My Grandfather's Stories

A collection of Elmer Adrian's work,
lovingly compiled by his grandson Dan

Elmer T. Adrian

Most recent update: April 23, 2016

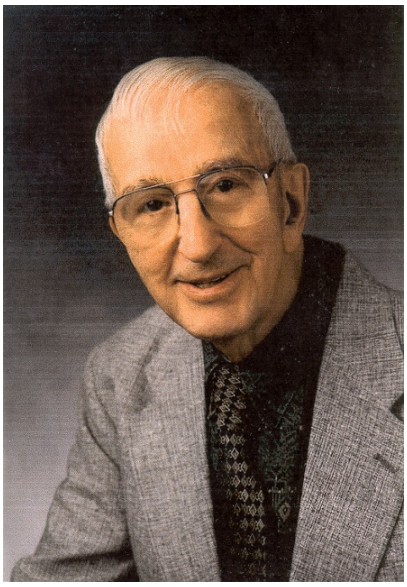
About this document

The stories were gathered from Elmer's floppy disks, computer files, and a large binder of his work put together by Helen McPherson, his neighbor and longtime friend. My dad (Mark Adrian) collected all of the computer files. Thanks to both of them.

A table of contents is provided. All red boxes in this document, such as in the last sentence, are links that take you take you to directly to the page described. If desired, after clicking a hyperlink, you can go back to the previous page by pressing "ALT + left arrow", which gives a functionality similar to a "Back button" on web browsers. I have also included Elmer's obituary in the preface.

This document is still a work in progress, so I welcome any comments, edits, additions, etc. you can provide. Please contact me on email at daniel.w.adrian@gmail.com.

About Elmer Adrian



Obituary Published in Chicago Suburban Daily Herald on May 23, 2002.

A memorial service will be held for Elmer Theodore Adrian, 93, at 10:30 a.m. today, at Union Park Methodist Church, 2305 East 12th St., Des Moines, Iowa. Born June 10, 1908, in Harris, Iowa, he died Monday, May 20, 2002, at Edward Hospital in Naperville. Interment will be private. Mr. Adrian had just recently moved to Naperville where he was a resident of Independence Village. He lived most of his life in Des Moines, Iowa. Elmer was a 1925 graduate of East High School. He was a very active member of the Union Park Methodist Church and enjoyed writing, having recently published the novel "Thorson's Bay" in June 2000. His poetry had been published in the Lyrical Iowa every year for the past 25 years. He also had poetry in "Tasteberries for Teens". Elmer was a member of the Alpha Chapter of the Iowa Poetry Society for many years. Mr. Adrian was a former jeweler and had owned and operated Adrian Diamond Shop prior to his retirement in 1975. He was a World War II Army veteran and was stationed at Camp Sibert in Alabama. He is survived by his sons, Richard (Barbara) Adrian of Freemantle, Western Australia and J. Mark (Sally) Adrian of Naperville; grandchildren, Kristin Adrian of Floreat Park, Western Australia, Julie Adrian of Wembley Downs, Western Australia, Catherine Adrian of Indianapolis, Ind., and Dan Adrian of Naperville; and several nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, August Theodore and Catherine (nee

Thodt) Adrian; and his wife, Dorothy L. (nee Wright) Adrian. Memorials may be made to the Union Park Methodist Church, 2305 East 12th St., Des Moines, Iowa, 50362. Local arrangements were made by Beidelman-Kunsch Funeral Home, Naperville. Friends may visit www.dailyherald.com/obits to express condolences and sign the guest book. For more funeral information, (630)355-0264.

Contents

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will." Matthew 10:29

Answered Prayer

I heard a flopping in a tree
and saw a robin hung by piece of string.
A feathered pendulum,
fitfully beating the air.

I ran to extricate its weakened fluttering;
uncoiled the string around its neck
and held it hopefully until it stretched,
made one last gasp and then lay still.

"Oh no!" I prayed and worked wings out and in;
a reflex action of my deep despair,
until I felt it tremble in my hands,
a slow resurgence as it gaped and gaped.

Then came a gushing rush of joy,
because I'd helped to bring back life.
And in that thankful interlude I knew
that there was joy in heaven too.

The robin stretched its neck;
it kicked against my hand and flew.

This is exactly what happened with no need or attempt to do other than express my honest reactions. It goes beyond coincidences because the joy I felt was a oneness with my God.

The Great Depression cut my college years short and defeated my plan to become a minister, but I taught Sunday school classes for nearly seventy of my ninety-one years. In those classes I've prayed for each person, hoping their lives would give us a better tomorrow, and those beautiful young lives with whom I've shared my life and love, have made me an optimist.

I have to believe in answered prayer. When our sons were five and twelve we visited my wife's sister in Denver. The two sisters were having a ball just being together, shopping etcetera. Our sons weren't that thrilled being ignored to that degree. I suggested we go climb a mountain. We drove until we could see some snow capped monsters in the distance. I stopped beside the road and we looked up at a foothill close by with it's brushy steps for maybe five hundred feet. We all agreed that it was formidable enough. We struggled to the top and admired our mountain. To add further significance to the occasion, we named it "Mount Adrian." We started back down. I soon stopped to check on the boys. I spotted Richard over on my right and looked for Mark. Then I heard a roar of what had to be tumbling rocks. I reached the edge of the enclosure to see Mark in the center of the rock slide with huge boulders bounding over and around him as he went with the slide. He had decided that stepping from rock to rock was easier than scrambling through that brush. Nothing could survive in that crushing avalanche. In total revulsion I prayed, "No God No!" It was my fault. I had caused my son's demise. Totally annihilated I scrambled down. When I reached the road, cars were stopped for miles each way. People were there helping to clear the road – and there was Mark allowing some lady to remove the dust from his face and clothing with nothing but a minor scratch on his arm. Try to explain it. God, in His infinite compassion, gave life back to Mark and me. This poem sticks in my memory:

"More things are wrought by prayer
than this world dreams of.
Wherefore, let thy voice rise
like a fountain for thee night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
that nourish a blind life within the brain,

if, knowing God, they lift not hands in prayer,
both for themselves and those that call them friend.
For so the whole round earth is everywhere
bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

Dorothy

I met Dorothy in church at the height of the Depression. She and two other attractive females boarded at Mrs. Howard's home whose daughter, Ladine, made the foursome. Ladine could play the piano well and had an excellent voice. Soon my friend Harry Rankin and I found ourselves visiting the Howard's to sing the popular songs of the day. I didn't have a job. Scrounging for pittance work, like washing windows and doing yard work for the few who could pay me thirty-five cents an hour, or less, made me a poor prospect for dating. But these attractive girls put up with us at the singing sessions and church parties. I looked at Dorothy, but with no intentions of making further advances. I wasn't in any position to let her know what I thought of her. All I can say is, what I felt from the start, she was a neat little lady, It was her eyes that gave evidence of a brilliant mind. To try to describe her would be defeating, She was Dorothy.

After graduating from high school I began to learn to be a manufacturing jeweler. The pay was minimal. Ed Triplett, another beginner, became a close and life long friend. Neither of us could spend money, but we soon found a Dance Studio where girls came without partners and so did we. There was a nice selection. Soon I was dancing with Dora, one of the instructors. Oh! she could dance and before long I was doing steps I thought I'd never be able to do. I didn't date her. The twenty-five cents it cost to get in was about the limit of my resources. Dora came with a girl friend. I didn't even know where she lived. I'm sure it was Dora's idea when the lady who ran the Studio ask me to become an instructor. It wasn't a bad deal. I got in free and demonstrated a new step with Dora now and then, nothing too fancy. I also danced with those who were wall flowers. Some of them really bloomed with a little encouragement. I did dance with Dora as often as I was allowed. Something was happening to me. I asked Dora if I could have the last dance with her. She looked squarely at me. We were in love. When it was time for the last dance, Dora came rushing to me. We held each other with a new tenderness as the band played, "I'll see you in my dreams." We had never dated. I missed a few meals to save money and we double dated with Dora's

friend Vera and her boy friend. Dora and I sat in the rumble seat of a car.

Considering the circumstances, I behaved quite honorably with lips only approach to our combined enthusiasm. We talked. I told Dora of my plans to enter college when I saved some money, to study for the ministry. My future didn't include marriage for many years. That ended our trip to the stars. I didn't want it to be over but our time schedules for marriage didn't coincide. It wasn't easy to let time make that wound heal. In this period of time, Ed and I played hand ball with a daily dedication to the sport. I was winning tournaments on the way up to become one of better players in the city. This agile game no doubt helped me to skim the dance floor with a confidence that set my feet afire with Dora. Perhaps God allows many of us a time of tinsel and wonderment in our striving to fulfill our goals.

At the manufacturing jewelry shop I had become proficient in the making and repair of jewelry. When I started to college, I asked to work part time to help pay my way. The Depression soon eliminated that job and my hopes to become a minister. I knew the despair of poverty and the hopelessness of not going anywhere.

In my two semesters at college, I had fallen in love with Nellie, who, I hoped, would be my bride some day. There were no bedroom scenes. Without a job in sight, I cruelly told her to look elsewhere. I was ashamed of myself, but I could see nothing ahead. Two years later I met Dorothy. I didn't let her know how I felt. I still didn't have a future. More years went by. Dorothy became engaged too another friend of mine. He, at least, had a job. I still missed some meals. Then the sudden turn. I got back in the jewelry business. I gave them everything I had and was appreciated for my efforts. The Depression had left its marks on me. I became a workaholic and I never got over it.

I don't even want to know the details, but Dorothy didn't get married and I was seeing her now with a glint in my eye. I gave her a diamond in July 1936, We were married on Sept. six of that same year. I was twenty eight. Dorothy was twenty-four. Were we meant for each other? I like to think so. I was still the workaholic. Dorothy had to scratch and scrape to get through her two years at the University of Commerce, a secretarial school, where she graduated with highest honors. She never told me of her scholastic excellence. I had to discover that in her last months, while going through her personal things, along with a diary that was a day by day record of the years before we married. It was hidden on the rear of the upper shelf in our bedroom closet.

We both worked. Dorothy was secretary to the president of Rollins Hosiery Mills. Each of us looked forward to the day when we were not on the bottom of the poverty scale. We spent little and started a bank account.

I worked a lot of overtime and she didn/t mind. One of Dorothy's activities was taking tap dancing lessons at the YMCA when I worked nights. She caught on fast and was soon giving me some single audience performances. As I have said before, she was a neat little lady. She was five feet one with blue eyes, my wife, lover, cook and companion. Her dad had won races in his high school days and I discovered she could run when we had to catch a street car, but I knew I had married a winner from the start. I still worked long hours. I began to toy with the idea of starting my own business. Dorothy didn't discourage me. With nothing but confidence that if I worked that hard for someone else, I could do it for Dorothy and me and be able to keep more of the money in the cash register. I did soon have more business than I could handle alone. I needed help. I had to train someone to do quality work. The third person I hired became quite capable. I worked harder and longer to pay the rent and overhead. Jewelers from other parts of the State sent me their work. Dorothy now worked with me, taking care of the mailing and ordering of material. It was our business.

We were still living in a two-room apartment when our first son, Richard, arrived six years later. Dorothy brought him into the world with a minimum of problems. Soon our landlady told us we had to move because he used his lungs to get attention now and then. We moved into our home, which we had selected in less than a week, on a cold December day. That first night my wife's close friend, Helen Nelson, kept our son Richard because I couldn't get our house warm until the next morning. I shoveled what seemed a half ton of coal in that furnace before the house warmed. Dorothy became a full time mother. By this time I had a five man shop and we had a bright future ahead of us. I still worked long days and many hours of overtime. It was at night that I really did my finest work, free of interruption. I was proud of my son and very much in love with his mother. Looking back, I know I should have spent more time with my family. The need to succeed made me a slave to our business. We had a reputation for doing good work at fair prices. There was a satisfaction in increasing our financial worth.

World War Two drafted me when our son was nine months old. We weren't winning the war at that time in 'forty-three. Harry, still my close friend had been blown to pieces by a kamikaze pilot in the Pacific, two weeks previous. It was one of the lowest times in my life so far, and I had lived some very low moments. I had bawled goodbye to my wife and Richard and reported to Camp Dodge to take a train to go to Alabama. The train came through Des Moines and stopped at the station. I looked out of the window of the train and there was my wife and little Richard. That destroyed any equanimity I had. I hurried to give them one last tearful hug. That trip to Alabama was another low ebb in my compilation of low ebbs.

Some things happened to keep my business alive. Dorothy's mother, Grace, came to live with her. Dorothy's dad had a job in Alaska for the duration, so Grace took care of Richard, while my wife, with the help of one my jewelers who couldn't pass the Army physical, kept us afloat, I never really knew how she paid the rent and a salary and kept us solvent. I do know that she strung beads for many clients and the jeweler was a good repair man. More than two years later I received my honorable discharge, along with a citation for "Above and Beyond," as a guinea pig for chemical warfare. When I got home I reported for duty at our Shop and resumed my workaholic routine. Our reputation grew, I was a good jeweler with some talent at making special order creative jewelry. In October of forty-seven Mark, our number two son was born. Our two sons, school and parent teacher involvement, kept my wife busy as a full time mother. I was the dad, who came home and kissed my boys after they were asleep. Our church was a center for many of our activities and our boys found friends in church and Scouting. Dorothy organized our vacation time and we did have fun as a family. We played hard and enjoyed our fishing excursions and later, hunting. For most of our lives, sickness or health problems were other peoples worries. Good advice and investments helped our finances grow. Our boys had their mother's intelligence and were excellent students. Their college grades showed this innate desire to do well. Each have left a mark of excellence in there work. Richard married Barbara. I never had a daughter and she took me by storm. She was and is a beautiful lady and she was such a delight in disposition and charm. Mark's Sally is the same. Dorothy, in her diary that she kept going for a while even after we married, makes this notation, "I want to be a good person." Our four grand children seem to have that same ingrained desire. God has been good to Dorothy and to me.

All that has been said, up to this point, is a prelude to Dorothy's final years. We saw Richard's daughters grow up until they moved to Australia where they finished their high school years. Kristin had the highest score in college entrance test of any female graduate in Australia and Julie followed with the second highest three years later. Our two imports had the ability and desire for excellence that their grandmother had shown. Mark's Catherine and Dan have been cited for superior performances many times though not yet graduated.

We sold our business in 1979. I spent two semesters at Grand View College. We took trips to Australia and went to Elder Hostels. Dorothy still worked at what was our Shop. I also played golf about five days a week, weather permitting. Dorothy was showing evidences of slowing down. We both were old, I thought. When she was seventy four or five, she handed me the bank statement and said, "I'm not getting this done. I guess you will

have to take over." I didn't or wouldn't think of Alzheimer's. I stubbornly resisted the probability that Dorothy was beginning her long siege of that mind crippling debilitation. In her own way, she carried on with a queenly acceptance of what was happening to her. There was no fussing, no overtures of despair, just a down hilling of that killer of the mind. I resisted its presence with a whole hearted stubbornness. I prayed and argued, "Why?" Why did God allow this to happen to one so wonderfully endowed with what I needed. I took care of her willingly because I realized how much I loved her. I can't say when she started her daily stint with shorthand. For years shorthand was part of her daily routine. I kept paper and pen handy. I suppose it had been the way she had practiced. Perfect straight lines of shorthand symbols raced across the paper that I kept handy. This continued for several years. When I sat her at the dining room table, she'd reach for a pen and practice. I often asked her to write, "I love you." A profusion of those symbols would skim across the page.

Now I wrote poetry about Dorothy, as Alzheimer's impacted our lives. This was the first.

Hollow Daze

I reread your birthday card of three years past,
"I'd like to run away with you, to a castle
by the sea and love happily ever after."

It's too quiet, you have slipped away again,
unmindful of my fear you may become too lost
to find, before you're more confused or hurt,
Youe walking is unsure, but I find you
across the busy street, waiting for bus
that goes to mall, to gratify your instinct
just to shop. I only can imagine the imprisonment
you feel, as your eyes, so expressive, now
stare back at me, almost opaque.
I think of Job, but with less fortitude,
I whimper, "Why are we on pyrite heap?"

You don't remember birthdays any more, but you
have been the Queen of my heart castle all these years
and in your slight response, I hear you say,

"Only our love has no decay."

Was it too late? How often I have wondered if she could now comprehend the depth of this love I now expressed constantly. My prayers certainly were not answered as I wished them to be. Maybe God was telling me I needed a lesson in loving . My love for Dorothy was given with a thankfulness for still having what was left, which made me try to give her happy moments when her response was a smile, a precious laugh or just a word or two. For several years I took care of her at home. She became incontinent. I tried to get some help to come in and allow me some freedom of time to play golf or help lighten my twenty-four hour load, but after one refusal I gave up. I took Dorothy to Willis Care Center who cared for her for a few hours each day. I would bring her and pick her up to go back home. Time frames elude me, but this worked for a while. Then one day I was told that she was beyond their care.

About four years had gone by. Dorothy still could walk. She dragged one leg a bit. I took her on rides in the car and went to her brother's farm near West Liberty, to see John, her brother and his wife Eloise. They were good to her and treated her like the queen she was. I had rented a wheel chair because her walking was unsure, so we toured John's apple orchard with Dorothy in the chair.

In this period of time, Dorothy walked away from the house and tripped on a side walk that was raised above the rest of the walk. She fell and broke her arm close to her shoulder. They repaired her arm at the hospital and I brought her home. That brought on a new dilemma. I was afraid I would do something to undo that arm, so I pleaded with Valley View Village to let me get Dorothy into their Care Center. Was it an answered prayer? They let her in after a few days and took care of her. From the start they treated her with tender loving concern. Perhaps, because she never fussed or complained, she crept into their hearts. When she was in her wheel chair in the afternoons, I came to take her for a ride and bring her home where I'd feed her ice cream, malts, McDonald twist or fruit. It was part of our routine to dance. Now she couldn't walk, but I would take her out of her chair and hold her close to me and dance. The steps would be short and I would sing tunes to her as we made short circles around our living room. I would really get to hold her. Songs like, "I'm dancing with tears in my eyes," brought tears to my eyes, but the hurt was better than the alternative of not experiencing that closeness and the obvious pleasure my wife seemed to receive. Our closing song, sung poorly by me was, "I love you, I love you. It's all that I can say. I love you, I love you. The same old words, I tell them in the same old way.

I love you, I love you. Three words that are divine. And now my dear, I'm waiting to hear, the words that make you mine." I sang numerous songs, "You were meant for me," "Give me your Smile," "I'd love to live in love land with a girl like you," even the song, "I'm forever blowing bubbles." I'm not sure all these are titles, but they are parts of songs. There were others. I thanked God for that sweet little person, that by her actions, still seemed to love me. Perhaps there will always be that nagging feeling that I should have shown my love for her more often. Somewhere in this period of time, I wrote this:

Enough

I tell you in repetition that I love you
until the curtain of your mind
slowly recedes and then you smile.
I ask myself if other demands blunted
or undercut the reasons why I said,
"I do." Was it the stress of job, the fixing,
mowing lawn or children's needs?
Did I accept your ordered neatness,
ingrained honesty, just being there,
your love, and make you conscious
of my love for you—enough?

The routine of bringing her home, dancing with her, taking her for rides and to McDonald's, continued for several years. One day when I came into the Care Center several of those who had been caring for her were getting her all fancied up for me. You could tell they were fond of her. She never fussed or made any raucous noises. They were putting a ribbon in her hair. As I came through the door one of them asked, "Who's that?" She gave a partial smile out of the corner of her mouth like I had seen her Dad smile. "That's my husband," she said loud and clearly as if she had been talking all the time. I hugged her and kissed her right in front of all. I was thrilled at that much recognition. In that period of time she waved at me when I'd come through the door. When it was too cold or stormy, I'd stay at the Center and watch TV. One day when I came in she had a Readers Digest in her hand. This was the resulting poem.

Live Coals

When I ghost into your room you stare,
as though our sixty years had been erased.
I kiss you, feel no quickening in you.
That Readers Digest, like stunned bird,
is in your hand again.
You've never turned a page. I read a joke.
A pebble ripples your dormant surface
and you laugh – lightning shock tentacles
streak through my brain. I see that you
are reading too. I've made a freefall dive
into the hidden pool that is your world.
I have to leave. I walk to door and wave.
You wave back – tears blind me as
I rush to you, kiss you and cry,
"I love you, love you, love you!"
For a moment your eyes brighten.
The sun rises from the pond inside you
as I hear you softly say, "I know."

To say that I cried a lot is an under statement. The constant ache in my heart was like a low cloud, cutting out the sunshine, like a drawn curtain that would not raise. If it hadn't been for those, with whom I played golf, I doubt if I could have carried the heavy load of grief that enveloped me. My church had also taken me in its arms. Parents with young ones allowed me to hug their children, who in turn responded to the honesty of my adoration for them. Some of the nicest people I know are active members of a church. Though still not perfect, they are exposed to its morality, its people concerns and its message of more. Many of our best minds accept its premises and lend their influence to stifle the increasing mass immorality.

Life is such that we need to be needed. In spite of the ache, I was happier with Dorothy than I was away from her. She was becoming more like a small child in her reactions to my show of love, which I've tried to depict in this effort of verse.

Love's Highest Plateau

I come into your room,
kiss you and say, "I love you."
You sense the love I have
contains no base alloys
and you light up with
incandescence of small child.

I take you from your bed
to your wheel chair
and feel your trusting closeness.
Tears torrent as six decades rumble
by like fast freight cars
Though in diminished state,
you pat me on my shoulder,
You are the mother once again.
I am your child.

The desire for a pencil in her hand remained, but the previous lines of shorthand symbols, so uniform and straight, now wavered across the page, I had begun to recognize a few symbols. Dorothy's "I love you" symbol also wavered and diminished in execution.

My driver's license had been revoked because of my poor eyesight. There were no alternatives, so I sold our home and moved to Valley View Village to be near the Care Center. Now I could see Dorothy repeatedly. I moved some of our furniture and tried to arrange it to be like it was in our home. I could be with her in her room or our apartment more than was previously possible. When I had come to take her home through her years at Valley View, one of Dorothys jobs, from her wheel chair, was to press the button that opened the door to leave the Care Center. I tried to help her feel that she was involved in everything we did. From the beginning she slid her hand along the rail that many used to help them walk. In the last few months, she still followed the handrail to our apartment. I would run the wheel close enough for her to slide her hand along it. I had to give up dancing with her because she couldn't give me any help and my eighty-seven years had sapped me of some of my strength. I had made it a routine to take off her slippers and massage her feet. I would still feed her some ice cream and give her Pepsi. Dorothy would spoon her ice cream and sip some Pepsi from a small glass. I still read to her from Guidepost magazines, talked about our

two sons and grand children and I continued to massage her feet. In the last month she put her foot back in my lap to be massaged some more. It was somewhere in her last few weeks that I kissed her and with my lips still close to her still pretty little mouth, I said, "Pucker." She puckered, and I kissed her and cried.

The Care Center was filled with those who seemed almost forgotten by their offspring, friends or relatives. As I came to see Dorothy, there were many who reached out to me just for some evidence of concern. Often I would hold their hand and give them the love I had. One could see a thankfulness at that much recognition. I did love them and found myself crying before I reached my wife in her wheel chair, knowing how much I needed what was left of the most wonderful gift God gave to me. Thus this poem:

Till Death and Beyond

You're not just a lady in wheel chair.
You are my wife who lighted up my life
for more than half a century.
You gave me everything you had,
the sweetness of your love,
two sons who now stand tall,
a tribute to your quite uncommon
common sense, your brilliant mind
that now is hid behind
a hard to open door,
yet, in my agony, I now look up
and hear my Maker say, "There's more."

Almost without warning, Dorothy stopped trying to carry on. She didn't put her hand on the hand rail, she quit drinking Pepsi and would close her mouth if I offered her ice cream. I massaged her feet, but that drew no response. She had quit. I knew that I had to try to let her go. I also prayed that God would now take her into His arms of love, but knowing that she had to die for that promise to be fulfilled, I cried and cried. Pneumonia came. They put her on oxygen and asked me if I wanted her to be put on the various life supports. Our wills stated, "No prolonging." I remember saying, "That would be cruel." I was with her when she took her last breath. In the awful rending of that moment, I had told Dorothy that I loved her for the umpteenth time as she left me behind. The room was filled with those who

had cared for her. I knew they all had grown to love her. She had sneaked into their hearts because she had been the ideal patient and because she was Dorothy. There was a room filled to the brim with love and they all cried with me. The funeral was large. Dorothy, in her unassuming way, crept into the warp and woof of the church's heart. It was a memorial service. Her body had been sent to Iowa City. That provision in our will had been made before Alzheimer's had started its ravage.

To me, Dorothy has to be in an atmosphere of Love where she is her total self. When I was seventeen my sister died. She was fifteen; her last words to me were these, "I'll be there when you come." This had been the hope that had set my sights on becoming a minister. Although the Depression vetoed my efforts in that direction, I clung to the premise of our Christian belief. Our Lord had promised us that there would be more. How can one read the Acts of the Apostles and their lifetime of trials, torture and death and not give credence to the message they brought that did turn the world upside down? Perhaps that's the sermon Christ wanted me to preach. We talk of God's unconditional Love. As a father, I know how I feel about our two sons. None of us are perfect but I love them in such an unconditional manner. All of us fall short. Who are we to say with smug introspection, "I'm in, you're out." "Other sheep I have, not of this fold." We might ask ourselves, "Would I have done it differently under the similar pressure and example?" I hope God will let me be with Dorothy.

Temporary Adieu

We climbed some mountains, you and I,
and then we'd sit and watch the view
that mortal mind or brush
cannot create.
We walked the road of life, we two
had babies too.
Together, we'd kiss them goodnight.
Soon they scampered, talked and played.
Sometimes we'd sip our lemonade,
to just enjoy unfolding view.
'Twas then we knew our love
extended far beyond the blue.

You're gone. You're part of that eternal

Love that outstrips human comprehension.
The curtain's drawn, I can't enjoy the view,
but part of me, dear one, is there with you.

“Hey you, Joe!”

I am eighty-nine. It has taken me this long to be able to write about World War Two and lay myself open to my years as a G.I. Joe. Right now there is a world wide note of terrorism and wanton killing that is rampant even in our own front yards. Corruption in high places dirties our flag that waves with a wounded heart. Special interest groups have bribed our lawmakers to the degree that no one can speak out for integrity and truth because of

his own dirty linen. We shone more brightly as a nation under God. Our substituted values grovel in immorality and license. The other nations seem to view us now as a paper tiger. This is not the better world this G.I. had in mind. What follows is my experiences in a war that completed many of its objectives. As it was in the army, it's time to "About face!"

Pearl Harbor was a year and one half gone. Harry, my close friend, had been killed in the South Pacific by a Japanese kamikaze attack on his ship. I had known him since my middle teens. We had gone to church together, double dated and danced with those curvaceous and tantalizing members of the opposite sex. The ladies loved Harry's curly hair. He may have been better looking than I was and I may have been the better dancer.

Perhaps I should add a little more background. After I graduated from high school I went to work in a shop that made and repaired jewelry. I made eight dollars a week which included all day Saturday. I was errand boy and general flunky as well as apprentice jeweler. Often, on errands, I passed the old Post Office building where a Marine recruiter tried to entice me to join up. I knew I would eat better, but the pall of regimentation burned deep in my being. I felt good every time I shook my head. I also was certain that I'd have made a damn good Marine. Well, here's about the way it was.

I had my own business and came home to my wife and baby of nine months, who had cut a groove in my heart as deep as the Grand Canyon. Then, six of us, who were close friends, received our "Greetings" to report for induction. Of the six, four were thirty-five or older and two were in their early twenties. We went through the usual induction routine and we four old geezers made it, while the two youngsters got off with heart and ear problems. I can remember being sworn in. I wanted to go over the hill already, but as I raised my right hand to take the oath, there was an unsolicited pride that enveloped me, along with a gut twisting sickness in my mid-section.

The Army and Navy interviewed me. The Navy offered me training and a job in instrument work, for which I was qualified. They told me I had to report in one week. There were two reasons why I chose the Army. Harry had been in the Navy and the Army gave me two weeks before I had to report. It was my sincere hope that the war would end by that time. As those two weeks hurried by, I felt like a man waiting to be hung. To leave my wife and our little Richard shredded my attempts to maintain a stoic attitude. When I went back to the Induction Center, I received my orders in an important looking packet. I was to go to Camp Sibert, Alabama and was delegated Acting Corporal in charge of one man, Dallas Moore, who was to report with me.

Dallas had a smile that would melt a marshmallow and for the moment I was his marshmallow, but It took me less than five minutes to discover his

priorities, which were alcohol and women. When we boarded the train at the Induction Center I was filled with a heaviness of spirit that I couldn't shake. I doubt that my imagination is more vivid than most. I assumed that I would be under enemy fire in due time and what happened to Harry could be my ending. A few miles later, the train stopped at my home town. As I looked out the window, there was my wife with our little boy in her arms. I didn't think she was planning to meet the train. Outwardly, I had controlled my emotions, but at the sight of those two, I bawled and was still sobbing as I got off the train to say good-bye again. Minutes later, I boarded the train again and looked for Moore. He was gone, but at that moment I had other priorities. Biting my lip, I watched my wife and little Richard until the train moved on. As I sat there numb, I wondered if I would ever see my wife and son again and if I could handle what lie ahead. This last thought brought me back to reality. I became worried about Moore, which led to another thought. What happens to a soldier who fails his first responsibility? I assumed that Moore could be in the john, but too much time had elapsed for any reasonable use of that facility. In panic, I went back through the coaches and spied him in the rear of the third coach, sharing a bottle with two civilians. That was the beginning of a series of bottles and a running game of hide and seek that kept me from other worries for most of our journey to Camp Sibert.

During a stop-over at Kansas City, Dallas informed me that he had to go to the john. I was reading a magazine but soon began to wonder what took him so long, so I went to jar him loose. There were many compartments in that place and some of the occupants got concerned about my looking over the door at them. Dallas was gone again. I ran out and searched the depot and even had others helping me, but he was not to be found. I was in a sweat when I heard the "All aboard," when Dallas reeled in with a bleary-eyed grin. "You wasn't worried about me, was ya?" Right then I decided I would stick to him like glue until we reached Sibert. This time I steered him into the coach and had him sit by the window with me by the aisle. Dallas seemed to be drifting into a contented stupor. Thinking he was asleep, I laid my head back for a moment and dozed.

I awoke with a jolting re-entry to my responsibility. Dallas was gone again. The train had stopped to pick up some passengers. I ran out to the loading platform, through the depot and out the other side. No Moore. I mentally kicked myself all over the place as I continued my frantic search. Then the train gave a toot and I knew I had to board. As I ran to the boarding steps, there was Dallas with two young women. I thought anything that could be picked up that fast must be meeting the trains. Dallas motioned to me, beaming from ear to ear. "I got us fixed up." he said. "We'll stay here

tonight and take the train tomorrow. Hell, the Army wont give a damn."

I knew he couldn't understand that I was happily and dutifully monogamous and saddled with the responsibility of getting him to Camp Sibert. "Nothing doing," I said, "you're coming with me if I have to carry you."

He understood that much. "O.K.,O.K." he grinned, then, turning to the girls he said, "Good-bye," and got on the train as the conductor nervously waited. From then on until we reached Sibert I followed Dallas to the drinking fountain, the john and strolled up and down the aisle whenever he did. I was doubly alert when we changed trains.

"I wont run out on you," he said.

"I know," I said, "and I'm not taking any more chances."

"You ought to get a purple heart for what you've been through already," he grinned.

I had mixed emotions about Camp Sibert and wasn't eager to get there, but I wanted to get Dallas duly delivered. We arrived in the late, hot afternoon. It was a bleak place. The camp was in a saucer like area between three mountain ranges. It couldn't have been more strategically located to get the most out of that Alabama sun.

I reported to Company B. and wasn't met with open arms. The First Sergeant barely looked up as he took my orders. He told us training wouldn't begin for five days, assigned us to a barrack and warned us to be ready to fall out when the whistle blew. There was a little ray of sunshine. What happened to Dallas Moore wasn't my responsibility any more.

The barracks were long unpainted wooden buildings that were supported by equally spaced cement blocks about two feet off the ground. Six barracks lined one side of the Company Street. On the other side was the Orderly and Supply room in one building, the Day room or Recreation building and the other building which contained the latrine and the showers. At the end of the Company Street at right angles, was the Mess Hall.

The whistle blew while I was writing a letter, so we hurried into the Company Street and lined in up in some semblance of order. Our names were read for duties for the following day. Mine was a ditch digging detail.

I hadn't been lifting anything heavier than a pair of tweezers for several years and the next five days in that hot sun was a grueling experience. I became thirstier, hotter, more blistered and tired by the hour. By the end of those five days I was completely pooped. All this time trainees were coming in until the Company roster was over three hundred. I was sorry those lucky suckers didn't get in on the ditch digging detail, but more sorry that I was thirty- five, when I looked at those fuzzy cheeked youngsters. What I would have given for fifteen years off my tired and aching body.

Training Begins

What still seems upper-most on that first day of training was that there was more hollering and bedlam than I had ever experienced. We were yelled out of our bunks before day-light. After we had dressed, made our bunks and ate breakfast, we had just returned to our barrack, when a sergeant came through the door and roared us out to police the area. We were lined up shoulder to shoulder at one end of our barrack and herded in between our allotted perimeters with that sergeant giving us his idea of humor.

"Stoop over so you won't miss anything. I don't want to see anything but asses and elbows."

So far, I hated everything about the army including that sergeant. One of the first training objectives was to divide the company into four platoons and each platoon lined up alphabetically. I headed the alphabet so I was in the first platoon made up of four squads and I was in the first or front squad. Who do you think was our sergeant? Yeah, old 'asses and elbows.'

Our sergeant snapped us to "attention!" He walked along the front of our squad and then down the side to inspect the other squads and came back up front. "At ease," he growled, then he made these remarks which I can quote verbatim. There was disgust in his voice. "I've seen some crummy recruits in my time but I have to admit they're scraping the bottom of the barrel this time." I took those assertions personally. In my pooped condition, I felt he was absolutely right. "We're supposed to make soldiers out of you in the next seventeen weeks," he said, "and I can assure you it wont be easy, so you'd better forget about everything else and keep your eyes and ears open every minute. We have ways to take care of anyone who doesn't stay on the ball. For your own good, I hope you understand what I mean."

I understood. Threat and innuendo was the way I had envisioned the army. Even when I was younger I wasn't used to taking it without handing it back. That was probably why I was in business for myself. No one needed to threaten me. I had decided to do the best that I could when I took the oath. The sergeant stood about two feet from me and he came in loud and clear. A cold anger came to me along with a desire to step out and give him one on the kisser. It was only a desire; I had no intentions of bringing dishonor to my wife and son.

Training began. Orientation-marching, shots-marching, physical exercise named T.C. 87-marching, with our loud mouthed sergeant hammering at us, "Eyes front, cover down, get in step!" Maybe it was the second day. We were marching to a training area and the old boy was hutting and hupping us as usual when he looked down my line and bellowed, "Hey you, Joe, get in step!" I have referred to him as the 'old boy.' He may have been my age but

I never saw him without that sour puss, peptic ulcer expression. He might as well have shot me because I was certain he was yelling at me. I had spent too much time on a dance floor not to be able to handle a more difficult routine than marching but in consternation I turned my head to see if he was talking to me.

"Not you, gawdammit, keep those eyes straight ahead!"

He had tricked me. I can still hear that raucous voice. Right away we had a problem with that Alabama dust. It hadn't rained for a long time and when we marched the dust would start rising. The rear of the first platoon would have dust rising to their knees, the second to their hips, the third to their shoulders and you couldn't see much of the fourth platoon. Our platoon felt a bit smug the first time out but coming back the Commanding Officer lined us up and then told us to about face. The first platoon ate dust all the way back as the fourth platoon led the way.

There were several reasons why the first ten days just about had me on the ropes. I hadn't recovered from that ditch digging detail when I developed chills and fever from what may have been my small pox vaccination. Every night I perspired so heavily that my bedding became soaked and each day I grew weaker. Being too stubborn or proud to go on sick call, I took a beating trying to keep up with the various phases of training. I did get some extra shut-eye however. We often marched to the R.B. or recreation building to see training films; the theme which most of them presented was 'kill or be killed.' Just as soon as the lights went out I fell asleep and woke up when men began to climb over me while filing out. Later, when some reference was made to these films, I could recall very little. To make matters worse the inflated company of three hundred plus was too large for the rations allotted and I wasn't getting enough to eat. I learned fast about chow hounds. The food was passed from the center aisle and often the ones on the other end were short changed because some slob had piled enough on his plate for three. With the combination of these debilitating conditions, I lost fifteen pounds and wasn't over-weight when I came in. But I soon recovered from whatever illness I had and when they shipped out about a hundred of our number to other places I began to feel my strength coming back into that thirty-five year carcass of mine. Dallas Moore was shipped elsewhere. I never heard of him again.

Sad sack

Being a sad sack is a derogative expression and I admit that I felt like one for the first ten days but I'm sure our sergeant had me tagged as one

for a longer period. To be fair, I did give him reasons for such evaluation. I am left-handed. I eat, throw and perhaps think left-handed. In my civilian work, I used tools with my left hand and looked through a magnifying loupe with my left eye. Maybe it was because I was older and more rigidly set in a left side approach, which caused me to resist right oriented army procedures. It was hard for me to react without a constant mental effort. Sometimes in panic, I didn't know right from left and while most responded easily I had to be alert to the point of being under stress.

In our rifle orientation we had to learn the proper way to get into a sling and the positions of firing. A corporal demonstrated the prone procedure by first putting the sling on his left arm. I figured how to transpose it to my right arm and assumed the prone position to wait for inspection by our sergeant. He spotted me in the otherwise uniform row of right-handers and came to me.

"Well, what have we got here?" he said with unveiled sarcasm. Kicking dirt in my face would have been more acceptable.

"I am left handed," I said.

"Is that so?" He roared, "Get that gawdamn rifle over to the other side. That's the way you're gonna use it."

That was hard to swallow. One of my favorite pastimes was hunting with my twenty-two caliber rifle and my second hand bolt action shot-gun which was for a right handed person. Using that bolt the opposite way didn't bother me. I may have been a better shot than anyone else in that line and the army was stripping me of my last vestige of competence. I swallowed hard. You can be sure I regretted not joining the navy.

Our commanding officer summoned the sergeant to a conference of some sort as I put the sling on my left arm and resumed my prone position. The sling felt tight and uncomfortable as I waited for further critique. When he finally got back to me he told me my sling was too tight, then he ordered us to line up for drill in the manual of arms. My arm was numb and the fingers of my left arm wouldn't function. Hoping this was temporary, I maneuvered the rifle to my shoulder and got in line.

"Order Arms!" The sergeant barked. I managed to get my rifle to the ground without mishap.

"Right shoulder Arms!" Actually I had practiced quite a bit. This time I brought it diagonally across to grab with my left hand center. It bounced off my unresponsive fingers into the crook of my left arm. I awkwardly and belatedly nudged my rifle to my right shoulder. I received a glare of disgust that would have won an Oscar. "You!" he said, "get behind that tree and practice until you can do it right!" I'm certain he thought I was bucking for a discharge. In a few minutes most of the paralysis was gone so I came back

in line. 'Loud mouth' looked at me with malevolence. I had fumbled my rifle. One would think I had trampled the flag. He knew that I felt he had crawled out from under a log,

"One more foul up like that and you'll be cleaning grease traps in the kitchen," he said, "are you ready?" I nodded and went through the manual of arms smoothly. I knew I was better than most but I had a smoldering hate for that sergeant. I was becoming the brunt of his invective and seemed unable to dodge it. He had found his horrible example in the front row.

What next?

When you're inducted you're measured for Government Issue clothing. No one asks your size; they measure you, toss the works at you from necktie to shoes. My feet had never troubled me but the first five mile march gave me another set-back. We took off after supper wearing our field packs that we had learned to roll so neat and tight. After a few miles I was conscious of my toes rubbing the ends of my shoes. It soon became painful. I couldn't tell 'Loud-mouth' about it. I had all the scathing I could take from him so I finished the march on my butchered feet. Sitting on my bunk, I removed my shoes, tore off my bloody socks and stared at five broken blisters on the toes of my left foot and three on my right.

After a shower, I washed my socks, put on a clean pair to keep from getting blood on my mattress cover and turned in. I could imagine the guff I'd get if I complained to our sergeant so I bloodied it out until noon and then went to the Supply sergeant. The shoes I had been issued were size ten and to exaggerate I hadn't worn anything smaller than size eleven since I was eleven. I explained my problem. The sergeant replied as I had expected.

"If the army fitted you, that's what your going to wear."

I took the shoe and sock off of my left foot and brought my leg over the counter with my foot close to his face. "I need a longer shoe and I don't need a Commanding officer or a doctor to figure that out," I said. I know he could feel my anger. "By god you're right," he said. I got the size elevens and my toes healed rapidly. In fairness I had to admit that my uniform fit me perfectly.

Inspection

In our first full uniform inspection we were lined up by platoons in our Company street as an Officer from Battalion Headquarters inspected our

ranks. I was in the front as usual and when he got to me he stood there and came up close.

"Did you shave this morning?" He had a smile on his face. I smiled right back at him.

"Yes Sir!"

"Step out, march, one two halt, about face!" he said. For some reason I didn't feel threatened as I did with 'loud mouth'.

The Officer looked at the platoon. "Here's a soldier," he said, "who wears his uniform with pride and honor. Notice the total bearing; the shoulders, chin, and neat uniform. Some of your uniforms have the appearance of being slept in. You lower the overall sharpness of your platoon."

He motioned me back in line. I have mentioned previously that my uniform fit me. 'Loud mouth' stood close by during my minute of approval. At least he wasn't given time for rebuttal. I was certain that he wasn't impressed.

K.P.

No trainee got out of his stint as kitchen police or K.P. Everyone else dreaded it, so I did too. Because I was in the (A's) I got hung with it when I was in that pooped and under-fed condition. Getting up at three in the morning was bad. The Mess sergeant wasted no time getting us lined up so we could get the breakfast table set up. We ate first to be ready when the thundering herd of trainees arrived. I ate well. After breakfast we really worked; washed dishes, pealed potatoes, cleaned, mopped, and set tables for dinner.

There were no ten minute breaks like we had in regular training but every time I got close to the refrigerator I grabbed a hunk of cheese, a slice of ham or an apple. We even had to wipe down the rafters that day and I didn't get back to the barracks until ten P.M., tired but temporarily, I wasn't hungry.

The Mess sergeant wouldn't have won any prize for looks but he was a good cook. The hair on his arms was long, black and thick. When he submerged his arms in that huge bowl of biscuit dough, he'd hesitate to strip the dough from his elbows to his wrist with his fingers. I've never tasted better biscuits. He drank lemon extract. I'll bet he had enough on hand to supply the whole camp.

The Battalion had inter-company contests for the best baked beans and our Mess sergeant won it more than once. I liked army chow but I never got too fond of mutton. Luckily, we didn't have it often. Over all I concluded that the food was superior to what most civilians were getting. Later, on a

furlough, my wife and I went to a restaurant. We ordered burghers. They were mutton burghers. "Yuck."

Gold Bricking

Something happened to many G.I.s after they had been in the Service a while. It's a contagion that you get from those who've been in longer called gold bricking. A 'gold brick' does as little as possible and does his best to get out of extra duty. Eager Beavers are unpopular. The army counters by getting a detail of ten men for a two or three man job. Almost every G.I. can lean on a shovel without disturbing the earth beneath and will cease complete inertia only when the one in charge looks his way too long. I was part of a detail of eight that had to truck some furniture from another building. When we arrived at the building where the furniture was stored our driver gave the man in charge the requisition for three chairs and a small desk. We all agreed to do the important thing first. We pooled our loose change and had the driver go to the Post Exchange to get cokes and candy bars. During the time he was gone we managed to carry one chair to the loading dock. As we sipped and munched we talked about every-thing from women to less interesting subjects. About two hours later, we finished loading the furniture and returned to our Company. Under the Commanding Officer's supervision we unloaded and carried the furniture into the Orderly room in less than three minutes.

One time, we were whistled out of our barracks to clean some machine guns. We all had our names on our helmet liners. The supply sergeant had a list of our names on a piece of paper. He looked at me and said, "You, step out." Then he looked at his list and picked names at random. Nelson in the third squad removed his helmet and was wiping his brow with his handkerchief. Sure enough, when the sergeant called his name, no one answered.

"Where's Nelson?" he asked. Nelson was still busy with his handkerchief.

"He's in the latrine," he said. "He told me he had the G.I.'s." The G.I.'s are to the army what Montezuma's revenge is to Mexico.

"Well, we don't want to clean him up," the sergeant said and everyone obliged him with a laugh. Nelson was the pride and envy of our platoon for a few days.

Boxing

I was fourth in a family of five siblings. My brother was two years older and more of an extrovert. Everyone knew Henry and to most people I was just his scrappy little brother they called 'Lefty.' Henry won prizes in Declamatory contest and it seemed to me that even my parents had more reason to be proud of him. When I was eleven I could make my brother say, 'Uncle' in a rough and tumble scuffle, which at least gave me a little notoriety at school recesses where I established some respect for being able to whip anybody in my age bracket and a few who were older. These scuffles didn't mean that we had to be angry at each other. It seems to be natural for boys to want to test each other. A few years later when I first put on some boxing gloves I found that my fast reflexes and left hand approach made boxing a sport I excelled in and enjoyed. I was part of a boxing team for the YMCA. One time I made five dollars for a three round exhibition boxing match with a friend who had some local professional success. I knew one boxer who was punch drunk and decided that could be me in a few years so I switched to basketball and handball.

Someone in our barrack came up with some boxing gloves and before long I was considered the pro of our platoon. One of the recruits had finished off a few others. Those haymakers he threw seemed almost murderous. I opened my mouth, "That wide open style will get you nowhere," I said. He tossed the gloves to me with a cocky belligerence, "Put up or shut up."

"I haven't boxed for more than fifteen years," I said, "Let's take it easy."

I've mentioned earlier that I hadn't lifted anything heavier than a pair of tweezers but I did have a punching bag in the basement that I enjoyed using. He missed with a blow that would have put me in the hospital if I didn't know how to avoid it. He didn't take it easy and was on his bottom in less than thirty seconds. "Maybe I was lucky," I said. "Let's try it again." He tore the gloves off. Reality wasn't fun. Suddenly I had a little stature. Two in the platoon wanted to make some extra money by getting into the boxing shows on Saturday nights. Roger weighed one-forty-seven and had fast reflexes. Steve at one-ninety, was a pretty hunk of muscles. I struggled with him for two weeks and didn't have the heart to tell him how rotten he was. On the night of their debut I watched Roger win easily but my golden haired Apollo was on his rear four times. The first round had thirty seconds left when I threw in the towel. I had the urge to get in the ring myself but I remembered I was thirty-five and that my son didn't need a dad with his nose all over his face.

"They were dirty, they were shrunk,

Oh my goodness how they stunk.
The little red drawers that Maggie wore."

With all the dry runs we had, it still wasn't natural for me to look down that rifle barrel from the right side. The day for 'familiarization' came. We had to fire ten shots to get our rifles zeroed in on targets two-hundred yards away. It was our job to adjust the sights so we could get a bull's-eye with the proper sight picture. I centered my sights, put the elevation on zero and fired from the prone position. The spotter in the pit gave me a 'Maggie's drawers,' which was a red flag indicating I had missed the target. I had seen some dust over to the right and down. I raised the elevation and gave the windage knob several turns and fired again. I got a two, over and down, I raised the elevation again and cranked the windage over farther. Up came a bull's-eye. I put the last seven shots in the bull's-eye. Which gave me a score of eight out of ten. My rear sight was way over to the right which meant I wasn't looking straight down the barrel. So what, as long as I knew where to adjust it. I received some satisfaction in that I was accurate from my right side but I knew it took me longer to get on target. About that time, our sergeant came along to check my progress. Without checking my score, he looked at the sight adjustment I had made.

"What the hell," he bellowed, "you can't hit anything with sights like that." He centered the windage and brought the elevation down, plopped on his belly and fired. Up came Maggie's drawers. He fired again and got another red flag. "Get that gawdamn rifle off the range and borrow another rifle for today," he said. This only added to my dislike for the sergeant. I had pampered, cleaned and lived with that rifle for the past four weeks. However, I didn't mind shooting some more. I was issued ten more cartridges and made ten bull's-eyes with my buddies rifle. To me this was a waste of time. I knew I'd use my left eye if I got in combat. Staying alive was my strongest instinct.

Marching

One of the basics of training is marching. It seems simple but when done with sharpness and perfection, it's a precise maneuver. It still bothers me when I watch a parade and see crooked lines with head bobbing up and down against the cadence. I had problems with marching. A rock in my right hand may have helped. Sometimes I didn't know right from left when orders came too fast. The sergeant was a tough taskmaster. One time, the

sergeant whistled us out of our barracks into the Company Street. He glared at us as we stood rigidly at attention. In order to march down the street we had to go to his left.

"Right face!" he roared. I'm just three feet from him and I wished I had cotton in my ears. Third platoon sergeant had a soft but audible voice. I envied the third platoon. We waited for the next command.

"Forward...," you don't even quiver until he gives the "March" command. My buddy in front of me started to bend his knee and though I knew better I did likewise.

"Gawdamn it, don't anticipate my commands." Our sergeant looked at his corporal standing near. "Get those names down. No week end passes." I wasn't going anywhere, anyway, but I detested being the object of ridicule so often. So far it seemed I had a monkey on my back. That afternoon was devoted to marching; close order, extended order, to the rear, left and right obliques, left and right flanks, double time and whatever I've missed.

Some time later we were told to dress in full uniform. We were to march at Battalion Head-quarters parade grounds where we would compete with other companies for marching honors. We were the third company in line so we watched the first two do their act as they 'passed in review' with a lot of brass in the reviewing stand. At our turn we came up to the starting point and as the Battalion band struck up a march, we came to the left of the stand and did a "Right flank!" to march in front of the viewers. At the command "Eyes right!" we turned our heads toward the flag. The musical cadence and the sight of the Stars and Stripes stirred emotions to the point of bringing tears to my eyes. I felt a Company pride. I knew we were a sharp outfit. We won top honors. I had to admit that our sergeant produced results.

Firing for record

Firing for record had me worried. Dry runs couldn't make that right eye of mine focus fast enough and now time was a factor. They didn't keep those targets up very long. At the designated time I assumed the prone position in readiness for further orders. "Ready on the right, ready on the left" and "ready on the firing line," at which time we were to "unlock our pieces." Then came the, "fire at will" and the noisy staccato of thirty caliber ammunition. Right away I knew I wasn't firing fast enough so I hurried. My scoring plummeted. The final score was one-fifty-four out of a possible two hundred and I was ashamed. My buddies were sharp-shooters or experts and I was a lowly marksman, a final blow to what little pride I had left. As we assembled to march back to our barracks, our Commanding Officer gave us

the news that Italy had surrendered. From the loud cheering I knew that I wasn't the only one who wanted the war to end. Thoughts, like getting home for Christmas, ran through my mind. I was eager to get this sad sack performance behind me.

Guinea Pigs

Shortly after firing for record, a bulletin came down from Battalion Head Quarters requesting volunteers to be guinea pigs for Chemical warfare at Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. Camp Sibert was a Chemical warfare base where this area of combat was taught more fully but was used primarily as a replacement training camp for the regular army. I made up my mind to volunteer without much deliberation. Looking forward to another ten weeks of Basic training with that sergeant on my back, convinced me that I could use a change whatever the result. Three of my buddies also volunteered. They were Bookins, Barkate and DeAndrea. Within three days we were on our way. From the start, we were treated like people. No one barked at us. We had roomettes on the train with its privacy and when we reached Edgewood Arsenal, it was the same. Our home was the second story of a barracks that was clean, cheery and well heated, with only sixteen guinea pigs as its occupants.

In between our experiments we were given free rein. We got up late, ate breakfast at our pleasure. The handy showers echoed our 'barber shop.' We raised mustaches and played baseball. I didn't touch a rifle or practice any basic techniques during my ten weeks stay. We even wrote a letter to Betty Grable asking for a pin-up picture and she rewarded us with a modestly costumed photograph that fit in well with the pictures from back home, including my wife.

Barkate was my closest friend, although I felt old enough to be his father. He was a clean cut chap, a good athlete and went to Mass every Sunday. We were subjected to exposure to different poison gases, using protective clothing and of course, the gas mask as we tramped through fields containing Mustard or Lewisite. The protective equipment was effective, although a few received burns, for the most part, superficial. One thing I remember, Lewisite smells like geraniums.

One of our tests was running, having first put on our gas mask with two ten pound sand bags on our backs. In this survival test, some didn't last three hundred yards. Barkate and I held out the longest. At two miles, I tore off my mask, exhausted but angry that Barkate lasted a few yards longer.

They stuffed us all in a huge gas chamber to get our reaction to that confinement. We could hear the hissing sound of gas piped in. One pounded the door hysterically in fifteen minutes. We were down to four in eight hours. I was the only one left in twenty hours. Our Officer invited me out at twenty-seven hours. One of our group received some burns that took a long time to heal but mine were not much more than a rash.

That delightful interlude ended and we were sent back to Sibert which we called the 'concentration camp.' We received citations 'Above and beyond.'

It was a chilly winter day when we returned to Camp Sibert. A canvass covered truck brought us out to our new Company that had ten weeks of basic training remaining. On the way out from Gadsden, we were talking and joking to cover our apprehension of things to come, when a sergeant yelled back at us from the cab, "Pipe down back there, you're back in Sibert now."

It freezes in Alabama. The frost came through the floor boards of the barracks. I used my winter over-coat on top of the quilted blanket they issued to help keep me warm as I slept. Training was in a different phase. Bivouacs, pulling and deployment of four point two mortars and firing them, learning to operate smoke generators, lectures on gases, impregnation of clothing to make them gas resistant, introduction to explosives, firing machine guns and more twenty mile hikes.

Somehow, the conditions were different. No one made a shambles of me by harassment. I did well in the evaluation test. It was still a grind and an unfulfilling experience, but I could handle it.

At the end of basic training the Company put on a 'beer bust' for us. Someone asked me to help dispense the cokes, snacks and apples. The counter next to us handed out the beer. We had some customers but the beer counter was a frenzy of activity as the men came back for more and more. No one knew where they were heading so the tension was alleviated by boisterous over-reaction, loud singing and much sudsing.

Stuck

The orders came. Some found themselves heading to the Pacific, while others were going to Europe and Africa. I said a lot of good-byes and realized I would miss my friends. Barkate later sent me a letter from France. I wasn't particular where I went as long as it was away from Sibert. My orders came after most had gone. I was to go to Cadre school and become an instructor of basic training,———at Sibert.

It didn't take long to find out that I wasn't prepared for Cadre school.

The recess of being a guinea pig had blunted what expertise I had of the most basic of all, the rifle. Here I was in the clutches of the most intensive basic training that could be contrived and whatever I did had to be better than good. There were twenty of us in this group and my impression of the others was that they were a sharp muster. The Officers in charge seemed to be unresponsive, unrelenting, mean and maybe sadistic but they picked on all of us. One of the first exposures to their style was in the giving of the 'manual of arms.' A mistake was recognized by a finger pointed to a tree, two hundred yards away, which meant we had to 'double time,' holding our rifles high above our heads. I soon 'palmed' the butt of my rifle and was fingered to the tree along with others. When I got back in line my "Inspection Arms!" wasn't good enough, so I took off to the tree again. The running wasn't so bad but my arms were taxed beyond endurance. They sagged badly by the time I made it back the second trip. Luckily, the Officers decided to do some T.C.87, which was a training chart, number eighty seven, containing a series of exercises to toughen us. That was torture the way they extended us. I practiced the manual-of-arms at night and soon stayed in line much longer. This time, I didn't have the vaccination problem or lack of food. We all toughened up in a hurry with double-time, bayonet thrust and parries, judo training and those T.C.87 exercises with exhaustion as the terminating factor. At the end of four weeks I was as finely tuned as a thirty-five year old could be.

One of our requirements was to give a lecture on some area of military training or tactics. Chemical warfare, its history and progress, was my assignment. The Post Library had books on the subject so I spent the little free time I had searching for information. Samson seemed to be a starting point. He had set fire to some foxes' tails and loosed them into the grain fields of the Philistines to destroy their food supply. The Greeks and Romans used harassing agent's. When the wind blew toward the enemy lines they fed the soldiers beans and sulfur. Another more effective disrupter was the use of the catapult armed with large pots of human feces, tossed into strategic enemy concentrations.

The day came for my talk. I was well prepared but more than over-awed by the critical nature of my judges as I stood in front, alone. Public speaking wasn't my long suit. It seemed I didn't have one.

"Fellows," I started.

"Stop!" Captain Ross, who was in charge, held up his hand. "None of this fellow stuff," he said. "This is the army and you're talking to men. Now start over." That just about took all the fight out of me. I wondered if anything I said would be acceptable. I stood there for what seemed a long time trying to get the courage to open my trap again. "Men," I finally said.

They all applauded when I finished, including Captain Ross.

One of the cadre trainees had been a Union organizer. He was near my age, a beautiful specimen of masculinity. He seemed to be a natural leader and had the baritone voice that matched his exceptional physical attributes. When he led us in marching at one time, he sang this bawdy ditty to the cadence of our marching.

> "I wish I were a fascinating bitch
> I'd never be poor, I always would be rich
> I'd live in a house with a little red light
> I'd sleep all day and work all night
> and once a month I'd take a little rest
> and drive all my customers wild
> I wish I were a fascinating bitch
> Instead of a legitimate child."

Toward the end of our training, it was my turn to march the men to the barracks at the end of our work day. I had them line up in front of me at "Attention!" Next was "Cover-down!" which spaced the men equally by using the left arm with hand on waist to nudge them apart. Then I gave a "Left-face!" which made them a single column pointing toward the barracks. We started with a "Half step, March!" and then to "Forward March!" which got us on our way as I called the cadence. Before we were half way to the barracks, I began thinking about that two plank bridge that spanned the ditch to our barracks. I decided to bring them across with a properly timed 'right turn.' No-one else had tried it. It began to get to me before we reached the bridge. I probably should have ordered a 'half step,' first but at what I figured was the right distance, I ordered a "Right turn," and then "March!" We missed the bridge by a foot and everyone followed the first soldier down into the ditch, waded through three inches in water and climbed the other side still in cadence. I followed them a step behind, although I could have walked across the bridge. When we reached level ground, I ordered "Cadre halt!" "Right face!" "Order Arms!" Then I did an 'about face' and saluted the officer in charge. He gave us an, "At ease!" and laughed with the rest of us.

Later, I wondered how the cadre officers had rated us. I met and saluted one of them. He walked with me to the Post Exchange and told me I had been rated the one who showed the most improvement.

After graduating from Cadre school, I was assigned to assist Sergeant Farr at Company M. He was a low key but competent instructor and we got along well as he explained procedures with me as demonstrator. Sometimes he'd let me take part of the platoon in orientation and training.

Platoon Sergeant

At the end of that training period, I was assigned to Company G. as acting sergeant of the fourth platoon. I was still a private at fifty dollars a month with an arm band that had three stripes. After being with sergeant Farr I was more convinced that the bad mouthing and belittling, that I was subjected to in my Basic, was unnecessary but I knew I had to be in control. There I was, standing in front of my platoon with the men rigidly at "Attention," so I gave them the "At ease." "How many of you wish you were back home?" I asked. The men brightened up a little as they all raised their hands. I had mine up too. "Men," I said, "You and I are going to see a lot of each other in the next seventeen weeks. Our job, yours and mine, is to make soldiers of you. Someone has to be in charge and that doesn't mean that I can't make a mistake along with the rest of you. Basic is rugged but you can do it. I'm here to instruct you and I'll help you and stay with you all day and night if necessary to get the job done. In return, I want your cooperation, because I have plans to make you the sharpest platoon this company has ever had so let's get on with it."

If one could reach back in the records of that seventeen weeks training period, they would have shown that ours was the honor barrack every week except one. When they finished they asked me to ship out with them. Battalion Headquarters told me that I was stuck with Sibert.

Hubert

Friendships are always confrontations that add a richness and reason to life. In one of my early periods of training, Hubert was transferred from the third platoon to mine. He was from the hills of Tennessee and had gone 'over the hill' in the fourth week of training. They brought him back and sent him to my platoon. No one ever told me why. Maybe the Company Commander thought I had some chaplain qualifications. I had spent some time in college with the thought of entering the ministry. The Great Depression squashed that possibility because I couldn't earn enough to eat and pay my tuition, so I had to say good-bye to continuing education. Hubert did need to feel someone cared, so we talked about our wives, my son and Hubert's five children and pitched horse-shoes. He was good at horse-shoes. I won a game now and then. I wasn't his chaplain. We became close friends.

Speaking of friendships, in a later period one of my trainees named Fred gave me some blood pressure. He was two years younger than I but time had hurried on him. The first thing the army did was pull out all his teeth.

He didn't seem overly rugged to start with and without his teeth he looked old enough to be my grandfather. My platoon sergeant in Basic had made us storm those barrack doors when we were whistled out to get in formation and my platoons made those front steps clatter as they found their places and snapped to attention. On this day, we were all in place long before the other platoons had settled down, with one exception. Fred stumbled down the steps and drug himself into position belatedly. I thought some unpleasant rebuttal and was just ready to tell Fred that he couldn't do that to us when he crumpled to the crushed rock below. A trainee and I carried him to his bunk. He was conscious but completely exhausted. I found out that he had missed breakfast, dinner and hadn't eaten anything the day before. I reported him to 'sick call' and suggested he needed food more than anything. I went back to my platoon. We double-timed until we caught up with the rest of the Company.

That evening I walked into our barrack and there was Fred looking much better. The Mess sergeant had brought him some soup and custard. He made it to supper and gummed a lot of food. Later in the evening I sent a trainee to the Post Exchange for some ice cream. Fred finished a pint of vanilla. The next morning he was back in line. I had him skip T.C.87. In three days he had his new teeth and strength to hold up his end. After he finished Basic, he was shipped to the Pacific area and I received a letter from him that one gets from a good friend.

Accepted

When I joined Company G, there were three other acting sergeants who were in charge of the other Platoons. It took a while for me to break through their ice. It happened on the day the trainees fired for Familiarization. Just before the firing, there was a lull as we waited to be available when our help was needed. Suddenly, one of the sergeants yelled, "Get him." Before I had any inkling of their intentions the three sergeants came at me. Dutch leaped on my shoulders, Potsy hit me in the middle and Nick went for my legs. I gave a violent heave and kicked myself free. As Nick came at me I picked him up head high and rammed him into the other two who were closing in and fell in a heap. That was the squirmiest mess I had ever encountered. Little by little they subdued me and stretched me out helpless. Then they let go and helped me up. There were some bruises but we all laughed. I was in.

No one could have forgotten Potsy, acting sergeant of the first platoon. Due to his disdain of army regulations he had been stripped of his three

regular army stripes and when I first knew him he was a P.F.C. Later he was down to buck private for missing roll call on Monday morning. He was handsome, a picture soldier and a charmer. He liked a week end pass, booze and women. He went all out in all three areas. We were friends. Although I was true to my marriage vows and didn't drink he didn't hold it against me but he had to needle me a little. On our first ten minute break on Monday morning he'd report to me the number of times he and his lady friend had made love. Maybe I envied him a little. He was living it up and I wasn't.

Gabriel Heater was the most listened to war commentator whose, "Good news tonight," kept us hoping peace was, "just around the corner." He was a 'Tokyo Rose,' in reverse but as the Companies came and went I was hoping with less enthusiasm. I had gone through many training periods and was still a buck private at fifty dollars a month. It must have been about a year before I got my P.F.C. and a four dollar raise.

First sergeant in the field

I've forgotten the sequence of Company Commanders. We had a fast turn-over. One we had knew nothing about operating a basic training Company. Maybe he was taken from a desk job. When he took over, Battalion Head quarters came up with a plan combining several Companies to do field training exercises and do tactical maneuvers with the 4.2 Mortars. Our new C.O. called me into the orderly room and explained his predicament. He asked me to be his First sergeant in the field. I told him that I was just a P.F.C. and not qualified. Our First sergeant had convinced the Commanding Officer that he had to keep the paper work in order and couldn't do both jobs. That really was a cop out because the corporal on the typewriter did that for him. All I'd ever seen him do was flick lint off his stripes. So the Commanding Officer offered me a ten day furlough.

It wasn't as bad as I feared. Some of the officers were capable field men; they set up the deployment and strategies and I was briefed in detail. I passed the information along to my Company. Each Company knew where to dig the important slit trenches, set up the pup tents and the field kitchen. One of my jobs was to wake the bugler. Our Mess sergeant got up at three o'clock and woke me up so I could jar the bugler loose to do his thing at four A.M.

It rained that first night. Many had neglected to dig a trench around their tents which resulted in a lot of wet blankets and bottoms. Daylight revealed much activity in the hanging out of wet blankets and digging the diversionary trenches for future down-pours.

I have mentioned that our Mess sergeant was a good cook. We ate well at breakfast and noon. The C. rations at night were a let down by comparison. C. rations came in a can and reminded me of the dog food I used for an Irish setter I had before I was married. One of the breakfasts we had was the much maligned but quite palatable 1shit on a shingle,' so called by friend and foe. It was toast covered with gravy that was loaded with ground beef. I'm inclined to think that most of the GIs liked it.

The terrain, soft from rains, took some tugging to get the mortars into their allotted positions. My Company's mortars were set up to fire over a high foot hill. A spotter on top let us know where the shells landed. We lobbed a lot of shells that day at twenty-five dollars each, World War two prices. The spotter zeroed us in on an abandoned cabin with smoke shells. Then we lobbed a shell with explosive rings on it. We hit it.

Our Company rated well that week, thanks to Dutch, Potsy and Nick. One Company sent some men to the hospital with ptomaine from ham patties that had been unrefrigerated too long.

I got my furlough. With most of two days spent traveling each way, I spent six days at home. Our little boy didn't know me but we soon took care of that. Going back to Sibert was rough and it took a while to get insulated to army life again.

Each of us were different as platoon leaders. Potsy was casual and a bit of a comedian, He knew his job. His manual of arms was perfection and none could match him in the dismantling of a machine gun or its assembly. Dutch was tough, a superb athlete and his platoon knew that he was in charge. Nick was loud and intense. I wouldn't have wanted to be in his platoon but we were friends.

During the training periods, I stayed in the barrack with my platoon. I had been drafted and my chief desire was to get the war over. No one could say that I didn't give it all I had. I was in on the barracks banter and often had five or six on my bunk as we talked about everything. I listened, played football, ping pong and pitched horse-shoes. My platoon made mistakes. No one was denied a week end pass because he bent his knee too soon. Buddies helped each other. Pitching horse-shoes got me into a sticky situation when First Lieutenant Harter became our Commanding Officer. He had been a college professor and didn't go for all the military stuff. He often came to the Orderly room by walking back of the barracks to keep from having to salute so many times. A few days after he took over he challenged me to a game of horse-shoes. I liked him and he enjoyed my company. Soon after that he came in the Mess hall for dinner and motioned for me to sit with him. We sat away from the trainees and he unloaded his problem.

"I'm in a bind," he said. "I signed papers for taking over this Company

without checking the inventory. Now that I've taken inventory, I'm short sheets, cartridge belts and foot lockers to the tune of six hundred dollars. I'm going to be married in two weeks and I don't have that much to throw away." The previous Commanding Officer had been shipped overseas. He must have been part of an inter company black market dealing. Harter was held responsible for the shortage on a no check, no excuse basis.

I knew he didn't expect anything but my ear but I felt sorry for him. I still wonder why I implicated myself but wheels began to turn in my head. Hubert, who had gone over the hill in my first training period, now worked at the Supply Depot. At the end of his Basic he had said to me, "If I can ever do you a favor, just ask."

"I have one idea," I said. I told Lieutenant Harter about Hubert. "Write down the number of sheets, foot-lockers, etcetera, you're short and give me the afternoon off to see if Hubert can help us," I said.

I walked to the supply depot which was probably about a mile and a half away. I spotted Hubert loading a Company truck with equipment from various bins. He greeted me cordially. After the truck left I told him the predicament.

"It was a dishonest trick on Harter," I said. "I'm involved but you don't have to be if it will get you in trouble."

Hubert took a little time. "Bring your truck here tomorrow morning and look for me," he said.

I had taken a test so that I could drive the Company truck when necessary so the next morning I showed up at the Supply Depot. Hubert motioned for me to back into a certain bin. In nothing flat I had the sheets and the cartridge belts and then I backed into another bin for the foot-lockers. Hubert slapped the cab. "Get the hell out of here," he said.

Later, Lieutenant Harter brought his bride and introduced her to the Cadre. She was pretty. When she came to me she kissed me on the cheek and said, "Thank you." I received some flak about being the only one that was kissed.

Toward the end of that training period Lt. Harter called us into the Orderly room. "I've tried to get ratings for all of you." he said, "but I've come up with only one." Then he told them about my saving him six hundred dollars. "I guess you know who's going to get the corporal stripes."

There was no jealously. Everyone likes recognition but my friends were happy for me. Potsy always ran out of money and borrowed from me. I would get sixty-four a month. "Now I can borrow more money," he said.

Every training period had its quota of problems. I'll give you Penninger. He had me baffled for a short time. He was six foot four, good looking and a smart aleck. From the start he took it upon himself to be a disrupting influ-

ence by belittling every phase of training with snide remarks and mimicry. I tried to overlook it hoping he'd see the error of his ways, but he just got bolder. On that day we were in a company area having a session on maps and map reading. I was lecturing from a chart on a stand and as I turned my back to them to flip a stubborn sheet he stood up and mimicked my actions. When I turned around he was still standing. He quickly sat down getting some laughs from those near him.

"Penninger," I said, "Would you please stand up again and tell me what a mosaic map is?"

"I don't know," he grinned and it was obvious he didn't care.

"Let's see if you can answer this question," I said. "What is a fifth columnist?"

"It's someone who tries to disrupt or put a monkey-wrench in the war effort," he said.

"I'll buy that," I said. "Now, you've been making an ass out of me and a shambles out of everything we've tried to accomplish so far. I can get you transferred to one of the other platoons so you can try to foul it up too if that's what you'd like to do."

"I walked into that one," he said. "I get the message and I'd like to stay here."

That did it. Later, I recommended him for Cadre.

I meet the General

When First Lieutenant Roper was Company commander they moved in a Company complete with their own non-coms for more training. We, the assigned Company G. cadre, were supposed to help when and where necessary. It evolved, we were superfluous. Though we went with them to their various areas we were often left out of the training instruction because their own non-coms needed the experience. It's hard to be effective when used sparingly. One time Roper caught us playing cards behind a building. He wasn't too critical.

"Just be alert if other Brass shows up," he said.

The Commanding General of Camp Sibert was inspecting officer of our Company the Saturday that I have in mind. We, the assigned cadre, made our bunks neat and ourselves unseen in an empty barrack as the inspection was in progress. It was cold so we built a fire in a stove. There had been a rumor that we would be asked to help in a 'Review and Retrain' session in the afternoon. Potsy was worried about the encroachment on his weekend pass.

When the inspection was over someone must have wondered about the smoke coming out of the chimney in that empty barrack. Suddenly, the General's aid crashed through the rear double doors breaking the bar and part of a door in the crashing. Someone shouted "Ten Hut!" and we immediately responded as the General, his aids and Lieutenant Roper came in and stood around us. I don't know why but the General came to me.

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing." I said. It was the truth but I felt that I had flubbed it and let my buddies down.

The General shook his head and looked at Lt. Roper. "It's not right for these men to be loafing," he said.

Our C.O. looked white around the gills. I couldn't leave things as they were. "May I say a word Sir."

"You may," the General said.

"I think you know Lieutenant Roper Sir. He's a hard driver and keeps us on the jump most of the time. We thought we deserved this little breather."

The general studied me, Dutch, Potsy and Nick. I think he was relieved.

"At ease," he said and motioned his aids and Roper toward the doors.

Lieutenant Roper waved me over at the Mess hall. "Thanks for saving my skin," he said. Then he grinned. "I'll give you men the job of fixing the doors." Now I was a liar and a thief. It was somewhere in that period of time that I received my 'Good conduct' ribbon.

The army is a cross section of humanity and it follows, morality. I never could quite accept the fact that many who were indoctrinated with high ideals and morals were soon coarsened by a low life buddy that couldn't stand it until every one about him was drug down to his level. One that I remember so vividly was a lowlife heel that I wanted to strangle. He spent his weekend passes womanizing and bragged about it. I met his wife when they came to visit. She was pretty and had two heart stealing little daughters. Their father was rotten to the core. Many remained true to their better instincts and faithful to their wives and sweethearts. The army didn't make an issue of morality and in lieu of the stress and strain of the wartime scene, I developed some tolerance. When I was in 'Charge of quarters' on week ends one of my duties, besides seeing that those with passes signed out and back in, was to issue pills to those that requested them. The pills were to prevent venereal disease, so I knew that a lot of them weren't planning to just hold hands. One came back at two A.M. asked for another pill. He must have been with the community playhouse.

As we marched in extended order we often sang songs which covered the scale from ribald to nostalgic and contemporary. "There's a long, long trail," "Shine on harvest moon," "Mare ze doats," or "Off we go into the wild blue

yonder." I remember a few lines of "Minnie the mermaid."

> "Oh what a time I had with Minnie the mermaid
> down at the bottom of the sea
> She lost her morals down on the corals
> Gee but she was mighty good to me"

AWOL

One of my Company Commanders picked me to go after a trainee who had gone over the hill. When I reported to the Orderly room in full uniform the jeep was waiting for me to take me to Gadsden where I'd take a train to Birmingham. The police had the man in custody. The supply sergeant gave me a holster which I strapped around my waist and then he handed me a 'forty-five.' I inspected the revolver. It was loaded but filthy. They didn't give me time to clean it but I knew I wasn't going to use it. The ride to Birmingham was a treat. To be away from the confines of Sibert for any reason was exhilarating. According to instructions, I reported to the police station to let them know I would pick up the AWOL in the morning and spent the rest of the afternoon roaming the streets of Birmingham and breathing that civilian air. I slept at the prescribed hotel and received my prisoner the next morning. He was a handsome, good natured young man, not too concerned about his predicament. We boarded the train and I sat in the same seat on the aisle side with my dirty forty-five dangling from my hip. We talked about everything except his problem and I was as sorry as he was when the trip ended. We were jeeped back to Sibert. I handed him over to the First Sergeant and cleaned that dirty revolver before I turned it in. The next day the AWOL waved to me; he was digging out a huge stump back of the Orderly room. He was reinstated before he finished his job. There was a large pile of dirt and many roots showing waiting for the next offender.

Section eight

A section eight was a discharge for one psychologically unfit for service. Lewis was an example. He wasn't in my platoon so I didn't have contact with him until we fired for record in that period. I was just marking time when I saw Nick get the C.O. and bring him to Lewis' station where they both sat beside him. It seemed that he was missing the target on purpose. The C.O. motioned for me and told me to take an open spot a short distance from Lewis and to fire at his target when he fired. When the target appeared,

I blazed away. The spotter showed four bulls and a four. Lewis screamed when he saw the score. "I didn't aim at the target."

"You're going to qualify whether you aim at the target or not so you might as well do it yourself," the C.O. said. That stinker shot a bulls-eye most every time. On further examination, the army gave him his Section eight.

A trainee, in the next Company, shot himself. He had held out a cartridge from the firing range and inserted it in his rifle locked in the gun rack. With his mouth over the muzzle, he pressed the trigger. There was also a hole in the roof. I heard the shot. I also imagined the depression and inadequacy he must have felt and even wondered if his platoon sergeant was similar to 'loud mouth.' I had never considered suicide. My reactions leaned more to breaking his jaw. It was about a year and a half after my induction that I received orders to fire for record again. After my Basic, no one had told me that I couldn't fire from my left side. Lt. Harter had challenged me to ten shots for a milk shake. I told him that I was firing from my left side. He replied, "I don't care if you stand on your head." I won.

The day we went to fire for record there were just a few people participating. A non-com from another Company was my score-keeper and I his. He made no protest when I told him I was going to fire from my left side. When the firing began, the bulls-eyes came up with regularity and I finished with a quite respectable one ninety-four out of two hundred. My score keeper grinned at me and said, "You're something." I felt good. It was on record that I was an expert with a rifle.

Another foul up

l blush when I remember the time I was Sergeant of the guard for Battalion Headquarters. It was an honor. Not every platoon sergeant was given the opportunity. My shoes got a special polishing and I shaved twice to make sure I hadn't missed a spot. I was as militarily presentable as I ever had been. I double checked the men who were to do the duty with me. I hadn't been carrying a rifle so I checked one out for the occasion. One of my men insisted on cleaning the rifle so I let him. I never even double checked it.

Battalion Headquarters made quite a ceremony out of going on guard duty. I marched my men at right shoulder arms past the Officer of the Day, ordered a halt and left face, so that he was standing centered in front of us. Next was, "Order Arms!" and "Parade Rest!" I saluted the officer and took my place at the right end also coming to a parade rest. The Officer of the Day brought us again to right shoulder arms and began his inspection of each

rifle. When he stood in front of you, you brought the rifle straight across in front and clasped firmly your left hand at center underneath and almost in the same motion, ripped the bolt open with the right hand. The OD took your rifle, looked down the barrel for signs of dust or neglect and practically threw it back to you. You grabbed it and as he stepped to the next victim you closed the bolt and brought it back to right shoulder arms. Each of the men did it well. When he reached me I brought my piece across and ripped the bolt open. There I was with the bolt dangling in mid air. I don't know if anyone has ever put a bolt back in any faster. I rammed that bolt back in place, locked it and pulled it back open. The OD may not have had time to get a burn going. Thank heavens or whatever, he didn't blink an eye. He inspected my rifle and tossed it back. There was a smile on his face. "Join the Club," he said. That took a lot of the sting out of it. Then he stepped back and properly dismissed us for guard duty. I can truly say that I felt no rancor for the young man that cleaned my rifle. I was the one who failed to check it. It's been fifty-two years but the memory of that moment is not a pleasant recall.

Top Secret

After V.E. Day, Camp Sibert slowly closed down. In July, 1945, two hundred of Sibert's cadre were shipped to a top secret Base and we were screened minutely to weed out any with radical leanings. A few were filtered out and sent elsewhere. When I returned to civilian life I discovered that some of the people who knew me had been quizzed to find out if I had shown any un-American inclinations. I remained at this Base and was subjected to many films telling me to keep my mouth shut. I spent my last months working as the shipping clerk for the Post Exchange. I didn't know what was top secret until after I was back home. Dutch, my cadre friend, stopped to say, "Hi," and "Good-bye." He was on his way back east having just been discharged. His college courses had made him indispensable at that top secret Base.

Home

When Japan surrendered, I began to be frustratingly more impatient to get back home. I was given my honorable discharge papers and my ruptured duck emblem at twenty-five minutes after ten P.M., September 25, 1945. I knew I wasn't the same. I had been exposed to trauma and overcame it. I

had been a credit to the uniform I wore and in my way had given above and beyond. I had taken a crash course on human nature which had broadened my perspectives and I had made unforgettable friends. To you especially, Dutch, Potsy, Nick, Barkate, Lt. Harter and you know who. Cheers. I can still hear Kate Smith shake the rafters of heaven with, "God Bless America." Encore! Encore!

Hoofbeats of Memory

Two horses, at separate times in my life, left an indelible impact on my world as I grew from early childhood to teens. The first story, a somewhat loosely rhymed sequence of events, tells of Old Nance when I was seven, eight and nine.

The Coolness

There was a time no matter what they say,
when every second beckoned expectation.
Brimming minutes savored a new exotic flavor,
with each twenty-four an eon of Creation.
Old Nance was part of that Forever day.
I'd seen her pictures and the captions underneath,
when she h won the race and wore the winner's wreath.
"Sired by Red Prince," it read,
whose records held till Lady Nancy, in her prime,
chipped seconds from his time.
In those pictures you could see the pride,
the supple muscles under sleek bay hide,
the queenly pose with front and rear stretched wide,
but that was long before she trotted through our gate
with neighbor Mr. Green, by chance or fate,
to steal our hearts, to captivate,
when Vi and I were five and seven
and Old Nance, twenty-eight.
There'd been an agreement between Mr. Green and dad,
for pasture and shelter in weather good or bad.
All Vi and I could do was stare
as that high stepping mare
with still proud spread and unbowed head
stood while the buggy and harness were shed.

Then, Old Nance lowered, gently put her nose
against Vi's cheek and mine, soft, silky, like a rose;
when, without warning, Mr. Green placed me astride
and there I sat, up high, wide eyed, tongue tied,
with Vi behind, stuck to me like a tack,
as Old Nance danced around the yard and back.
This was living–
ranked with Christmas, birthdays and Thanksgiving.

When she was in the barn and we'd come 'round,
she'd chortle through her nose, a bubbly sound,
searching our hands for sugar treat.
Soon she stood beside the barnyard gate
to wait with unmoved feet
for us to take our seat.
She'd walk sedately to the pasture
where mother couldn't see, then she went faster.
We'd fly and watch the fence post hurry by
as we rode swiftly, smoothly down the lane;
but if we bounced too much, I'd grab her mane.

To school, her hoof-beats trailed with dusty swirls,
arrived, the teacher straightened out Vi's curls,
old Nance munched grass behind the 'Boys' and 'Girls.'
Yes, we loved old Nance; if I can judge I'd say
It was an instant happening from that first day.
For three years long
She was part of our 'Forever song.'

But, just before... Vi and I could see that she
was slowing down; for short periods
her head and ears held high with old desire,
but she would scarcely run and quickly tire.
We hugged her drooping, graying head,
sensing with dread, she'd nearly run her course,
'cause dad said thirty-one was old age for a horse.
One day we called, she didn't come;
we worried as we went to seek–
found her, floundering in the creek.
She came to drink but slipped in the soft ooze
and there she lay upon her side,

with mud in teeth,
unable to get feet beneath.
When she saw us, her head arose
and she, with mighty effort, tried to roll upright.
Her head fell back, blood spurted from her nose.
the mud and sand turned red.
Old Nance was dead.

Mr. Green and dad came to decide
and the Green's two daughters came and cried.
We cried again, gave answers to their probe
and sobbed when told they'd take old Nance's hide
to make a rug or robe.
Dad tied a rope around her neck
and with two live ones drug her to a spot
where they began to skin.
We winced at every cut and tug.
How could they do this for a rug?
Soon the gory hide was stripped and pried
and dad, with plow and scraper dug a trench
and rolled the carcass to its side,
rib cage, legs and head of flesh and mud;
it teetered on the edge and down it sped
with one unholy thud.

A coolness came.
There was some blame.
Somehow, it was dad's fault, that little creek,
which they all knew was there,
had finished dear old Nance.
It wasn't like before...
the phone no longer rang,
where mom and Mrs. Green exchanged
their recipes on how to pickle beets
or get a thick meringue;
and the adjoining fence, where Mr. Green and dad
discussed the weather, crops and politics,
could lend its friendly ear, no more–
until the blizzard.

I started home from school, alone.

The wind made eerie sounds, a muffled moan,
a shrieking wail;
and I hurried, worried at that flurried low cloud veil.
Then a sudden blanketing of driven snow and sleet
froze my cheeks and forehead, I couldn't keep my feet.
In my helplessness at that benumbing pitch,
I stumbled, tumbled into roadside ditch.
I sat there shivering, chilling, but unwilling
to face the blinding blast of that demented overcast,
feeling cold and scary, planning my obituary;
thinking, I wouldn't get to say good-by to Vi,
when above the frigid fury, I thought I heard my name.
I wondered if the wind was playing a demoniac game,
but I sensed a prayerful pleading as once again it came
and I knew it was my dad, IT WAS MY DAD.
I scrambled to the road yelling, "DAD!", with all I had.
Soon dad's arms surrounded me, hysterical with joy
and it was then I really knew
how much my dad loved me, his boy.

Dad put me in the wagon next to Mr. Green
who had volunteered to help in search for me
when dad had called around.
He wrapped me in a robe. I felt the soft smooth hide
and knew it was old Nance, but I felt good inside,
because I had been found... but it was more–

I knew the telephone would ring and mom would try
a recipe from Mrs. Green for rhubarb pie,
and dad and Mr. Green again together
at the adjoining fence, would talk of crops and politics and have a rerun on that weather.
In that bitter winter blizzard, the coolness had died.
That's why I know there was a laughing, loving,
starry eyed, Forever time.

There was such a horse. Old Nance had won races as a trotter on various tracks. In later life she was a mailman's horse, pulling his buggy through mud, snow and dusty roads of yesterday.

Mr. Green had bought old Nance when she was replaced with a Model

T. His two daughters rode and drove old Nance until their high school years, when they boarded in town. There was Vi. In a poem I have written about her you will find this metaphor, "We were a pair of shoes, not complete more than a step apart."

In the summer following old Nance's demise, a ruptured appendix almost took dad's life. The doctor told him to get off the farm because any heavy lifting would rupture him beyond repair. We moved to town where dad had to cope with a new world to try to make a living and our economic state plummeted. I continued to work for other farmers when not in school.

Seal

When you're young, along with the feeling that you're going to live forever, one also imagines that if you give it all you have, each day will unfold like kite string without tangles or knotty problems. Well. I graduated from high school when I was sixteen, hoping college was my next move, but my little sisters death at the same time, depleted our family finances. My dad had to leave the farm because of ill health. He was a farmer and a good one but his health and society didn't need whatever else he had to offer so we all went our separate ways to eke out a subsistence of our own.

I was a farm boy and still a boy, not wanting to leave my nest, and, as for coping with the job market I was unequipped to face the working world any place but the farm. Because of Dad's health we had moved to town. Much as I loved the farm and especially horses, being a farmer's hired hand didn't promise much of a future, so I opted for a job in jewelry shop which paid eight dollars a week. After finding a room and breakfast for four of those dollars I tried to survive on five cent hamburgers, peanuts and a quart of milk now and then.

I made it through the winter getting skinnier each day, but when the first warm winds of March swept across the small patches of snow, I knew I had to get back to the farm. I explained my problem to my boss who offered me a raise of two dollars, but the vision of three hearty meals a day and my own love for the farm and horses, was the stronger magnet. He understood my situation.

"Come back if you change your mind, I'll have a job for you." I went to visit my best friend who farmed with his dad. He said that Stub Colby, the banker in Greenville, had been looking for more help at his seven hundred

acre farm. The next morning we drove into Greenville and parked in front of a small bank. I went in. A man with a cigar in his mouth looked at me from his side of the teller cage. He said he was Stub Colby. After telling him what I wanted, he looked at me for quite a while. I could read his thoughts. He was looking at a skinny and pale city boy who probably didn't know how to open a barn door, and I knew I didn't measure up. He didn't even question me. "I'm not hiring anyone today."

My spirits had taken a sudden nose dive and as we drove out of town, I wondered if every farmer would assess my capabilities in like manner. About three miles later I saw a farmer hitching four horses to a disc. Jumping out of the car before it was completely stopped, I ran to him.

"Would you be needing any help?"

"Can you handle horses?"

I thought that was a fair question. I told him he could find out right away if he would let me run that disc for him. He didn't say no, so I helped finish hitching the horses, picked up the reins and took off across the field. When I came back he told me to stay on the disc and finish the field. Later that day I was informed that this was Stub Colby's farm. The man who hired me was Mr. Stiles, the straw boss. I said nothing about my interview with Colby.

Early the next morning as I was harnessing the horses, Mr. Stiles pointed to a tall horse in the shadows a few stalls over and told me to put a harness on him. He said the horse's name was Seal, then he went out to start milking the cows. I grabbed the collar behind Seal, spoke to him and slapped him on the rear to get him to move over so I could get between him and the side of the stall. Right then it seemed that the barn exploded. Seal lunged forward with his chest hitting the manger with a crashing thud. It sounded like ten horses prancing around in that one stall, but I was more worried than frightened. I had just gotten the job on the premise that I could handle horses so I figured I'd better prove up. I talked to Seal patted him gently and worked my way up to the front. I began to feel him ease up a little as I put the collar on him. Then I came back with the harness, threw it over his back and fastened the snaps and buckles. All this time Seal's ears went back one second and forward the next. He quivered each time I touched him but made no further trouble. I put my arms around his neck and straightened his mane in a final gesture of friendliness. When I started to leave, he turned his big head around and looked at me. Then he snorted. I went out to help with the milking and suddenly felt a burning pain in my big toe. Seal had stomped on it while we were getting acquainted.

Bates Stiles, the fifteen year old son, came to help carry the milk to the house and tell us that breakfast was ready. He came over to the cow I was milking.

"Did you harness Seal?" I nodded.

"Dad and I wouldn't touch that horse with a ten foot pole. He's an outlaw, a run-a-way, and mean as they come."

Somehow I felt little ill will. Outside of the prospect of losing a toenail I felt good about myself and that other possibility, that Seal and I needed each other.

I couldn't explain it. I was unaware of any special rapport with horses, but Seal and I must have been on the same wave length. Seal's reputation as an outlaw was common knowledge for miles around. He was like a big puppy with me.

When I came in the barn, he stuck out his head in front of the manger and nickered at me. I'd jump in the manger, hug his head and say a lot of affectionate nothings to him. I soon taught him a few tricks. In a short time he would bring his front legs up high when I would nudge him and do the same. When I told him to stand, he wouldn't budge even if I pulled his tail or walked under him, but when another man approached him he would respond with angry noises that made them back off. Seal was tough. Work or hot sun didn't phase him. Baldy was the other half of my team and I had to be careful that he didn't get over-heated when we cultivated corn. At the end of one corn field there was an old orchard. When I stopped to give Baldy a breather, I climbed over the fence and filled my pockets with green apples to share them with Seal and Baldy.

A few days later we had plowed beyond the orchard and when we stopped for the usual time out for Baldy, I waited a few minutes and said, "Giddup." Seal shook his head and reared slightly. I told Seal to "Stand!" and ran back to the orchard. Three green apples later, Seal was ready to continue.

Sundays would often find me out in the pasture where the horses were grazing. One time Seal was at the other end of the pasture and when I whistled he came running toward me. I suddenly realized that his ancestry must have contained some racing blood because his stride wasn't a choppy work horse gait. Seal was stretching out with clean flowing strides that would do credit to an Arabian. This lead me to resurrect an old buggy from the scrap heap. I widened and lengthened the shafts and used the two front wheels for a racing sulky. I would have been criticized if I had worked any other horse and then raced up and down the road on Sundays, but Seal loved it and it gave me some special status with the neighboring farmers. I could sense a certain respect for my mastery of the outlaw, Seal.

Then something happened that destroyed my tenure of invincibility. It was that day when I was hauling manure from the barnyard and Mr. Stiles asked me to help him dehorn a young bull. He told Bates to take over my job. Seal was one of the three horses on that spreader and I felt a momentary

qualm about Bates being left with Seal. But my job was to take orders. Soon I was too busy trying to get that bull snubbed down in that special enclosure designed for that purpose. Then I heard Bates's nervous "Whoa" and the sound of lunging horses along with the increasing speed of that spreader. That load of manure wound up in a timber patch with one rear wheel hitting a large tree. Seal tore loose while the other two horses drug what was left of the spreader to a stop. Bates was petrified, but still hanging on to the reins when we got there. When Stub viewed that wreckage, he said he was going to get rid of Seal, but he didn't carry out his threat.

The threshing season started and I hitched Seal and Baldy to the bundle wagon. There wasn't one of those dozen farmers who didn't feel that Seal would run away when I brought that first load of wheat bundles alongside of the noisy separator. I had a large audience. Seal perked up his ears a little but that was all.

Then one day when I came in from mowing fence rows, Stub Colby, his wife and their two boys were standing in the yard with Mr. and Mrs. Stiles and Bates. Stub's wife was crying and the two boys were taking turns. I was told that Dolly, their pony had been kicked by Seal. Her hip was crushed and the veterinary said that she would have to be destroyed. After Mrs. Stiles took Mrs. Colby and the two boys to the house, Stub took a thirty-two caliber revolver from his pocket.

"One of you will have to shoot the pony."

Mr. Stiles and Bates quickly begged out of it. Stub looked at me.

"I guess it's your job."

Dolly was in the back pasture. When I was still some distance away, she saw me and whinnied pitifully. I ran to her and put my arms around her neck and bawled. The thought of shooting her made me ill. She was thirsty and feverish. The water tank was a quarter mile down the hill, but I ran to the tank and found an old leaky bucket which would hold water if I held my finger on the hole. After three trips Dolly could hold no more and I couldn't put off my job any longer. I put the muzzle of the thirty-two right on Dolly's forehead, pulled the trigger and threw myself on the ground, vomiting in revulsion.

Now Seal had to go. Stub had all the trouble he was going to take from one horse, but I was positive that Seal wasn't the culprit. There was a four-year-old black gelding in the pasture that was mean. I had seen those hind legs kick out, barely missing old Bess. Seal showed no signs of viciousness with other horses. His problem was people.

Everyone was positive that Seal had kicked Dolly. Even Bates sided with the others. Stub asked me to show Seal at the Sale barn. I felt I had to make him look good. A buyer from another part of the state came into the ring

and grabbed Seal's mouth to look at his teeth. I saw the sudden flashing of hate in Seal's eyes, but he stood quiet as I spoke to him. The buyer bought Seal. I had betrayed a trust and ran outside to be alone if I broke. I did.

The next morning I went out to the barn. There was no cheerful whinny, no large head sticking out to greet me. I couldn't explain the ache and the overwhelming futility that I felt. Then I heard a distant clip-clopping on the road and I knew it was Seal before I saw him. All of a sudden I was the happiest person in the world. I would buy Seal. It would take all my summer's wages and I didn't know what I would do with him, but Seal would be my horse.

I ran to the gate and opened it. I could see the broken halter rope swaying back and forth as Seal came nearer. A truck was close behind. And the truck followed through. It was the man who had bought him. I had to face reality. Seal wouldn't let me keep seal on the farm. I had no alternatives. Cried as I had for put a stronger on the halter and tie Seal back of the truck. I couldn't control my sobs. It was the same wrenching grief as when my sister died.

A week later, I was back working in the jewelry shop.

The next spring, Stub Colby came to the shop where I worked and this time he asked me to come and work for him. I wanted badly to do it but my present boss had given me back my job when I needed one and I felt obligated to remain. Now I go to my best friend's farm and enjoy his friendship and his farm, but I have to admit that tractors don't give me the same satisfaction.

Midnight

For almost two decades of my life, horses were the main source of power on the farm. At threshing times after a large dinner meal, the men sat in the shade and talked about the merits or demerits of a horse they owned or knew. It was then that one of the yarn spinners told this story. My grandfather used to tell about a horse named Midnight.

He was a friend of Reverend McCann who was a circuit rider. His parish had a radius of fifty miles. He weighed at least two-hundred-fifty pounds and often showed up at grandfather's place around mealtime. He was a tough fire eater who would hold a meeting at the drop of a hat. Often, he was in the saddle sixteen to twenty hours a day and he was spending far too much of his meager free will offerings for horses. They were having a horse sale at my grandfather's home town, which usually turned out to be a social high-light. My granddad went just to get in on the carnival atmosphere. The sale had been in progress for some time when everyone looked down the road at the

approaching horse and rider. What they saw was Rev. McCann aboard old Bess. Old Bess had developed string-halt. One hind leg would come up so high that it hit her rib cage before returning to the ground in a one, two, three, kerplop cadence. Rev. McCann sat stiffly on old Bess holding his bible in one hand and the reins in the other. It was hard to maintain dignity on that sorry spectacle of a steed. He was aware of some snickers as he reined up and dismounted. He put his bible in his saddle bag but didn't bother to tie old Bess. As he strode toward the auctioneer it was obvious to all present that here was a man, tall, big boned and muscular. Those fingers that turned the pages of his bible were tentacles of prodigious strength. It wasn't long before a horse named Midnight entered the buying circle. A man in front of Midnight pulled down on a twitch that was tied around a tender portion of Midnight's upper lip and a man on each side held the horse's head down by grasping each ear. The remainder of the horse followed along in a side-ways canter that displayed the powerful body of that rangy, big, black horse. None were present that didn't know the horse's past. Midnight had left a trail of broken bones from Texas to North Dakota in rodeos but he had become so mean and tricky that no one would ride him any more. The auctioneer felt that this was the end of the line for Midnight.

"How much am I bid for this flea bitten coyote?" he asked, "Do I hear two dollars?"

Rev. McCann raised his hand. "Two dollars," he said. It was then everyone knew that Midnight was the reason the Reverend came to the auction.

The auctioneer almost lost his cud but went on. "I got two dollars, do I hear three?"

He rolled on for a short period. Realizing he had no bidders, he stopped and looked at Rev McCann.

"Now, look here preacher, don't you think you're biting off more than you can chew? This critter ain't no ordinary sinner."

"Two dollars," said Rev. McCann.

The sky had looked threatening and the clouds were rolling in fast as the auctioneer continued. "Two dollars once, twice, three times, sold to Rev. McCann." The auctioneer looked at the preacher, "If you can convert that ornery piece of horse-hide, I'll sing in the choir beginning next Sunday."

A loud clap of thunder came as Rev. McCann was given the rope attached to Midnight's halter. The rain came in torrents. The three men that had held Midnight ran for shelter. The first thing Rev. McCann did was remove that painful noose from Midnight's upper lip. In a split second the horse seemed to realize that the odds were more in his favor. He reared and kicked into action. The intermittent lightning added to the grotesque situation. Midnight drug Rev. McCann all over that corral. Sometimes he was lifted

off his feet as Midnight reared straight up, kicking with his forelegs like a boxer. In between the claps of thunder, the onlookers could hear the quoting of scripture. There are numerous passages using the word 'woe'. Evidently, Midnight wasn't impressed by 'woe!' or 'whoa!' It rained even harder and Midnight seemed to increase his onslaught with the added tempo of the storm. That Rev. McCann wasn't crushed seemed a miracle.

The auctioneer had been watching the battle. He looked at those around him.

"I'm still betting on Midnight," he said. "Is there any one here daffy enough to cover five dollars?"

Grandma Cooper had been helping serve the coffee and doughnuts with the proceeds to go to the Ladies Aid Fund.

"I don't have five dollars, but I'll take fifty cents of that bet. How about some of you kicking in? If we win, the money will go to the Ladies Aid Fund. I have a hunch that Rev. McCann has something going for him that we haven't considered."

It was a gesture, more than anything else, but ladies and men chipped in to cover the bet. Now, the preacher had a rooting section, of which he wasn't aware. All this time, the battle still raged. If one assessed the situation honestly, he would have to admit that Midnight had things going his way. The simple unanswered question was, how much can one man endure, even if he had the faith of a mustard seed?

Midnight reared higher than at any other time in an effort to get rid of that menace at the end of the rope. His hooves slipped in the muddy slime and he fell backwards into a pool of water with Rev. McCann sailing through the air, still hanging onto that rope. He landed right on top of Midnight's head which was under water. Rev. McCann changed his position from prone to sitting. He spit out some water and sat on Midnight's submerged head, trying to get his breath back, because of the extended period of exertion. Then he clasp his hands in prayer, with the rope still firmly grasped.

"Oh Lord!" he prayed loudly, "You know I've done all I'm able to do. You know we need this horse badly. Now I'm placing it in your unfailing hands. Thy will be done. Amen."

Midnight's head was still under water and though he was struggling, it was obvious he was going down for the third time. The Rev. McCann was in no hurry getting off. When it seemed far too long, he lifted Midnight's head out of the water and rolled him over on his legs. Midnight was too weak to get up. He coughed and wheezed, blew out streams of water with each mighty heave. He finally struggled to his feet and stood, head down and sick. It had stopped raining. Rev. McCann led the subdued, wobbly Midnight over to the hitching rail along-side of old Bess. He removed her

bridle, lengthened it and put it on Midnight right over the halter. Then the preacher adjusted the saddle and put it on Midnight who was still in no condition to resist as the Reverend tied the halter rope to the hitching rail and with his hands on her nose steered old Bess over to the auctioneer.

"Here's the two dollars I owe you and I'm throwing in old Bess to boot. I'll be looking for you in the church choir, beginning next Sunday." Grandma Cooper didn't mention winning the bet from the auctioneer, which enhanced the Ladies Aid Fund by all of ten dollars. She didn't want a lecture on tainted money.

Rev. McCann rode Midnight through thick and thin for seven years. Midnight was still going strong when the Reverend was given charge of a large church in Grandpa's town. The church furnished a buggy and two matched, high stepping trotters. He needed Midnight no longer. The horse had caused no trouble, but the preacher had kept that halter on him at all times and there was no love lost on either side. But Rev. McCann was too busy saving souls, to worry about his sullen but obedient steed. The preacher asked Grandpa to go with him to give Midnight his freedom out on the open range, not far from town. Midnight, tied behind the buggy, trotted along obediently until they reached a spot where you could see nothing but sky and open range if you didn't look behind. Rev. McCann untied Midnight from the buggy. As he removed the halter he thought it proper to quote a bit of scripture.

"Well done, good and faithful servant."

In an instant, a baleful gleam of pure undiluted hate came in Midnight's eyes. His ears flared back as he wheeled and kicked his hind legs at Rev. McCann. The two hooves straddled the preacher's head, missing each ear by inches. With a squeal that sounded like something from the depths of Hades, Midnight streaked over the nearest hill. The Reverend never saw Midnight again but there were reports of hearing a shrill unearthly noise, followed by the sound of retreating hoof-beats.

Not Theophilus

Thanksgivings are supposed to be fun, but this particular one gave me some of the blackest moments of my whole eight years.

In the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving we had decorated our schoolroom with pictures of turkeys that we had drawn, colored, and cut out. Every available space seemed to have a turkey on it. Some were good but some were of dubious design, but at least we knew they were turkeys. And all this time I dreamed of having turkey for our Thanksgiving dinner. Was that asking too much—Just a turkey?

I didn't leave it all to chance. Turkey pictures that I had made and cut out were hung in strategic places around our house and I wasn't very subtle in my hinting. "Mom, can see this turkey from there?" I would ask. "Where can I hang this turkey? Wow, I'll bet they're good eating."

In spite of this I heard the decision handed down a few days before Thanksgiving. "We're going to roast a pig."

"Roast pig! Gee!" I hoped my dad and mom could tell my revulsion to the idea by the tone of my voice. So we were going to have pork for Thanksgiving. Boy! It sounded as romantic and tasty as the cooked cornmeal or mush that we had for breakfast far too often. Dad was a hog farmer and the place was literally littered with pigs.

This wasn't all. The preacher, his wife and their two daughters had been invited to have dinner with us. They were the age of my brother and me. The older one was named Lois and the other Eloise. But what could they do? They couldn't shinny up trees, catch mice in the haymow or play ball. When I discussed the subject with my brother I didn't get any sympathy from him.

"Lois is a good looker," he grinned. How could anyone look so pleased about a girl? I had never noticed Eloise and that was the way I liked it.

There was a lot of action around the place early Thanksgiving morning. My two older sisters were helping mother with the baking and getting the house in order for company. Dad started a fire under the big iron kettle in the yard. He enlisted my little sister and me to carry firewood while he filled

the kettle with water. We knew this was the usual procedure for butchering. Then dad went out in the hog lot and herded several pigs into a corner. He reached down and grabbed a squealing pig by the hind leg. The two of us, who had been watching, realized what had happened and in almost the same breath we yelled, "No dad, not Theophilus!"

Dad didn't hear us because of all the squealing but my little sister was over the fence in a second. She grabbed the pig by a front leg and started tugging and pleading with my dad. At the same time the pig squealed louder than ever as a result of the double trouble he was in.

This was Theophilus. He was one of the six pigs that had been farrowed about six weeks later than the others. All this trouble wouldn't have happened if dad hadn't told us to take care of one of them which was a runt. He told us to bottle-feed him because he was getting pushed away from his mother at dinner time. Now he looked as healthy as the rest and we named him Curly because we were happy to see the curl come back in his tail. In the meantime we had made pets of the other five because we were with them so much. We named them all: Roscoe, Myrtle, Nosey, Whitey, Curly, and Theophilus.

Dad could see tears in my little sister's eyes and he was a softy about her. "Okay, okay," dad said, "Which one may I have?" He explained that the six were the only pigs small enough to get into our oven. Dad sat down and waited for our decision, still holding Theophilus, who had stopped squealing.

Well, it couldn't be Roscoe. He was so friendly. He would lie down in front of your feet so you would rub his stomach. Not Myrtle. She was the only girl pig in the bunch. Nosey would root at you with his nose until you scratched him behind his ears. Curly was the only white pig on the farm—the others were all red. And not Theophilus—my older sister had gotten the name out of the Bible and we liked the sound of it. Besides he was so smart he almost talked to you.

Well, that ruled out all six pigs, but dad still had Theophilus by the hind leg. "I hope you understand," he said, "but I've got to do what I've got to do." He looked at us and saw that we didn't understand. He put Theophilus under his arm and said, "Don't follow me," and then went around the back of the barn. We listened for what we knew was coming; a long squeal and then silence. My little sister and I cried and vowed we'd never speak to our dad again—but that didn't mean we couldn't watch the butchering.

Dad poured the hot water from the iron kettle into a barrel. By using a rope on a pulley hung over the barrel, he dunked Theophilus several times and then scraped the hair from the steaming hide. Soon he shone in smooth polished pinkness and we looked on, still sullen but fascinated. Dad started to speak to us a couple of times but he could see that the natives were

unfriendly and went back to work. After removing the insides he gave the carcass some final touches and then took it to the house to turn the job over to mother. We tagged along behind.

Things were taking shape in the kitchen. The wood-burning kitchen range was red hot in spots. My brother and I had stacked firewood high along the side and back of the range and we coud see the pile was going down. Over against the wall was a large table which was all covered with the dinner-to-be. A kettle of cut pumpkin for pies, another full of apples, raisins, pieces of bread and spices, which would be the stuffing for the pig. Loaves of fresh-baked bread were along one end of the table, along with pans of rolls and tarts. There was a cake ready for frosting. Also there were pickles, jellies, canned corn and green beans, pickled crab apples and sweet potatoes. My older sister was putting marshmallows into a fruit salad. It was early but my taste buds were overworking already. I tried to filch a marshmallow but my sister said, "Scat."

Mother put the finishing touches on Theophilus and filled him with the stuffing. Then she discovered he was too large for the roaster so she put him in a large dishpan with nose and hind legs still overhanging. She finally worked him into the hot oven in a diagonal position and then closed then closed the oven door.

Our company arrived about that time. We were told to go and play. We didn't usually need to be told but I wasn't very keen about playing with girls—my little sister excepted. Dad had made a swing in the driveway in the center of the barn, which seemed to be fun for a while. Then we played hide-and-seek. Somewhere along the way I began to think that Eloise wasn't so bad after all. I tossed a ball to her and she whizzed it back so hard I decided she could play on my team any time. By the time they yelled for us to get ready for dinner, Eloise and I had reached the hand holding and giggling stage. I had forgotten all about Theophilus's demise.

Mother made me wash up better than usual and I had to change to company clothing before I could sit down to dinner. Eloise sat beside me at the table and when I saw and smelled all that food I knew I couldn't wait much longer. Dad asked the preacher to give the blessing. I always liked to watch him pray. His eyelids would flutter as he spoke and I imagined he was getting little glimpses of heaven. Outside of that he seemed almost human.

After the Amen, my mother and older sister came in with the platter holding Theophilus. There he was sprawled out on that platter, baked to a beautiful golden brown. With that baked apple in his mouth, he looked like an angelic cherub ready to depart for pig heaven.

My little sister gave me a look and then an agonizing "O-o-o-h!" like when you get the cramps. All of a sudden my lower lip started quivering and

a tear rolled down my cheek, and then the two of us bawled.

The preacher was the first to speak. "Now just a minute," he said, "let's get that pig out of here." My mother looked as though she couldn't believe her ears. Dad must have told the preacher about us. "This calls for a little miracle," the preacher continued. "It's called out goes old pig; in comes the new."

He grabbed the platter and headed for the kitchen with mother and dad following. My little sister and I stopped crying and I was wondering if we had carried this thing too far. Everyone just sat there waiting to see what was going to happen next. There was some noise in the kitchen and soon the preacher came into the dining room carrying a platter of pig that bore no resemblance to Theophilus.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I want you to meet Mortimer, who will substitute for Theophilus. The last I saw Theophilus he sailed right out the window and up into the air and when I looked around there was Mortimer on the platter." I thought the preacher took a quick look upstairs with a "Forgive me, Lord," expression.

There was a transformation. The pig on the platter didn't have an apple in his mouth but there was one of dad's old corncob pipes with a wisp of smoke coming from the bowl. A tin cup upside down on his head at a rakish angle made a hat. He was hunched up in the center of his back which made him look like a razorback and a little American flag was where his tail had been, at a forty-five degree angle.

I wasn't so sure it wasn't Theophilus, but my little sister was satisfied. She climbed out of her chair and ran around to dad and gave him a big hug and dad brightened up a lot. The preacher took the carving knife and stood up. "Now who wants the first slice of Mortimer?"

Perhaps I grew up a little. I knew that this happened to all pigs sooner or later. I raised my plate up high. Suddenly, I felt real good. I nudged Eloise with my elbow because I had to do something. She turned, looked at me and giggled. So did I.

Toody

I have this neighbor, a hard head if there ever was one tough, feisty, unbending and sometimes mean. I'll give you an example. Fred, that's his name, and I were leaning on our lawn mowers, when a young lady came walking up the sidewalk with her poodle on a leash. She was wearing a mini outfit and she was pretty. At that moment she had my vote for Miss America. She showed Fred a neat set of teeth.

"May I walk my dog on your vacant lot?" she asked.

Fred smiled right back at her, "Lady, if I wanted a dog on my lot I'd have one of my own."

That vacant lot is important to Fred; it's his bird and animal sanctuary. The peony bushes on the edge are his rabbit habitat, and the two walnut trees are full of squirrels. He buys peanuts for his pet blue jay, cookies for Charley, his pet squirrel and keeps a year round supply of corn, nuts and birdseed for the furred and feathered. A stray dog or cat is apt to get a pellet from his sling-shot in his zeal for preservation.

We play golf together. You should hear some of those tangy expletives Fred uses on a straying ball; it reminds me of a platoon sergeant I had in Basic Training. But I just smile and manage to keep my composure when his squirrels eat our peaches, apples and pears and his rabbits, our lettuce, peas and cabbage. This winter, Fred will be out with his snow-blower before daybreak, clearing sidewalks and driveways for us and our neighbors. If you think we don't love Fred, you're jealous. Fred spent much of his early life as a boxer and a race-car driver. Everything he did was at wide open throttle. When he was courting 'Toody,' few knew her name was Ruth, I'm certain she felt she was wooed by a tornado. There was a woman; she loved every turbulent segment of Fred's personality and you could tell that Fred thought he won the Five Hundred when he married her.

We all liked Toody. Her infectious laugh kept the neighborhood happiness scale, six point eight degrees above the norm. Some people go to movies for entertainment, but we had a better show next door. They even seemed to enjoy their fights. We would hear a din of word artillery that shook their

shingles and then in a few minutes they came out of their house, giggling like school kids. They'd climb in the car to take a ride or test their gourmet appetites on a new eatery. Fred would lean her way with a pucker and Toody would reciprocate. Theirs was pure constancy with punctuation. You could almost hear the tin cans rattling behind.

Most of the children were afraid of Fred, but our two boys saw through that rhino veneer. Maybe it was because our houses had adjoining driveways. In spite of all the extenuating circumstances, that bald-headed crustacean is my friend.

Toody succumbed to cancer. The neighborhood took it hard, but Fred couldn't shake it. I never played so much golf as I did then, and in all kinds of weather. Fred often talked about Toody and when he did, he cried.

The other day, I looked out the window and saw Fred wiping dust from his car, which he always kept in show room condition. I had a sudden urge to play golf before my wife decided I should mow the lawn or worse. As I started out the door, a flock of pigeons flew over. they must have pulled the chain simultaneously, because Fred's car was splattered from radiator to rear bumper. He saw me and couldn't resist making the most of the situation. Waving his arm like a baseball umpire, he yelled, "Come back you buzzards, you missed a spot." Fred hosed off the residue. "Feed 'em and they crap all over you," he muttered.

"How about some golf," I asked.

"O.K., but I want to see if you recognize this bell."

On the floor of the garage was an old iron dinner bell, the kind you used to see on farms. It was rusty and had a crack in it. I picked it up; the clapper gave a sound that was a cross between a thunk and a gong.

"I recognize that sound," I said.

"Yeah," said Fred, "it's the old dinner bell from granddad's farm."

Fred always called it his granddad's farm, although it now belongs to his sister and brother-in-law. We used to hunt there and while we hunted. Toody helped Fred's sister cook the dinner. When it was ready, Toody rang the bell for us to come and get it. My stomach thought that bell made sweet music.

I acted more interested in that bell than I felt. I knew Fred would make it look like new again, but I had to say something.

"One thing for sure," I said, "This isn't like the church bell you had."

Sometimes when we hunted, Fred would say, "Let's see if we can shoot the preacher." On one corner of the farm was an old abandoned church. The brush and weeds around it often produced a rabbit and if we shot one it would be the preacher. Before the turn of the century, Fred's grandfather donated an acre and a half of his farm for a church site. A church was built,

complete with belfry. the members ordered a large bell, because they felt the larger area the bell was heard, the bigger the membership. For many years it called people to worship on Sundays and special occasions, such as weddings, church dinners and at funerals it was rung as taps for those who died.

Times change, better roads and automobiles dwindled the congregation to where it ceased to be. The building soon became dilapidated for lack of upkeep; it stood there termiting away. One time after an attempt to shoot the 'preacher,' Fred decided to give the church some closer scrutiny. It was in bad shape. The belfry leaned at an angle; it looked as though the bell could come crashing through the roof at any moment. Suddenly, Fred's eyes lit up like a child's on Christmas morning.

"I want that bell," he said.

Well, if Fred wanted something, he usually got it. You should see that big motor boat in his garage, which he waxes and shines once a year, but never goes near the water. Golf did that to him. Fred checked with his sister and family. No one was interested. It was Fred's bell. With my help and a block and tackle, we took that bell down and put it in a shed by the farm house. Toody and Fred worked on the bell in their spare time until it shone like new. In the process, they discovered the names of the first members were engraved around the perimeter at the bottom.

Word got around about Fred's bell and many people wanted it, but Fred had formed an attachment, as he had for the boat. He was in no hurry to part with it. He and Toody had talked about it. Toody made her feelings known.

"It doesn't seem right for it not to be in a church."

After Toody died. Fred never went near the bell. Then one day, he received a letter from a Catholic priest whose parish was building a new church in a community some distance away. Part of the letter read, "We have heard about your bell and would like to see it and perhaps buy it if it's not out of reach." Fred answered the letter and set a date that he'd be at the farm. I rode along. Three men climbed out of a pick-up truck and introduced themselves. the one in the clerical collar was Father O'Brien. They liked the bell and when they sounded the clapper, they liked it even better.

"Oh, that's a beautiful bell," Father O'Brien said. "We want it if we can meet your price."

"I've got a price," said Fred. "You see those names around the bottom? If you leave them on, you can have it. Take it or leave it."

"We'll take it and the names will stay," said Father OBrien. He reached for Fred's hand and said what I knew all along. "You're one of a kind. Weeks later, Fred received another letter. Dear Fred, We have finished our church

and the bell is in place. As a special dedication of the gift of the bell, We want you to come and take part in the service, by ringing it for the first time."

Fred showed me the letter. "I'm not going," he said, "I'd choke up and spoil their dedication."

"Oh yes you are going," I said. "You've done a good thing and you have to give them their day."

"O.K.," said Fred, "I'll go if you go with me. It ain't gonna be easy."

The day came and the church was filled. A long rope had been attached to the bell and it dangled in the foyer where all could see it. Fred and I sat in the rear pew. There was more up and downing than we were accustomed to, but Father O'Brien did a good job on the sermon and when it came time for the dedication, he came and stood at the level of the pews.

"Our dedication," he said "Is not just calling your attention to a bell. This bell has a history. For many years it brought another congregation to worship, a Protestant church. Around the bottom of the bell are the names of its first members. We will revere their memory as we do those of our parish. this is, in a way, a resurrection, because the bell will be living again. I have asked Mr. Fred Vogel, the man who gave us this beautiful bell, to ring for the first time. Fred, will you stand so all can see you?"

Fred stood. There was a spontaneity of applause which may not have been a part of the intended procedure. when it died down, Father O'Brien said, "Ring it Fred."

Fred made his way out of the pew and back to the rope. I had seen his white knuckles, which indicated the turmoil within him. The first tug was a small clang, but then Fred reached up and pulled with his strong arms. The bell pealed in full clarity as though it was expressing joy at doing what it was intended to do. In my mind it was saying, "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

Tears poured down Fred's cheeks and I knew that he and Toody where pulling on that rope together. That wasn't rain on my cheeks.

Violet

On the Fourth of July, 1910, my sister Vi was born. We lived on a farm. My sister Martha was put in charge of us who were the previous offspring. Martha was eight, Alma six, Henry four, and I was two. The others were allowed to shoot those small firecrackers. I soon wandered away and climbed the windmill. The rungs were far apart but I struggled up that thirty foot elevation to the top and sat on the platform to watch the whirring blades that pumped water into the large tank below. Martha came around the corner of the house looking for me. She saw me and ran into the house. Dad came out and hurried up the ladder to me. "Put your arms around my neck and hang on." I hung on and we came down. I usually got a swat on the rear for my inclination to get in trouble, but Dad said sternly, "Don't try that again," and hurried back inside.

Soon the doctor came out with his valise, jumped into his buggy and left. We were invited into the house to see our new little sister cuddled in my mother's arms. To me it was an instant attachment. In a short time I was allowed to hold Vi as I sat in a small rocking chair. I loved her with all the little boy love I had. It must have been obvious to Vi, because her face would light up with the sweetest smile. My brother and sisters would hold her, but she would squirm and reach for me. It never changed. When the others were at school, mother would read to us. Vi was on her lap and I sat on a chair beside them. When I asked about a word, mother would let me get acquainted with the letters. She felt my insatiable desire to learn and I soon had quite a vocabulary as well as the meaning of each word. When I was four I had rheumatic fever and was bedfast for a long period. As I recovered, I read the Funnies and Items in the newspaper to Vi. I wasn't informed, but the doctor told my parents that I wouldn't live to be a teenager because my heart was damaged badly. I did have nightly sessions of awaking with the sound of loud thrrrumph! thurrumph! that resembled horses galloping around my bed. This happened night after night for several years. I didn't associate it with a health problem and was never told to be careful. Vi and I were inseparable. I cannot remember a cross word between us. When I

started to school there was a problem. It was that little primer. I grinned at the teacher. "I can read as well as my brother. He's in the third grade." She brought me a history book and turned to the Preamble to the Constitution and I read it. She was a sour pickle who considered me a problem. My penmanship was legible. Later that day, she found me writing with my left hand. She hit the back of my left hand with a ruler, grabbed the pencil, put it in my right hand and almost joyfully said, "You're going to write with your right hand!" When I showed my parents the obvious bruise on the back of my left hand my dad threatened to give my teacher a bruise on her back side. Nothing was done, so I write with my right hand although I eat and throw a ball with the south paw approach. I remained in the first grade and with a strong feeling of disgust.

In the early part of my third school year we moved to a farm and a one room school house. The teacher seemed nice as she talked to me. "You're the same age as my two second graders. You'll do just fine there." I smoldered. When she called for the second grade to come up front. I remained in my seat. She pointed to me. "I won't do the second grade again," was my retort. She showed some spunk. "O.K. you just sit there until you decide what you want to do." In the matter of a week or ten days the teacher came to visit my parents. No doubt they informed her of there belief that I wouldn't live much longer. Forcing me to take second grade wasn't the answer. So she ignored me. I read Edna's history book and nearly memorized portions of it. She sat across the aisle from me. I was a Civil war buff at seven. In the next two years I solved the eighth grade problems more often than the eighth graders did. We were moving to town after the end of my fifth year. I was still the teacher's problem. One day she came by my desk and picked up my work book. I had just worked a problem she had on the black board for the eighth grade. She flipped some pages and found more that were solved correctly. "Well, well," was all she said. In my remaining school year, she gave me test from the higher grades in all areas of study. On the last day she gave me a sealed envelope. "Give this to your parents." She even patted my head. She knew we were moving to town. Vi was in the third grade which I had never passed.

I worked on my grandmother's farm that summer. If there was anything wrong with my heart it didn't give any signs. I worked hard and became stronger by the day. I missed Vi and cried myself to sleep often. When I returned home to start to school I was as strong as my brother.

My mother gave me that note to give to the sixth grade teacher. She was pretty and had a lovely smile. "What makes you think you can handle the sixth grade?" "I think I could do the eighth grade, but this is the right grade for my age and years in school." "O.K., I'll take a chance. Now don't let me

down." I was her best student and liked my teacher.

The years flew by. Our pattern remained the same. Life lost its luster when Vi and I were separated. When she was fourteen I took her to a ten cent movie where Hoot Gibson rode into the sunset with his beautiful bride. On the way home it started to rain. We ran. In a few steps Vi stopped and would have fallen if I hadn't held her. Her heart was pounding. We walked very slowly and made it home. I had just discovered that Vi had a bad heart. Less than a year later they took her to the hospital. I was working in a shop where jewelry was repaired and made. One day the foreman of the shop said there was a phone call for me. My mother said Vi was asking for me. "Hurry," she said. It was uphill to the hospital and I ran the eight blocks as fast as I could. At Vi's room mother motioned me to go right into her room. I approached Vi's bed with tears gushing down my cheeks. I kneeled beside her bed and really bawled. Vi ran her fingers threw my hair. "You'll be all-right. I'll just be there when you come." There was a long sigh and her suffering was over. Later, I was informed that my mother lost a sister at fifteen with the same symptoms. Today the heart could have been rearranged to eliminate the problem. I am a healthy ninety-one. Supposedly, I was the one to die but I'm still around. We are told that, "Love never dies." I hope my story has a happy ending.

"I'll just be there when you come."