had scarletina, a mild form of the scarlet fever others had had. Foolhardy as it was of me to keep my illness a secret, apparently I did not transmit my germs to anyone, for I was the last "case" in our community.

It was at about this time that I decided I didn't like the way people called me "Mar-grut," and so, after careful consideration of every cute name I could list, I decided I'd be "Peaches." I was smugly pleased with my selection and thought "Peaches Ellsworth" sounded super – and certainly there was no one else named "Peaches" in Formoso! The fact that no one else called me that was no deterrent. Blithely, I folded my school papers in half vertically, and on the outside carefully penned "Peaches Ellsworth," with the class subject and date beneath. A passing fancy, to be sure, for it lasted no longer than a couple of weeks, and I abandoned that whim to go on to bigger and better things.

I had become quite boy-crazy and my first real crush was on Robert Burchinal, who was a banker's son, later killed in World War II. Early grade school encounters with him during recess proved he was painfully rough. His way of showing me attention was by scratching, or wrenching my thumb so that, even today, it is slightly misaligned.

First attempts at quasi-dates were accomplished on the infamous Saturday nights when groups of boys and girls would deliberately wander from main street's lights to the darkened seclusion of side streets, or to the steps of the school building. Furtively, we rendezvoused for a show of boyish bravado, accompanied by girlish giggling. Sometimes we played "Truth or Consequences" – often resulting in a quick, but nonetheless daring kiss!

HAIR OIL AND CLOVE GUM

During the summer of 1936, all Jewell County joined in celebration of the year's bumper crops with a "Wheat Festival" in Mankato. Complete with a carnival and all its embellishments, it provided a time to rejoice and was an event looked forward to by all. In conjunction with this festivity, I received an invitation to visit my cousin, Barbara Ann, in Mankato.

After receiving many instructions and admonishments pertaining to proper conduct and manners from Mother and Dad, I was given permission for my first overnight stay away from my parents. Arrangements were completed between Barbara's parents and mine, and I counted the days, the hours, until the appointed time for my exciting adventure into independence.

I was somewhat awed by the Teeple home, for it was a "city dwelling" - complete with an indoor bathroom, electricity and even a fireplace! Barbara Ann's father was an attorney, and though her parents were gracious enough, their lifestyle differed greatly from that of my parents. The Teeple's enjoyed their cocktails openly, and both parents smoked. I was fascinated as I watched them casually flip cigarette butts into the fireplace. They also allowed Barbara and me freedoms my parents would never have permitted.

One afternoon during my holiday in Mankato, Barbara Ann and I went to the "Ute" theater where we could see a matinee movie for a dime. Being a country girl, this was indeed a "big deal," for I had had very little exposure to movies before, and certainly none in such a grandiose setting. As we approached the theater, the letters "U-T-E" blinked their dazzling lights invitingly to me, and I didn't know people speculated the owner named it that because it was the shortest, and therefore, also the cheapest to have in neon. To me, it offered a whole new world, the likes of which I was not accustomed! Grasping Barbara's hand, I followed her into the darkened theater. I felt lush carpet beneath my feet, and the delicious aroma of freshly popped corn titillated my senses. Barbara and I groped our way until we found seats and settled in for the "show." I sat primly and properly, straightening the skirt of my very best lime green dress.

Soon we were distracted by two boys who had noisily taken seats behind us. Barbara cheerfully greeted them and identified them to me as boys she knew well. Nice, neat boys they were, whose unusual names were Carlos and Maurice Beardmore. Fate had surely moved a hand! Conversation with the boys became just too awkward, separated as we were by a row of seats, so it didn't take Carlos and Maurice long to hurdle the distance to sit beside us - Maurice by Barbara, and Carlos by me. I flirtatiously greeted Carlos with "Hi, sailor!" I have no idea why I chose such a gauche salutation. It probably was the cutest thing I could think of, at the moment, but it worked. Ever so casually, he gradually extended his arm across the back of my seat. This guy was a "Mover"!

To this day, I do not recall one single thing about the plot of that movie, but I vividly remember being awestruck by Carlos, whose curiosity about me was both insatiable and flattering. Smelling sweetly of hair oil and clove gum, he

was unusually suave for a 13-year-old! Boldly, he asked me if I smoked. Not knowing which answer he was seeking, and so wanting to say the right one, I arched an eyebrow (a new talent I had discovered) and coquettishly responded with "What do YOU think?"

By today's terminology, I guess Barbara and I were "pick-ups," for the Beardmore boys took us to the carnival after the movie was finished. Carlos and I rode the "Loop-A-Plane" and I squealed the proper amount while he displayed how "cool" he was, as we hung upside down in the precarious motions of the ride, watching his coins, gum and comb cascade to the ground beneath us.

Later, Barbara briefed me about the Beardmore boys. I was quite curious about their names, for they were most unusual. No "Carlos" had I ever known before, but I learned many years later he was named after his mother's brother who died while still a child. "Maurice" was given the French pronunciation, with the accent on the second syllable, and he was nick-named "Meice." The two boys were the sons of Mr. and Mrs. Meade Beardmore, who owned a Buick-Pontiac dealership in Mankato, and were a highly respected family. Maurice was in Barbara's class in school, and Carlos was one year older. Barbara had known the boys always, as they had grown up and played in the same neighborhood. Many years later, I learned it was with Barbara and other neighborhood children that Carlos and Maurice enjoyed "trading peeks" for the first time.

Thus began a long-spun courtship-one woven to mold, shape-and pattern my life, as well as that of my progeny.

Quite often, after Carlos and Maurice were allowed to drive, they occasionally drove the twelve miles from Mankato to Formoso in their yellow 1935 Buick. Quite a car it was, resplendent with green fenders and a rumble-seat. Too shy to approach our door, they drove by our house, honking the horn and calling out my name. Believe it or not I ran and hid and had Ruth call out to them through the window that I wasn't home. Understand, they were o.k., but I was embarrassed, and besides, I had become more interested in Formoso boys. "Out of sight, out of mind," you know.

During my junior high years, I found both of the Sloan boys attractive, but Dad put the "nix" on Junior because he was several years older than I. (He wrote notes to me in beautiful, flourishing penmanship and played the piano in the same way.) His younger, pudgy, trombone-playing brother was Bob and I was allowed my first car dates with him. Bob matured into a really great person, eventually married one of my best friends in Mankato, and was an Army Air Corps officer who was killed in action during World War II.

THE PURPLE AND THE CREAM

In January, 1939, Mother, Dad and I moved to a rented farm two miles west of Mankato. This home was also on Highway 36, and was only a two-bedroom bungalow, but since both Ruth and June were gone from the home, we no longer had need for a larger house. This home was considerably newer and nicer than the previous one, and the builder had optimistically included a "bathroom," even though there was no modern plumbing and no appropriate fixtures in it. At least, the empty room permitted us privacy for our old galvanized tub, as well as a place for Mother to keep her treadle sewing machine.

Dad, always one of Kansas' minority of staunch Democrats, had received a political appointment through Governor Walter A. Huxman, as an inspector at the Mankato Port of Entry. In addition to farming and dairying, he had been driving the twelve miles between Formoso and Mankato to work his midnight to 8:00 a.m. shift. How he kept such a schedule I will never know, for he seldom slept. The port-of-entry job was temporary, and lasted only during Gov. Huxman's administration, but it paid \$100.00 per month, and it was like manna from heaven, a welcome supplement to our family's meager income. So, although Dad continued to farm and dairy, the proximity to his nighttime job made his heavy workload easier for him after our move. In addition to this reason for moving, it had become apparent to Mother and Dad that I was blossoming into quite an active young miss, and the larger Mankato school would provide me better educational and extra-curricular opportunities. Formoso was on the decline. Its once flourishing main street of businesses now yawned gaping ugly holes created when first, the hotel, then one of two banks, then the mercantile store had burned to the ground, never to be rebuilt. The local *New Era* newspaper had merged with *The Western Advocate* in Mankato, and other businesses had closed their doors as owners moved to larger towns where business was better. Mankato, being a county seat, was a more stable community.

I shall never forget my first day as a mid-year freshman at Mankato High School. I had been a self-assured student at Formoso, but Mankato's school seemed awesome to me and I was intimidated into a "shrinking violet." Sensing my insecurity, Dad accompanied me to school that first day. I was both relieved and grateful when cousin Barbara Ann came running to greet us. Eagerly, she showed me around in the building, all the time happily introducing me to everyone.

It soon became obvious to me that Barbara was well-liked and popular, and that since I was her cousin, I was "in." My head spun with names, room assignments, my locker combination – while I also received the customary "new student inspection" from all the other students.

Almost immediately, I was the center of attention, particularly with the boys. First on the scene was Carlos Beardmore, but I was reeling in this throng of young men offering me their "wares," and I intended to make the most of it by "shopping" carefully. I was indeed heady with my new success!

Among the potential suitors was Charles Kier, a brother of Gerald, who later married my sister, Ruth. A hulk of a young man, he was aptly nicknamed "Hippo."

He was Mankato High School's most outstanding athlete, and a senior. He was too old for me, at that time, but I did have a date or two with him during that "whirl-wind" get-acquainted time. I never smell a leather jacket without having fond memories of him in the one he wore. I still grieve with his family that Charles died in 1959, of war injuries which led to a subsequent fatal heart attack.

On March 28, 1939, Carlos, who had been devotedly patient while I ran the gamut of available young men, asked me to be his "steady," and I agreed. It seemed the thing to do, for all the "popular" kids were doing this. I liked Carlos all right. Certainly he was one of the best-dressed fellows, and he was quite good-looking. Even Mother and Dad approved of Carlos, for he came from a substantial family, and his manners were impeccable. Mother was particularly impressed that Carlos was the only boy who called for me at the front door. Most of the guys drove into the driveway to the back gate, then honked the horn! This display of proper etiquette was particularly gallant of Carlos, since he had to park out on the highway, then wade through a yard of weeds that sometimes were knee-high, in order to reach our front porch.

I plunged into my new classes with zeal. Academics, for the most part, were easy for me and I seldom had homework. Oddly enough, the Home Economics classes were not the least interesting to me (because there were no boys?) and most of us aggravated our teacher by gossiping and exchanging jokes as we worked on various projects. I did manage to sew a 2-piece outfit during our semester of sewing – but only because I thought I would look pretty nifty in it. Made of blue wool with imitation grey caracul trim, the dress had a full-circle skirt, underfaced in flaming red satin. Actually, it was a skater's costume, and although I had no intentions of skating in it, I did manage to swirl and twirl just enough to reveal splashes of the shiny red lining. Little did I realize then how importantly cooking and sewing would figure into my life's vocation.

Life has a cunning way of planting equalizers and, as Mother often quoted, "Pride goeth before a fall," Physical Education classes provided that equalizer for me. Our gym classes were called "G.A.A." (Girls' Athletic Association), and, as far as I was concerned, that was a gross exaggeration. I was not an athlete. I was neither fleet-footed nor agile. Catching a ball squarely was a dubious feat, much less knowing what to do with the ball, once I had it in my hands. Looking back, the earliest indications of my athletic clumsiness probably manifested itself when I was still a small child. Playing "Ante-Over" the garage with my sisters, I had trouble catching the ball before it smashed into my nose. In G.A.A., I was quite often among the last chosen to be on a team for competition. I might have been consoled just to look shapely in the gym shorts we wore, but knobby knees did not combine well with the baggy pantaloons-type togs which were required uniform.

My extra-curriculars included Girl Reserves, Glee Club and Mixed Chorus. I joined the band so I could be with most of my friends. Carlos played second-

chair clarinet, Barbara played a lusty baritone, and I learned to play the school's new glockenspiel. Maurice was in the band, too, but was so busy being the band's clown and making us laugh that his presence was disruptive and a source of annoyance to our director. I enjoyed being in the band, and took pride when we made public appearances in uniform. Dressed in white duck slacks, white shirts, purple capes and visored caps, trimmed in gold braid, I thought our band was the "cat's meow"! There was only one reservation. When we marched, I found carrying the glockenspiel awkward, for its lower extremities poked against mine, and sudden gusts of wind often-times blew the decorative fur tail-pieces in my face. Equalizer #2?

Barbara and I became inseparable friends. Her secrets became mine, and vice versa. I stayed overnight in her home often so I could attend activities and not have to prevail upon Dad for transportation to and from the farm. After awhile, this also became an "excuse" for "undercover" activities. Barbara's parents partied and were gone from the home a lot, so we began to take advantage of our independence, sometimes staying out beyond curfew, knowing her parents would not be home to check. The Teeple's had a summer house in their backyard, and Barbara and I sometimes persuaded her parents to let us sleep out there. It allowed us the added opportunity to sneak out, to explore Mankato's night-life on darkened streets. Barbara and I often shared a package of cigarettes, purchased with our combined assets. We seldom had much money, but managed to salvage a few cents from lunch money or from allowances given us for other school expenses.

And so, "I came, I saw, I conquered." I had moved to Mankato, and felt at home, singing our school song:

Makes no difference where you wander,
Makes no difference where you roam,
Stand right up and proudly tell them
Mankato is your home — rah! rah! rah!
M.H.S., it is your high school,
Stand right up and proudly say
That the purple and the cream shall wave,
And ever have full sway!

VII

THE FOLKS

Mother and Dad were pleased with my progress in the new school, although they seldom were demonstrative about it. In fact, if I proudly showed a paper with a grade of "100%" on it, Dad often brusquely asked, "Why isn't it 200?" But, his brusqueness was only a facade for the glowing pride I knew he felt for his "little girl." Times were improving some for Mother and Dad, and they didn't feel so over-extended. Since I was the only child at home, I became the focal point of their interests.

Mother never seemed to tire of sewing for me, and frequently burned midnight oil to complete a new dress for me to wear for a special occasion. Her ideas were always innovative, and I took smug satisfaction in being avant-garde with the latest style trends. Sooner or later, my friends would copy what I wore. Mother could make something out of nothing, and had an uncanny knack for finding bargains in sales catalogs that were exceptional buys.

Mother had acquired an oil stove, so baking became an almost-daily ritual. Applesauce cake was a specialty of hers, plus one she simply called a "stir up" cake. Rarely did she use a recipe, but just some of this and a pinch of that. Coming home from school to find one of her warm cakes was something I took for granted.

Faithfully, she tended the milk as Dad brought it in from the barn. Although I always harbored doubts as to the sterility of the whole process, she washed bottles, then filled them, pressing paper caps into their tops. She operated the big separator, from which she poured the cream into pint and half-pint bottles for later sale in the stores. During hot weather, the bottles of milk and cream were placed in big tubs of ice to keep them cool until carried to the stores in metal milk racks.

The one area in which she was less than diligent was house-keeping. Dishes were washed, for we had no surplus to allow an accumulation, but dust collected over the house in layers, and she was oblivious to it. I seldom invited friends to our home, for I was embarrassed by its appearance. I cannot remember that I was very dependable help, though occasionally, I'd at least dust the front room if I expected company. Amid the dust and the clutter, Mother crocheted, hooked rugs and sewed for me. Absorbed in her thoughts as she worked, she still abstractedly called out Dad's or my names, followed by "I love you." A few times I questioned her about her strange habit. More often, I chose to ignore it, since she was never able to give me a satisfactory answer.

Confining her activities to the home, Mother seldom went out, with the exception of school programs in which I was involved. She read a lot and was unusually adept at crossword puzzles. We had no encyclopedias, but she was infinitely knowledgeable from her amazing retention of things she had learned through reading. We didn't own a dictionary, but Mother's four years of high school Latin made it easy for her to go back to a derivative so she could supply at least a definition that was approximate. I cannot over-emphasize her intelligence or her creative talents. She had a brilliant mind.

Dad enjoyed making new acquaintances in Mankato and often loitered in the stores after delivering milk, in order to visit and to keep abreast of local news, or to talk politics. These conversations were repeated to us at home, often injected with his own good sense of humor.

Dad seldom lost his temper, but an old Plymouth car we had just about tried him to the limit. Moisture had gotten to it, and it just would not start one morning when he needed to get the milk to town. Slamming doors, he stomped into the house where he grabbed newspapers, twisting and crimping them into a long wand. As he grabbed a pocketful of stick matches, Mother asked, "Ray, what are you going to do?" Eyes blazing, he bellowed, "I'm gonna burn the Goddam sonofa bitchin' thing up!" Now this was indeed a scary situation, one completely out of character for mild-mannered Dad, and certainly one in which I knew to keep very quiet and completely still. Of course, Dad's real intent was to dry the moisture out with the heat of his home-made torch, which, even though dangerous, was successful. His temper flamed, but was snuffed—just like the burning newspapers, when the old car began to purr.

Dad had an interesting appetite and his slight body attested to his light eating habits. He would not allow fish in the house, for he claimed he could even smell it in an unopened can! Fried chicken was one of his favorite foods, but he stolidly refused to eat any except the breast portion, and we girls learned early in life not to venture near that part. Furthermore, it had to be cool, for he claimed hot chicken smelled like the feathers. The breast section undeniably his, it was not uncommon for him to just eat part of it for a meal, placing the remainder back on the platter to finish at the next meal. He enjoyed fruits, both fresh and canned, and his favorite bedtime snack was cold milk, into which he broke soda crackers, and ate with a spoon.

I was shocked when Carlos once remarked that my Dad was not a very good-looking man. While it is true Dad had a prominent proboscis, squinty eyes and thickened, weathered lips, it had not occurred to me to appraise his looks one way or another. He was just MY DAD. So, compared to Robert Redford, perhaps he was not pretty. I prefer to remember him as a bantam John Wayne- in overalls!

VIII

IMPRESSIONS

As Carlos and I continued dating, I became better acquainted with his parents. Although I was intimidated by both of them, I was more comfortable around Mr. Beardmore. A rather stocky man, he was clean-cut and very nice looking in his business suit, shirt and tie. I knew I should be cautious around him, but at least he smiled often, and his blue eyes twinkled. He was a regular church-goer at the Methodist Church where he sang a pleasant tenor in the adult choir and served on the Church's Board. He also sang in a mixed quartette, often performing at funerals and programs. He was one of Mankato's prominent businessmen, frequently serving on various civic committees.

Mrs. Beardmore really intimidated me. Despite her average 5'4" height, her regal posture lent her a certain unmistakable air of loftiness. She was a handsome woman, her ash blonde hair always smartly coiffed, and obviously a product of the beauty-shop, a status symbol not many women could enjoy. Seen out in public, she was always attired in smart, fashionable clothing, including coordinated accessories—the superlative being an elaborately festooned hat and gloves. Local people would have described her as a "high falutin" woman.

My personal encounters with her gave credence to her appearance. She remained aloof, and spoke with what I suspected was an extremely articulate affectation – almost haughty, and very unlike the flat Kansas brogue common to everyone else. She looked at me, her gimlet eyes piercing me with thorough scrutiny, as though she were inventorying the very marrow of my bones. I wasn't at all sure I was even coming close to her standard of measurements for the girl with whom her son was keeping company.

Their home was on High Street, and I was impressed, for it seemed much larger and nicer than mine. Too, it was immaculate, smelled of incense, and there was a canary in the kitchen. My first visit in their home was prompted by Carlos' quarantine for mumps. Carlos welcomed my visit, but Mrs. Beardmore gave me a cool reception and kept an obvious surveillance over us.

Mr. and Mrs. Beardmore had a reputation of being extremely strict with their sons, so much so that some of their rougher contemporaries considered Carlos and Maurice "sissies." They were set apart, too, with their manner of dress. Always in sharply-creased trousers and freshly starched shirts, their hair neatly combed, they were a sharp contrast to many of their ragged peers. And while most boys loitered on the streets, or even in the pool hall, Carlos and Maurice were either running the gasoline pumps at their Dad's garage or they were studying at home. Carlos had had crushes on girls before, but my move to town coincided with his first real car dates, so Mr. and Mrs. Beardmore were particularly wary of me.

I also became better acquainted with their sons. Though I was Carlos' steady girl-friend, I was also a good friend of Maurice's. He and I had many classes together in school, so I learned to know him well. I liked both of them a lot.

Carlos (Meade) was born April 8, 1923, and Maurice (Young) was born less than sixteen months later, on July 31, 1924. Both boys were born at Glasco, Kansas, but moved to Mankato before they began school. They were unusually

close but varying in dispositions. Carlos was serious and conscientious. Maurice, or "Meice," enjoyed making people laugh, even at the expense of being disciplined when his jokes got out-of-hand. A favorite family story was that even as a toddler, Meice had learned to balance and ride a tricycle which had one rear wheel missing. Perhaps he was clownishly entertaining an audience even then. Carlos told me that, as children, if he was naughty, he was spanked, but if Meice misbehaved, his parents would laugh. This penchant of Maurice's for being a clown carried on in the classroom, and his wise remarks often caused him to be sent out of class.

I seriously doubt if Maurice's parents ever fully realized how much trouble he was involved in at school. However, there were a few times when Mrs. Beardmore came bristling to Supt. Sheffer's office to straighten out a "sticky" situation. I learned one more thing about Mrs. Beardmore: She was a strong woman, and a protector of her sons!

It came as no real surprise that Carlos' parents (particularly his mother) would not permit him to play football. They were convinced football was too rough and vicious a sport, and did not want their sons hurt. It was true that neither of the boys was physically robust enough to be considered good "football material," but in Mankato's small school, every possible candidate was encouraged to play. Virtually the same boys who participated in football were also in basketball and track, and there was only one head coach for all sports.

Carlos became the brunt of ridicule and harassment, particularly by the "tough guys" and they made life miserable for him. The worst of these offenders was Lyle Blair, one of the school's best all-around athletes. Only a few of the fellows, whose parents were close friends of Mr. and Mrs. Beardmore, remained civil to him. Day after day, the "toughies" seized every opportunity to deride him as a "sissy coward." When he joined in basketball activities, even the coach was so quick to criticize him that Carlos became tense and was never able to make the "A" team. On one occasion, the coach humiliated him in front of the others with, "Whatsa matter, Beardmore, are ya yella?" Carlos could only defend his situation by answering "No. My mother won't let me go out for football." He might have been happier if he had defied his mother, as Maurice did the following year. Though too small to be very good at football, Maurice went out for the sport, despite parental dissent. Perhaps he had profited by his brother's experience, and the resulting denouement – a permanent scar on Carlos, wrought by the devastating humiliation he had endured.

Carlos did better as a pole vaulter in track events, probably because it was not a "team effort," but one he could master independently. He felt special triumph when he succeeded in defeating his chief antagonist, Lyle Blair, and established a vaulting record which remained unequalled for many years at Mankato High School. During his senior year, he won second place at the State Track Meet.

Perhaps he thought he could compensate for one deficiency by excelling in another. Doggedly, he pursued academics where he did excel, and was a model student. In addition to basketball and track, his extra-curriculars included band, glee club, mixed chorus, boys' quartette, Hi-Y and its cabinet, student council,

class plays, and, in his senior year, the yearbook staff. He played the piano quite well, too, having taken lessons for many years. However, his reluctance to perform was surely an outgrowth of the misconception that only "sissies" played the piano.

Supposedly, high school fraternities and sororities were illegal, but Mankato High School had both. Not particularly smiled upon by the school, meetings were held in members' homes outside school hours and posed no serious threat to the school, other than they created cliques. P.D.O.S. (also called "Skullbusters") was the boys' fraternity and, in both organizations, new members were "pledges," who had to be voted in by the "actives," and who served a probationary period before becoming a full-fledged member. Highlights of the year occurred when the two organizations held their banquets. To be a member's date for these social events was a coveted status symbol. Carlos belonged to the "Skullbusters", though his pledge time was an opportunity for his adversaries to vent their resentments by making servile demands on him and wielding the "pledge paddle" excessively. To this day, I do not know what "P.D.O.S." stood for, for Carlos was faithful to his promise never to tell.

I was quite sure that Carlos was not universally liked at school. Girls, for the most part, liked him and admired his intellect, his manners and his good looks. The "toughies" were relentless, though, and even confronted me with "Why do you go with Beardmore, anyway?" I was enough of a politician that I laughed it off to them. Inwardly, I felt compassion for him, for he had done nothing to deserve their recriminations – and I felt supportive of him. I was also sure his parents were not aware of the whole situation, and that he was too proud to complain to them. He frequently sought me out while I was at my locker, between classes, where he often managed a furtive caress. He was a sensitive person, and his touches reassured him of our alliance.

And so it explained, perhaps, why Carlos was so overjoyed when I, the new "plum" of Mankato High School, said I'd be his steady girl-friend. He had found an ally, someone with whom he could escape, someone to love, and he did. He was always much more serious than I, and he confided to me of his love for me and of his ultimate plan to marry me someday. When Ruth and Jerry were married, Carlos was invited to the wedding. By pre-arrangement, we had agreed to secretly repeat their vows to ourselves, as a symbolic exercise of our eventual plans. While this was most certainly a very adolescent thing to do, it made him feel wanted and he spoke often about how one day I would be his wife and his cook. It was thus befitting that his pet name for me became "Cookie." Gradually, as others heard him call me that, they began calling me by that name, too. At first, Carlos deeply resented this infringement, but over the years the name has become universal by all who know me. Few even know my Christian name today.

IX

THE WISHING WELL

My sophomore year was compounded by activities. I earned straight A's, except for a B in Home Ec. I continued singing in mixed chorus and glee club, and shared accompanying assignments on the piano. My greatest wish had always been to sing as a soloist, but the quality of my voice was only adaptable to choruses and small groups, in which I sang a strong second soprano or alto. I "heard" harmony so early (clear back to the "Snow-white" days in 3rd grade) that I suspect I strained my voice singing too loudly (and showing off) in groups when all the other voices were only able to sing the melody.

English was my favorite subject, and I wrote what I was sure were masterpieces, only to have them returned with the criticism of "Too wordy!" – but with an A, nevertheless! Thus inspired, I wrote an eloquent essay on "What America Means to Me," and won a contest which entitled me to represent Mankato High School in a citizenship pilgrimage to the State Capitol in Topeka. Maybe that was the beginning of my fervent patriotism to my country, for even today I am a great believer in the United States of America. I fly our flag faithfully, and can hardly sing the entire National Anthem without getting goose-bumps and a lump in my throat.

It was during the pilgrimage to Topeka that I met Donald Diehl, who was a representative from the neighboring county-seat of Smith Center. In many ways, he was much like Carlos – just a cut above the norm. Don was a banker's son, and obviously affluent, since he impressed me with the fact that he had already toured Europe with his parents. He and I took an immediate liking to one another, and I realized I was not so blinded by Carlos that I could not be attracted to another. Shortly after the Topeka trip, I was invited by Don's parents to be a guest in their home for dinner. Cousin Barbara knew Don's cousin and had a "crush" on him, too, so it made a convenient and very secret doubles arrangement that was rendered brief when distance staled the whole affair.

Carlos and I saw lots of one another. Mother and Dad trusted him, so gave me "free rein." We set a record one time of being together 23 nights in a row, though always observing the curfew set by his parents. We saw movies. We went to dances. We parked in secluded havens we called our own. We listened to the car's radio and adopted a current love ballad as our very own theme song. The name of it was "Wishing," and we found significance in its lyrics.

Wishing will make it so,
Just keep on wishing and cares will go,
Dreamers tell us dreams come true,
There's no mistake
That wishes are the dreams we dream
When we're awake.
The curtain of night will part,
If you're not certain within your heart,

So if you dream long enough,
Dream strong enough,
You will come to know, Wishing will make it so.

Sometimes we double-dated. One night, after a banquet, we parked at the city's golf course with Barbara and Warren Brown. Carlos and I were in the back seat of Warren's father's car. Barbara loved to tease, and so she threatened to crawl over the seat to kiss Carlos. He bolted out of the car to escape, but laughing Barbara was in quick pursuit. Looking back as he sprinted across the grass in the dark, he ran right into a barbed wire fence. His upper leg was badly cut and the pants to his one and only new suit were shredded. We dreaded taking him home, and I don't recall that we even stayed long enough to help him make necessary explanations to his parents!

Always garrulous and ready for fun, I considered everyone my friend. Although Barbara and I were best of pals, I also enjoyed countless others. I was voted in as a pledge to "D.P.K.," and happily ran the errands demanded by actives, and only flinched a minimum when the paddle was administered at meetings. Though I was consumed with curiosity, I didn't learn until the night I officially became an "active" that D.P.K. stood for "Damn Phi Kare." This was a secret all members swore never to reveal. Looking back on it, membership in this clandestine organization was not all that elevating, despite its reputation for having only the "elite" as its members. Meetings were covert evenings of smoking, gossiping and exchanging smutty jokes.

During the following summer, many of us had part-time jobs. I worked as a candy clerk at the Ben Franklin Store, and Barbara was a soda jerk at one of the drug-stores. Carlos had taken a job as a delivery boy and sacker at Smith's Red and White grocery store. Another of his jobs there was to wipe off the stale hotdogs so they would appear fresh! This was accomplished using some old rag doused in vinegar.

Barbara, at the time, had no particular boyfriend, but had a crush on LaVere Munyon. His father was the minister of the United Brethren Church, and like many preacher's sons, LaVere rebelled against his father's rules and was considered quite a renegade. LaVere was also among those who constantly harassed Carlos, and who had often chided me about dating him. LaVere didn't date girls much, but Barbara conceived the plan that if I'd go out with LaVere's buddy, Lyle Blair, then LaVere would take her out, to complete the foursome. Partly out of loyalty to Barbara, partly out of daring, partly because I was bored with Carlos' overzealous possession of me, I agreed to go along with the plan.

Even though I expected Carlos would come calling for me at home that night, I told Mother I was going to a party at another girlfriend's house. When Carlos came to get me at home, Mother told him where she thought I was. Carlos checked, and of course I was not there. He drove around town until he spotted the four of us at a baseball game. I had hurt him beyond comprehension. Not only had I dated "out" on him and broken our covenant, I had also lied – and the sickeningly worst insult was that I was with the very guy Carlos despised the most! Mea culpa, mea culpa!

My courtship with Lyle was of short duration, for he had graduated that spring and left shortly thereafter, to seek employment in California. In his defense, I must assert that Lyle was a complete gentleman with me, and I learned later from his sister, Betty Joe, that he truly liked me a lot. After he went to California, he purchased a gift for me, but before he could send it, he received my letter in which I curtailed our brief romance.

At first, I laughed off my split with Carlos, but as I began to hear rumors about how desperate he was, I began to have real pangs of guilt. Any overtures I made toward him were blatantly rejected, and he began to hurt me back. He dated some of my friends, he dated girls whose reputations were questionable, and I heard some rather disheartening stories about some of his conquests.

The tension between Carlos and me was obvious. I knew that he still cared for me, but that I had hurt him so deeply, he could only seek revenge. I also felt sure that if I could only be alone with him, I could make amends. I managed a few of these occasions, and on each I was sure we had reconciled, only to hear that he had later gone out with someone else and had laughed at my attempts and made mockery of my efforts.

I realized I had made a mistake, and it was surely beginning to "boomerang." Maurice treated me in a manner rather cool and I even felt hostility when I happened to see his parents. My Mother and Dad had strongly approved of Carlos, but didn't seem to mind that, all of a sudden, I was seeing other fellows. I don't think they ever realized how badly I had mistreated Carlos, or how very seriously possessive he had been of me.

My junior year in high school reflected turmoil that was to be of several years' duration. I wanted Carlos back, but I was too proud to grovel, even though I made deliberate attempts to make myself available to him. I enrolled in chemistry class, in which I received my only "C" ever, because I could be in class with him. So it wouldn't be too obvious, I flirted outrageously with other fellows in the class, including Joe. R. Beeler, who was a senator's son. He was also a close friend of Maurice's, and an outstanding scholar in our junior class. Joe and I subsequently had several dates. I always felt Joe's parents intervened, and I never knew whether it was because they felt I was beneath the Beeler's status, or whether it was because they were rabid Republicans when my Dad was spearheading Democratic activities in Jewell County.

However, I was much too proud to be put down. My dates were frequent, and varying. Besides Joe, I also dated Lee Walker, Dallas Nelson. After all, Carlos wasn't exactly pining away; in fact, he was among several fellows who were abandoning Mankato's female population in favor of new female attractions in Beloit. I heard by the grapevine that Carlos was dating Joanie Power, a Beboit Girl, with increasing frequency. Likewise, boys from Superior, Nebraska, were crashing Mankato's gates for girls. I dated a couple of them at various times, but was never very impressed.

During my junior year, I also had a major role in the class play. In Dramatics class, I also waxed eloquently with the reading "Mary, Queen of Scots." So that I could participate in the Cougarettes Pep Club, I dropped membership in the band. That led to a scary fiasco that fall.

Mankato's high school football team was scheduled to play against Lincoln, Kansas, on their field one Friday evening and those of us who were members of the Cougarettes had to find their own rides to that town, probably fifty miles away. Barbara, Lois Weaverling and I persuaded Gerald Stedman to take us. Gerald was a harmless guy, but had a reputation for driving too fast. Gerald was a young bachelor who worked in Dillon's Grocery Store, and he agreed to take us, along with Johnny Norlin, a crippled friend of his. Now, we girls knew our parents would never allow us to go in Gerald's car because of his driving reputation alone, much less that we would be unchaperoned! So, we all lied to our parents and told them we were going with parents of another Cougarette. It was late when we left for the game, as we had had to wait until Gerald got off work, but we finally left town with the three of us girls in the back seat, and Johnny and Gerald in the front. About thirty miles enroute, in Beloit, Gerald missed a sharp turn and the car virtually flew over a hedge, landing neatly with all four wheels in a fish pool located in a lady's front yard. None of us was hurt, but the car had new dents and a blown tire. The lady of the house came charging out, demanding that restitution be made for damages to the pool before we moved one inch. Boldly, Barbara counter-threatened to call her father, who was an attorney. This, of course, was all bluff, for Barbara could not let her father know about our predicament. Finally, Gerald and Johnny combined their resources and paid cash to satisfy the woman. The car was pulled out, the tire was changed, and we proceeded to the game. We arrived at half-time, somewhat shaken by the course of events. We all vowed never to tell a soul, but I learned, years later, that Mother and Dad heard about it the very next day. I guess they figured I had learned a lesson, for they never did confront me with the "error of my ways"!

My girlfriends were both juniors and seniors. During noon-hour, we'd hang out at Lucille's Beauty Shop at the rear of Hale's Drug Store, where we smoked hurried cigarettes. After school, our meeting place was the Correll Hotel's Coffee Shop. Oddly enough, nearly all the "in" girls smoked, and considered the habit a glamorous thing to do. Conversely, very few of the guys smoked, since they were all aspiring athletes.

In the spring, I was among four candidates selected for Girls' State, but was not the winner. Barbara was, and this added fuel to a growing rift that was festering between us. Barbara and I had been almost like sisters, and, as such, had developed a sort of sibling rivalry. We began to have differing opinions, a situation which peaked when she and I had a bitter exchange of words that severed the close relationship we had enjoyed for over two years. They say "Time heals all wounds," and Barbara and I finally became compatible enough to be in the same groups again, but we were never again as intimate as we once had been. After high school, she became a competent nurse and later married Dr. Lindell C. Owensby. The parents of four daughters, Barbara and Lin lived for many years at Concordia, Kansas, where he was on the staff at the hospital. She was later divorced, but we have continued to keep in touch always. I cherish many fond memories of our friendship.

Carlos was graduated from Mankato High School that spring. Surprisingly, when grade points were tallied, he was neither valedictorian nor salutatorian, but was third in rank in his class. Mrs. Beardmore was upset about this and confronted those in charge of the accounting, for a reassessment. An error had been made, for Carlos had not been properly credited for religion classes he had taken at the Methodist Church, and which were applicable. The mistake was rectified, but too late for Carlos to receive the honor due him at commencement exercises. Some of Carlos' relatives came for his graduation and were guests of the Beardmores in the new bungalow they had purchased, located just a block or so west of the Beardmore Motor Company and Kiers' IGA Grocery store corner. I summoned my courage to call on Carlos after commencement, to give him a graduation gift. The gift enclosure card, I hoped, would be of special significance to him, for I had signed it, "Wishing -Cookie." He was stiffly cordial to me as he introduced me to his Oklahoma kin. Shortly after graduation, then, Carlos left for Manhattan, where he enrolled in a summertime course in drafting at Kansas State College.

That summer, I spent a great deal of time with Pauline "Polly" Rose, who had also graduated that spring and was preparing to enter nurse's training. I did not suspect that I was being criticized for abandoning my classmates, but when school began that fall, I was ostracized by the girls in my class. At first, I didn't understand why, but it soon became evident that the girls resented my companionship with Polly because she was already out of high school. Too, I had been elected editor of the 1942 Mankatoan yearbook, an honor heretofore held only by males. I am sure I must have been rather smug about this coveted honor, which only added fuel to their fire of resentment.

And so my senior year in high school began at a new "low." Spurned in love, and now also in friendship, I found each day difficult. But, out of it all, I learned a lesson as Mother's "Pride goeth before a fall" rang succinctly in my ears. It was my problem, though, so I did not reveal my strife to my parents or to any elders, even though my teachers must have been well aware of the situation. I didn't really feel I had done anything wrong, except maybe I had just "ridden" a little too high! The reaction of my classmates was all too typical of small town schools, and it was a cruel blow to my ego. Gradually, I began to solve the problem – first, by trying to be a friend to them again, and finally, by openly confronting them with the situation and asking for consideration. Once approached, their arguments collapsed as each one became embarrassed over the triviality of the whole scheme. We were friends again. After that, there were four of us who were almost inseparable pals during our senior year – Roma Nelson, Betty Joe Blair, Lois Weaverling and me. Betty Joe had become acquainted and was steady-dating my old friend from Formoso, Bob Sloan. The other three of us were dating M.H.S. boys – Roma with Glenn Grout, Jr., Lois with Finley Smith, Jr., and I was dating Jim Scott, whose widowed mother was a highly respected musician and loved by all who knew her.

There was a two-fold benefit from dating Jim Scott. The obvious one was that he was a drummer in a dance band, so I frequently accompanied him to dances where his group played. On one such occasion, I met a young country-school teacher at a dance in Lebanon who proved to be an excellent dancer. No matter that he had an acne-pocked face, for I easily overlooked that flaw in favor of being asked to dance frequently.

One day at school, a stark notice was posted on the bulletin board that my Dad was coming for me and that I should prepare to go home immediately. I didn't have time to ponder this unusual situation long before Dad arrived and it was very apparent he was unusually terse.

When I asked what was wrong, he just kept saying, "Just you wait until I get you home!" I was prepared for most any catastrophe, but not for what actually happened. At home, Mother confronted me with a letter that had arrived in that day's mail. Addressed to me, and written by the young male school teacher, the letter had been opened and read by my mother, whereupon she had fainted and fallen against the dining-room table. Together, Mother and Dad were in such shock at the letter's contents that they snatched me home for an immediate explanation. I was both mad and embarrassed that Mother had opened my letter, and even after reading it, I could not understand why they were so upset. The letter itself was simple enough – just a friendly note reminding me to save a particular dance for him the following Saturday night. Then I knew, for there it was! The fellow, whose handwriting was barely legible and punctuation even worse, had asked me to save White Heat. Carelessly, he had omitted punctuation that would have identified it as the title of a current jitterbug tune, and my parents had misconstrued the entire message. No wonder Mother fainted! Although I was shaken and annoyed by the entire episode, I laughed at Mother and Dad for being so easily misled. However, it took them some time to recover, even after I produced a copy of the music for them to see.

The second benefit derived from dating Jim Scott was not quite so conspicuous. Because Jim and Maurice were very close friends, I was able to keep track of Carlos through our conversations. I learned that Carlos had completed his course at Kansas State and had moved to Burbank, California, where he was employed as a draftsman for Lockheed-Vega Aircraft. He and California seemed a long distance away.

I was surprised, then, when one day I received a letter from him. Though it was quite casual, his letter carried a mild hint that just maybe he still cared for me. Foolishly, I taunted Jim with the letter which he bullishly insisted I answer under his supervision. My letter to Carlos extolled Jim, and closed the doors to any further contact between Carlos and me. However, my closing sentence was one I cleverly calculated to strike a nerve in Carlos, without Jim's knowing its hidden meaning. It read, "Wishing you success...." My letter was unanswered.

The manner in which our lives were unfolding typified the tempo of the times. My life evolved around Mankato, Kansas, and I was not prepared for the shocking, all-encompassing course of events to come.