

AUGUST #ONE, ALL I SAID WAS...AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY GEORGE A. BAKER

FOREWORD

I HAVE DRAGGED MY FEET ON THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY. IT HAS TAKEN ME FOURTEEN YEARS TO GET IT DOWN ON PAPER; WITHOUT THE INSISTENCE AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF MY CHILDREN IT WOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED. THE REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST WAS OFTEN PAINFUL; BUT ENQUIRING MINDS NEED TO KNOW. YET, RECALLING CERTAIN TIMES, PLACES, EVENTS WAS, BY TURNS STIMULATING, EUPHORIC, FUNNY AND GENERATED MUCH "SWEET SORROW."

I AM A MAN SPLATTERED WITH LUCK! I AM LUCKY TO HAVE WORKED WITH SOME OF THE BRIGHTEST TALENTS OF BOTH THE BUSINESS AND TECHNICAL WORLD DURING MY FIFTY-SEVEN YEARS IN THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY, AND FORMED LASTING FRIENDSHIPS WITH MANY. THE SUPPORT RECEIVED BY THIS KID FROM "UP AT THE HOME" FROM MY ASSOCIATES BOTH SUBORDINATE AND SUPERIOR HAS BEEN EXTREMELY REWARDING AND DESPITE MY CARDIAC DIFFICULTIES ALONG THE WAY ENABLED ME TO WORK PAST MY SEVENTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY. AS ONE OF MY FORMER ITT ASSOCIATES PUT IT RECENTLY, "BAKER HASN'T MERELY SURVIVED; HE HAS PREVAILED!" THAT REWARDING REMARK REALLY "TIGHTENED UP MY HALO"!

I AM LUCKY TO HAVE FOUR BRIGHT, INDUSTRIOUS KIDS (PLUS THEIR "PASSEL" OF GRANDCHILDREN AND GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN) WHO TOOK THEIR MORE WHOLESOME QUALITIES FROM ALMA, THEIR UNSURPASSED MOTHER WHOM I NEVER TOOK THE TIME TO "LEARN" OR APPRECIATE.

HAVING JUST PASSED MY SEVENTY-SEVENTH BIRTHDAY I'VE LEARNED HOW SOON THE YOUNG GET OLD, AND HOW 'SHORT A WHILE' FOREVER IS. I FINALLY REALIZED THERE WASN'T ENOUGH TIME TO GET IT ALL DONE; THE CHORES, THE KID RAISING, THE CAREERS, WALKING ON THE LAND YOU OWNED, ENOUGH 'SOFT SHOING.'

I'M COMFORTABLE THAT I FILLED SOME SMALL TEMPORARY SLOT AND, IN GENERAL, LEFT THINGS BETTER THAN I FOUND THEM AND DID THINGS AS FAIRLY CLOSE TO GOOD AS I COULD MAKE THEM.

I'M GRATEFUL TO ALL OF "YOU," ESPECIALLY ALMA, MOTHER OF MY CHILDREN, WHO CLEANED ME UP, AND LEAH WHO FILLS MY EMPTY YESTERDAYS WITH LOVE AND DEVOTION AND KEEPS ME IN SHAPE MUCH LONGER THAN I ALONE OR ANYONE ELSE COULD HAVE.

AND "I AIN'T DONE YET"!

SO, ABOVE ALL, I HOPE YOU WON'T PUT THIS DOWN UPON FINISHING IT, AND SAY, "WHO CARES?"

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
DECEMBER 1995

GEORGE A. BAKER
1918-1999

P.S. NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS I WILL NEVER CONSIDER MYSELF A FAILURE, AS I HAVE ALWAYS SERVED AS A BAD EXAMPLE.

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BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS PRE-ORPHANAGE 1918-1927

IT ALL STARTED NOVEMBER 6, 1918, FIVE DAYS BEFORE THE WORLD WAR I ARMISTICE WAS SIGNED, AT THE FOX HOTEL, WASHINGTON AVENUE, NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA.

WHY THE HOTEL?

RAISES A LOT OF QUESTIONS TO WHICH I CAN GIVE NO ANSWERS EXCEPT TO SAY, "I WANTED TO BE BORN THERE SO I COULD BE NEAR MY MOTHER." LIKE 'NORMAN COUSINS', "ANATOMY OF AN ILLNESS", MAYBE HOTEL ROOMS WERE CHEAPER THAN HOSPITAL ROOMS EVEN THEN.

MY TWIN SISTER, NEVER NAMED, DIED SOME NINETEEN DAYS LATER. DR. DRAPER, ATTENDING PHYSICIAN, SAID, "THIS BOY WILL HAVE THE VITALITY OF TWO."

I WAS NAMED GEORGE AUGUST BAKER.

THE MIDDLE NAME AUGUST SEEMINGLY WAS A FAMILY FAVORITE. I EVEN HAVE THE NAME AUGUST ON MY LICENSE PLATE. MY GRANDPARENTS CAME FROM SAXONY, GERMANY ON MY FATHER'S SIDE. HIS DADDY'S NAME WAS GEORGE AUGUST. MY DADDY'S NAME WAS WILLIAM AUGUST. MY BROTHER BECAME WILLIAM AUGUST. I NAMED MY SON GEORGE AUGUST THE SECOND. AND HE NAMED HIS SON GEORGE AUGUST THE THIRD.

I WAS USUALLY CALLED GEORGE.

MY FATHER, WILLIAM A. BAKER, WAS A FIREMAN FOR THE CITY OF NEWPORT NEWS. THIS WAS HIS FIRST MARRIAGE, MY MOTHER'S SECOND. SHE AND HER SISTER, FANNIE HAD MARRIED THE APPLE BROTHERS, CHARLES AND OSCAR, WHOM I THINK WITH THEIR FAMILY HAD MIGRATED TO TIDEWATER, VIRGINIA FROM NORTH CAROLINA, PROBABLY BECAUSE OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE SHIPYARD. MY MOTHER HAD MARRIED CHARLES APPLE, BY WHOM SHE BORE TWO SONS, ROBERT AND CHARLES, JR., WITH WHOM WE/I HAD ONLY PASSING CONTACT AS LIFE WENT ON. MORE ABOUT AUNT FANNIE AND UNCLE OSCAR LATER.

SOME TWO YEARS LATER MY SISTER, MAMIE ELIZABETH, WAS BORN; AND TWO YEARS AFTER, THELMA MAE CAME ALONG. AND IN YET TWO MORE YEARS, WILLIAM AUGUST (BILLY) CAME ALONG, JULY 3, 1925. DAD HAD PASSED AWAY AT AGE 46 IN THE MEANTIME (ANEURYSMS) AND NEVER SAW THIS "DARLING."

MY FAINT REMEMBRANCES OF MY DAD INCLUDE HIM COMING HOME FROM FIRE CALLS, SOAKING WET AND COUGHING A LOT. I RECALL MY DAD TAKING ME TO THE FIREHOUSE TO SEE THE EQUIPMENT, A LOT OF WHICH WAS HORSE DRAWN. HE WAS "THE HOOK AND LADDER MAN," I WAS TOLD LATER.

I ALSO REMEMBER ONCE HE TOOK ME WITH HIM TO VISIT A FRIEND WHO WAS DYING OF CANCER. HIS FRIEND REACHED UNDER HIS PILLOW AND GAVE ME A SMALL SACK OF CANDY. WHEN WE LEFT AND GOT OUTSIDE, MY DAD TOOK THE CANDY FROM ME AND PUT IT IN THE TRASH NEARBY; IN THOSE DAYS THEY THOUGHT OF CANCER AS CONTAGIOUS.

I MUST HAVE BEEN ABOUT SIX YEARS OLD WHEN DAD DIED.

I REMEMBER AUNT EMMA, MY DAD'S SISTER, STANDING AT GRAVE SIDE WITH ME HOLDING MY HAND AND CRYING, SAYING HOW MUCH SHE LOVED HIM AND HOW PROUD SHE WAS OF ME. SHE ALWAYS REMINDED ME WITH THESE SAME WORDS IN LATER YEARS WHEN I VISITED HER.

FUNNY HOW RELUCTANT SHE WAS TO HELP MY MOTHER AFTER DAD'S PASSING. HER HUSBAND, HAMMIE GRUBBS, HAD MADE A LOT OF MONEY DOWN ON THE "BAD SIDE" OF NEWPORT NEWS DURING WORLD WAR I. IT WAS A TYPICAL BAWDY, SAILOR TOWN: ANYTHING GOES, ILLEGAL BOOZE, PROSTITUTION, ET CETERA. ON PART OF TOWN WAS CALLED "BLOODFIELD." TYPICAL WARTIME PORT CITY.

I ALSO REMEMBER HOW MY DAD HOW HE KIDDED MY MOTHER ABOUT BEING SO "CLEAN CRAZY," SAYING, A-RAT-A-TAT-TAT, I CAN HEAR YOU CLEANING THE ROOF."

MY MOTHER WAS A STICKLER FOR KEEPING THINGS CLEAN. DIRTY CLOTHES BARELY HIT THE FLOOR BEFORE SHE WAS WASHING; AND THE SAME FOR MOPPING AND CLEANING FLOORS AND FURNITURE, OF WHICH WE HAD LITTLE AFTER DAD'S DEATH.

MY MOTHER ALWAYS TOLD EVERYONE, "IF BILL HAD LIVED, EVERYTHING WOULD HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT."

AFTER DAD DIED, THERE WAS TALK INITIALLY OF MY DAD'S BROTHER, JOE, IN RICHMOND AND HIS WIFE, GOLDIE, TAKING ME TO RAISE (THEY HAD THREE CHILDREN OF THEIR OWN, LAWSON, MARY ROY, AND PAULINE, AND MY DAD'S TWO SISTERS; YETTLER (WHO HAD ONE SON, STEVE), TAKING THELMA; AND EMMA (WHO HAD LOST A CHILD, MAMIE), TAKING MAMIE.

THIS NEVER HAPPENED. THEY ALL WANTED GEORGE, WHICH WAS UNWORKABLE. MY MOTHER WAS TO KEEP BILLY, THE "DARLING" WHO WAS AS YET UNBORN AT MY FATHER'S DEATH.

MY MOTHER STRUGGLED ALONG WITH US, TRYING TO PROVIDE. WE MOVED FROM PLACE TO PLACE, PROBABLY BECAUSE WE COULDN'T PAY THE RENT. SHE TOOK IN WASHING, IRONING, AND STRETCHING CURTAINS, AND BAKED BREAD TO SELL. SHE WAS AN EXCELLENT COOK. I REMEMBER TAKING ORDERS AND DELIVERING THEM AFTER SCHOOL.

I WAS FIVE WHEN I FIRST WENT TO PRE-SCHOOL, BEFORE I WENT TO THE ORPHANAGE. I WENT TO KINDERGARTEN. THAT'S ALL THE PRE-SCHOOL I RECALL. I LIKED EARLY SCHOOL.

IN THOSE DAYS THERE WAS NO WELFARE OR AID OF ANY KIND. RELATIVES, FOR THE MOST PART, WERE NOT FORTHCOMING. THROUGH SOME LOCAL CHARITY WE RECEIVED SEVERAL CASES OF EAGLE BRAND CONDENSED MILK, WHICH KEPT US ALIVE AND BECAME "TRADING MATERIAL" WITH LOCAL GROCERS FOR OTHER STAPLES. THE GROCERS "COULD SEE ME COMING" WITH A NOTE FROM MOM

(BARELY LEGIBLE) AND WEREN'T TOO HAPPY ABOUT TRADING; BUT MOST DID, RELUCTANTLY.

WE WERE "NANNIED" SOMETIMES BY A BLACK LADY NAMED "PATTY." SHE WOULD HAVE SEIZURES AND SCARE US BADLY; ONCE SHE BURNED HERSELF AT THE STOVE WITH AN ATTACK, BUT SHE WAS SWEET AND KIND!

I REMEMBER ATTENDING JOHN W. DANIEL SCHOOL THIRD GRADE IN NEWPORT NEWS. THE TEACHER KNEW OF OUR PLIGHT AND ONE DAY BROUGHT ME A LARGE LAYER CAKE TO TAKE HOME. WE INHALED IT!

THERE WERE DAYS WE DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO EAT. I GOT SO HUNGRY ONCE I ATE A BOTTLE OF ASPIRIN—IT DIDN'T SATISFY MY HUNGER—BUT I'VE NEVER HAD A HEADACHE!

ONCE MY MOTHER SENT ME WITH THE MONEY TO PAY OUR LANDLORD THE RENT. SOMETHING LIKE THREE OR FOUR DOLLARS AND MOST OF IT IN CHANGE. I STOPPED ALONG THE WAY TO PLAY AND LOST THE MONEY; WENT BACK, TOLD HER, AND WE RETURNED TO THE SITE. I REMEMBER HER CRAWLING AROUND, LOOKING IN THE GRASS, SEARCHING AND CRYING, "WHAT WILL I DO?" I CAN'T REMEMBER WHETHER OR NOT WE FOUND IT.

ONCE IN A COLD WINTER, SNOW ON THE GROUND, MOM SENT ME TO THE STORE AS SHE HAD JUST DELIVERED MY BROTHER BILL AND HAD MAMIE AND THELMA TO LOOK AFTER. IT WAS QUITE A WAYS TO THE STORE AND BACK. I GOT REAL COLD AND LAYED DOWN IN THE FIELD ON MY BACK. SHE SAW ME THROUGH THE WINDOW, RAN OUT, AND DRAGGED ME IN, PUT MY FEET IN THE OVEN TO THAW ME. I GUESS I COULD HAVE FROZEN. I WAS ABOUT EIGHT YEARS OLD AT THE TIME.

MOM STRUGGLED ON THROUGH 1925 AND 1926, AND IN 1927 THROUGH, TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, (OF WHICH MY DAD AND MOM WERE MEMBERS), WE KIDS WERE ADMITTED TO "THE LUTHERAN ORPHAN HOME OF THE SOUTH" AT SALEM, VA. OUR PASTOR TUEFEL OF TRINITY CHURCH KNEW WE COULD NOT CONTINUE AS WE WERE.

SO HERE'S MY MOTHER WITH BILLY IN HER ARMS AND THE OTHER THREE OF US, GETTING ON THE WRONG TRAIN IN NORFOLK OR SUFFOLK, HAVING TO CHANGE, CRYING AS SHE HAD BEFORE WITH, "BILL, WHY DID YOU HAVE TO LEAVE ME?"

THE ORPHANAGE YEARS, 1927-1936

FINALLY ON THE RIGHT TRAIN, WE WERE MET IN ROANOKE BY MISS MASON, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDANT OF THE "HOME," AND WE RODE THE STREETCAR OVER TO SALEM AND OUR "NEW HOME."

WE WERE PLACED IN QUARANTINE IN THE MAIN ADMINISTRATION BUILDING FOR SEVERAL DAYS TO ENSURE WE WEREN'T BRINGING IN "ANYTHING CONTAGIOUS." WE CRIED A LOT, MAMIE AND I, THINKING MAMA WOULD EVENTUALLY COME AND TAKE US BACK. COMING FROM FLAT TIDEWATER AND LOOKING OUT THE WINDOWS AT THE TOWERING ALLEGHENY AND BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS ONLY MADE US SADDER, SO WE CRIED SOME MORE.

WE FINALLY WERE PLACED IN OUR RESPECTIVE COTTAGES: BILLY AND I TO "SMALL BOYS UNDER TWELVE;" MAMIE AND THELMA TO "SMALL GIRLS UNDER TWELVE." AT AGE TWO-AND-A-HALF YEARS, BILLY WAS THE YOUNGEST CHILD EVER ADMITTED, SO MRS. CORA WHEELER, OUR HOUSEMOTHER, TOOK HIM UNDER HER WING---EVEN HAD HIM SLEEP WITH HER FOR AWHILE. ANYONE MAKING BILLY CRY "GOT IT!" MRS. WHEELER WAS A WIDOW IN HER SIXTIES FROM BURLINGTON,

NORTH CAROLINA AND HAD LOST A SON MANY YEARS BEFORE. BILLY WAS HIS REPLACEMENT.

LIFE AT THE HOME

LIFE AT THE HOME SEEMED TOUGH AND AUSTERE THEN, BUT WE NOW KNOW IT WAS THE BEST THING EVER TO HAPPEN TO US. THE DISCIPLINE IN THE HOME WAS VERY STRICT. WE RESENTED IT MUCH OF THE TIME, BUT IT SEEMS WE ALL GREW UP BETTER FOR IT.

THE HOME PHYSICAL PLANT CONSISTED OF SOME 200 ACRES, FOUR COTTAGES, ONE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, PLUS AN ARRAY OF FARM BUILDINGS, BARNS, CHICKEN HOUSES, HOG PENS, SILOS, ET CETERA. THERE WAS ONE COTTAGE FOR SMALL GIRLS UP TO 12 YEARS AND THE SAME FOR SMALL BOYS UP TO 12 YEARS. AT 12 YEARS OF AGE, SMALL GIRLS AND BOYS TRANSFERRED TO LARGE GIRLS' AND BOYS' COTTAGES RESPECTIVELY.

SUPERINTENDENT OF THE HOME AT THAT TIME WAS REV. PAUL SIEG, A TALL, KIND, SOFT-SPOKEN MAN WHO NEVER SEEMED TO BE "OUT OF SORTS."

WE HAD ONLY BEEN AT THE HOME A FEW MONTHS WHEN "MAMA CAME AND TOOK US OUT," DETERMINED TO TRY TO "MAKE IT AGAIN." I BELIEVE AT THAT POINT IN HER LIFE, MY MOTHER REALLY LOVED US AND WAS TRYING DESPERATELY TO KEEP US TOGETHER. THIS LOVE WAS GREATLY DIVERTED OR DIMINISHED AS TIME WENT ON BY HER REMARRIAGE AND ANOTHER CHILD (A GIRL, MARY LOU CRIZER), WHO DIED VERY YOUNG OF PNEUMONIA, PLUS CONTENDING WITH AN ALCOHOLIC HUSBAND, GRANVILLE CRIZER.

I CAN'T RECALL WHAT COULD POSSIBLY HAVE HAPPENED TO MAKE HER THINK SHE COULD SUPPORT US, OR WHY THE AUTHORITIES AT THE HOME WOULD LET HER "TAKE US BACK." ANYWAY, BACK TO THE GRIND, BAKING BREAD AND SELLING IT, (I TOOK THE ORDERS AND DELIVERED THEM AFTER SCHOOL), TAKING IN WASHING AND IRONING, CUSTOM CURTAIN WASHING AND STRETCHING. I REMEMBER HER BLEEDING FINGERS FROM THE OLD STYLE STRETCHERS.

OUR LUTHERAN PASTOR TUEFEL SAW WHAT WAS HAPPENING AGAIN AND INSISTED WE RETURN TO THE HOME. ON OUR RETURN, WE WERE GREETED BY THE NEW SUPERINTENDENT, REV. T. A. GRAVES. WE WERE RETURNED TO OUR RESPECTIVE SMALL GIRLS/SMALL BOYS COTTAGES, AND "DARLING BILLY" RESUMED HIS PET STATUS WITH MRS. WHEELER. ANYONE BOTHERING BILLY OR MAKING HIM CRY FELT A WRATH IN THE FORM OF A TONGUE LASHING AND/OR SWITCHING. THE EPITHETS SHE HURLED WERE SOMETHING LESS THAN GRACIOUS, SUCH AS, "NO GOOD, LOW DOWN, COMMON, GOOD FOR NOTHING, STINKIN'—".

THIS WAS AWFULLY HARD ON MY SELF ESTEEM, BUT IN BETWEEN TIRADES, WE ALMOST FELT NEGLECTED WHEN IT DIDN'T HAPPEN. SOMEHOW WE ENDURED AND DIDN'T GROW UP ANY WORSE FOR IT. AS SISTER THELMA MUCH LATER IN LIFE SAID, "GEORGE, NOBODY LOVED US BUT WE MADE IT OKAY." THIS WAS CONTRASTING OUR BRINGING UP WITH TODAY'S BROKEN FAMILY SYNDROME AND THE HUE AND CRY ABOUT THE LACK OF LOVE BESTOWED ON TODAY'S CHILDREN.

ONCE MY MOTHER RETURNED US TO THE HOME THE SECOND TIME, SHE SEEMED TO LOSE INTEREST, WHICH WAS SOMEWHAT UNDERSTANDABLE, AS SHE HAD REMARRIED AND HAD BORNE YET ANOTHER DAUGHTER, MARY LOU CRIZER, WHOM WE NEVER KNEW. SHE DIED VERY YOUNG, SO I GUESS "MAMA TRIED," AND DID THE BEST SHE COULD, BUT WE NEVER HEARD FROM HER UNTIL I BECAME A SENIOR IN HIGH SCHOOL.

THERE WERE FAMILY VISITING DAYS AT THE HOME, GENERALLY ON SUNDAYS, IN THE AFTERNOON AFTER CHURCH. WHEN OUR MOTHER FIRST PUT US THERE,

SHE CAME UP A COUPLE OF TIMES, BUT AFTER SHE BROUGHT US BACK, WE NEVER SAW HER AGAIN FOR OVER SEVEN YEARS.

HOWEVER, MY FRIEND CHARLEY'S MOTHER, MARY BROWN, USED TO VISIT CHARLEY, JUNE, ED, AND PAUL, HER FOUR CHILDREN, AND SORT OF BECAME A MOTHER TO US ALL. WHEN KIDS HAD A CHANCE TO GO TO ROANOKE, THEY ALL USUALLY STOPPED TO SEE MARY BROWN. I VISIT HER GRAVE ANNUALLY AT SHERWOOD PARK IN SALEM. SHE WOULD BRING THINGS, MAINLY FOR HER KIDS.

SHE WAS IN THE SAME POSITION MY MOTHER WAS. SHE HAD FOUR KIDS WHO WERE PUT IN THE HOME BEFORE WE WERE, BUT SHE NEVER LOST TOUCH WITH THEM. I THINK HER HUSBAND DIED FROM A HEART AILMENT SIMILAR TO MY DAD WITHOUT LEAVING HER ANY INSURANCE.

MRS. BROWN AND MY MOTHER BOTH DID CHURCH JANITORIAL WORK, TOOK IN WASHING AND SEWING TO MAKE ENDS MEET. THERE WAS JUST NO WAY A WOMAN COULD RAISE FOUR KIDS BY HERSELF IN THOSE DAYS, WITH NO HELP FROM RELATIVES, WHO ALL LOOKED THE OTHER WAY. SHE WAS NEARBY, JUST A STREETCAR RIDE FROM ROANOKE. WHEN SHE CAME, SHE BROUGHT THINGS PRIMARILY FOR HER OWN CHILDREN, BUT SHE WAS FREE WITH ALL OF US. A PRETTY WOMAN AND VERY ARTICULATE.

HER DAUGHTER JUNE WAS ONE OF MY CHILDHOOD SWEETHEARTS AND MAY HAVE BEEN THE FIRST ONE.

IN LATER YEARS, DURING ONE OF MY SINGLE PERIODS, I CALLED JUNE AND WE AGREED TO MEET FOR LUNCH AT THE HOLIDAY INN, BYRD AIRPORT, RICHMOND. I ASKED HER, "WE HAVEN'T SEEN EACH OTHER IN YEARS, HOW WILL WE KNOW ONE ANOTHER?" SHE SAID, "IF YOU WON'T BE LOOKING FOR LONNIE ANDERSON, I WON'T BE LOOKING FOR ROBERT REDFORD." SO WE MET, HAD DINNER, TALKED ABOUT "UP AT THE HOME," AND WENT OUR SEPARATE WAYS.

ALTHOUGH WE KNEW EACH OTHER, MY BROTHER AND SISTERS AND I WERE SEPARATED AT ALL TIMES, THOUGH THE TWO GIRLS LIVED TOGETHER. BILL WAS SO YOUNG. NATURALLY, AS A BOY, I WAS CLOSER TO BILL THAN THE GIRLS. I WOULD SEE MY SISTERS AT MEAL TIMES AND WE WOULD JUST GRIN AT ONE ANOTHER AND GO ON. I BET I DID NOT SAY 200 WORDS TO MY SISTERS IN NINE YEARS. WE LIVED IN SEPARATE COTTAGES, BUT THERE WAS A LOT OF COMMONALITIES BETWEEN THE BIG BOYS AND THE LITTLE BOYS.

ALL THE BOYS LIVED IN A BIG DORMITORY, TWO ROWS OF BEDS. WE HAD VERY SMALL CLOSET SPACE WHERE YOU KEPT YOUR "SUNDAY SUIT." WE HAD A "BOX ROOM" IN THE BASEMENT WHERE WE KEPT OUR JUNK AND HUNG OUR WORK CLOTHES.

MY BROTHER AND SISTERS WERE NEVER CLOSE, BECAUSE WE WERE PHYSICALLY SEPARATED AT THE HOME AND SEEMED TO MAINTAIN DISTANCE THE REST OF OUR LIVES. I WAS SORT OF A MAN AMONG MEN IN THE LATER YEARS BECAUSE I WAS ONE OF THE OLDEST. I WOULD SEE MY SISTERS AND SMILE BUT WITH BILL IT WAS A LITTLE DIFFERENT. OUR COTTAGES WERE ADJACENT AND HE WAS ALWAYS LOOKING UP TO ME, SO I WOULD SEE HIM. I WOULD KEEP OTHERS FROM PICKING ON HIM. I WAS PROUD OF THE FACT HE WAS FLEET OF FOOT LIKE I WAS AND HE COULD OUTFRAN ALL THE KIDS IN THE SMALL BOYS COTTAGE.

I WAS MY BROTHER'S KEEPER TILL I WAS 12. I CARRIED HIM TO THE HOME ON MY BACK BECAUSE I WAS NINE AND HE WAS TWO. BUT WHEN I WAS 12 WE WERE SEPARATED; I WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE LARGE BOYS' COTTAGE. I WAS WALKING PAST THE WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL ONE DAY DURING THE WAR ON PASS FROM FORT MONMOUTH, N.J., HADN'T SEEN HIM IN YEARS. HE WALKED OUT, SURPRISE! WHAT A "HAPPENSTANCE." HE LATER JOINED THE COAST GUARD.

WE MAINTAIN REGULAR CONTACT NOW. HE LIVES IN AN APARTMENT IN MANHATTAN. HE NEVER MARRIED. HE ALWAYS MANAGED THEATRES. HE IS

RETIRED NOW. HE MAINTAINS CLOSE LIASION WITH MY OLDEST SISTER MAMIE AND THEY GO BACK AND FORTH AND TO SEE EACH OTHER. SHE LIVES IN YONKERS.

AS A YOUNGER CHILD, BEFORE 12 YEARS, WE WERE TAKEN AND DISTRIBUTED IN VARIOUS SIZE GROUPS TO THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY, FROM WAYNESBORO NORTH. PARISHIONERS WOULD TAKE ONE OR TWO OR MAYBE THREE CHILDREN AND "VACATION" THEM FOR ONE OR TWO WEEKS, THEN RETURN US TO THE HOME.

MY MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE WAS BEING DROPPED OFF WITH MY BROTHER AND ONE OTHER BOY AT THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AT NEW MARKET, VA. OUR HOST FAMILY WAS THE JACOB LOWERY'S. THEY HAD A SON AND A DAUGHTER, CHESTER AND MABEL. WE KIDS FOLLOWED MR. LOWERY AROUND ALL DAY LONG AND HELPED WITH WHATEVER CHORES HE WAS DOING, BEIT HAYMAKING, MILKING, GATHERING EGGS, OR WHATEVER. HE APPARENTLY WAS A TENANT FARMER AND THE FARM WAS BEAUTIFULLY LOCATED ALONG THE SHENANDOAH RIVER.

I WAS SURPRISED HE EVER TOOK US, BUT THEY WANTED TO SHARE WHAT THEY HAD WITH US WHO WERE LESS FORTUNATE. THEIR LIVING CONDITIONS WERE QUITE FRUGAL, ALMOST AUSTERE. THE BEDS WE SLEPT IN WERE "STRAW TICKS." THEY HAD VERY LITTLE FURNITURE AND INTERIOR DECORATIONS WERE NON-EXISTENT. THEY WERE JUST GOOD PEOPLE WANTING TO SHARE WHAT THEY HAD WITH OTHERS.

WE NEVER WENT BACK OR SAW THEM AGAIN. THOSE TWO CHILDREN WOULD BE MY AGE. I OFTEN WONDER WHAT HAPPENED TO MABEL AND CHESTER.

AS SMALL BOYS, WE MOWED THE LAWN OF OUR COTTAGE, CUT WEEDS, AND HERDED COWS IN UNFENCED FIELDS. WE WENT TO SCHOOL THROUGH THE FIFTH GRADE AT THE HOME AND TO SALEM, VIRGINIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS THEREAFTER.

WE ALL HAD OUR HOUSEHOLD DUTIES, SUCH AS MAKING BEDS (OUR OWN PLUS SMALLER BOYS'), SCRUBBING AND WAXING FLOORS, CLEANING BATHROOMS AND COMMODES UNDER MRS. WHEELER'S STRICT SUPERVISION AND INSPECTION. WHEN IT WASN'T UP TO "CORA LEE'S STANDARD," YOU RECEIVED HER VERBAL TREATMENT PLUS SLAPPING AND SWITCHING.

WHEN ONE OF MY ASSIGNMENTS WAS NOT UP TO SNUFF I WOULD HEAR, "WHERE IS MR. BAKER? SEND HIM UP HERE." I WAS ALWAYS "MR. BAKER." AS RECENTLY AS 1968 I WAS TELLING MY FRIEND, MRS. ANNIE DUFFEY OF MILAN, TENNESSEE, (WHO ALWAYS ADDRESSED ME AS "MR. BAKER,") ABOUT THE HOME AND MRS. WHEELER. SHE SAID, "MR. BAKER, IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN MR. BAKER ALL YOUR LIFE."

WE SLEPT A LOT IN SCHOOL. MY GRADES WERE NOT ALL THAT GREAT. AND SEVERAL TIMES MY TEACHERS HAD TO MEET AND TALK A LOT IN THE HALL TO GET ME PROMOTED TO THE NEXT GRADE.

AS I RECALL, I SEEM TO HAVE BEEN SLIGHTLY AHEAD OF THE OTHER KIDS IN MY FOURTH AND FIFTH GRADE CLASSES IN READING AND RECITATION, BUT "DUMBER" IN ARITHMETIC. I LOCATED MY FIFTH GRADE TEACHER, WHOM I CALLED JUST RECENTLY. VIRGINIA STICKLEY IS NOW 89 YEARS OLD AND SHE SOUNDED ON THE PHONE THE SAME AS 67 YEARS AGO. LEARNED MORE WITH HER IN THE FIFTH GRADE THAN ANY OTHER TIME. SHE WAS TOUGH AND DEMANDING. ONE DAY WE DIDN'T KNOW OUR GEOGRAPHY LESSON; AND SHE WHIPPED THE WHOLE CLASS, SOME 15 KIDS! GIRLS AND BOYS! SHE MADE US ALL GO OUT INTO THE HALLWAY BESIDE THE CLASSROOM AND COME BACK IN ONE AT A TIME AND TAKE OUR LICKS FROM A LONG, WIDE BLACK LEATHER STRAP AS WE LAY ACROSS HER DESK.

ONE OF MY REGRETS WITH HAVING TO WORK SO MUCH WAS NEVER BEING ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AT SCHOOL. THERE

WERE LITERARY CLUBS AND DRAMA CLUBS AND FOOTBALL, BUT EVERY TIME WE GOT OUT OF SCHOOL, THE SUPERINTENDENT WAS SITTING THERE WAITING TO HAUL US BACK TO GO TO WORK.

THE IMPORTANT THING ABOUT THE SUPERINTENDENT IS HE HAD A HELL OF A JOB WITH 130 CHILDREN AND THE STAFF AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF OPERATING AND PROMOTING WAYS OF FINANCING THE WHOLE OPERATION BECAUSE THE LUTHERANS ARE TYPICALLY POOR GIVERS.

SAD TO SAY, IN HIS FINAL YEARS AT THE HOME, REV. GRAVES WAS DISMISSED FOR MISMANAGEMENT AND MISHANDLING OF FUNDS.

AFTER THE FIFTH GRADE, WE WENT TO SALEM PUBLIC SCHOOLS. MY FAVORITE SIXTH GRADE TEACHER WAS ANN OAKY.

IN THE SIXTH GRADE, I RAN A PITCHFORK IN MY FOOT. AND IT WAS ABOUT A TWO TO THREE DAY DELAY BEFORE I GOT A TETANUS SHOT. WHEN I GOT THE SHOT, I ALMOST DIED. THEY JUST ABOUT GAVE ME UP. ONCE I GOT WELL, I DIDN'T WANT TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL ANYMORE. MY HOUSE MOTHER CAME ONE DAY TO TAKE MY TEMPERATURE, WHICH BY THEN WOULD HAVE BEEN NORMAL. I HELD THE THERMOMETER OVER THE RADIATOR TO RUN IT UP AND SCARED HER TO DEATH. SHE IMMEDIATELY CALLED THE DOCTOR, WHO RUSHED THERE FROM SALEM AND DISCOVERED MY TEMPERATURE WAS NORMAL. I LATER ADMITTED TO MY MISDEED.

DURING MY SEVENTH GRADE TENURE I BECAME 12 YEARS OLD AND WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE LARGE BOYS' COTTAGE, WHERE LIFE REALLY TOOK ON A DIFFERENT MEANING. WE WALKED, WALKED, AND WALKED TO SCHOOL. IT WAS ABOUT A MILE FROM THE ORPHANAGE BUT IT SEEMED LONGER THAN THAT. WE WEREN'T VERY WELL DRESSED.

WE WEREN'T VERY PROUD OF OUR DRESS, MUCH OF THE TIME BECAUSE IT DIDN'T MEASURE UP TO THE DRESS WORN BY THE BAPTIST ORPHANAGE KIDS IN THE SAME TOWN AND AT THE SAME SCHOOL. THE BAPTISTS HAD MONEY TO SPEND AND WE HARDLY KNEW WHAT MONEY LOOKED LIKE. THE SHOES WE WORE WERE OUR FARM WORK SHOES, WHICH WEREN'T ALWAYS COMPLETELY MANURE-FREE, SO WHEN THINGS GOT WARM IN THE CLASSROOM, WE GO DIRTY LOOKS FROM SOME OF OUR CLASSMATES.

THE BAPTIST ORPHANS HOME HAD OVER 300 KIDS. THEY WERE WELL FINANCED BY THEIR CHURCH. THE KIDS DID NOT HAVE TO WORK. THEY LIVED IN AN INSTITUTION JUST LIKE WE DID, BUT THEY WERE GIVEN A MONETARY ALLOWANCE AND DRESSED VERY WELL, WHEREAS OUR LUTHERAN HOME OF SOME 130 KIDS WAS POORLY DRESSED AND IT SHOWED IN OTHER ASPECTS.

ONE OF THE BIG EVENTS WAS GETTING NEW SHOES. RAPIDLY GROWING FEET OF GROWING BOYS DEMANDED THAT THIS HAPPEN QUITE OFTEN. WE ALWAYS WANTED THE GOOD WORK SHOES WITH THE RIVETS ON THEM. EVEN IF SOMETIMES THEY DIDN'T FIT EXACTLY. WHEN GRAVES THE SUPERINTENDENT WOULD SEE HOW MUCH YOUR FOOT HAD GROWN SINCE THE LAST PAIR, HIS COMMENT WOULD BE "BOY, YOU'RE GETTING BIG ENOUGH TO GO TO WORK."

WE ALL HAD TO WORK. WE GOT UP EVERY MORNING AT 4:30 TO MILK COWS, FEED HOGS AND CHICKENS. BREAKFAST WAS FROM 6:00 TO 6:45 A.M., MORE CHORES TILL 8:00. THEN BE READY TO WALK ONE MILE DOWN TO SALEM TO SCHOOL AND BE THERE BY 9:00. TO GET READY FOR SCHOOL WE HAD A BUCKET AND A BRUSH FOR CLEANING OFF OUR MANURE-LADEN SHOES. WE BATHED EVERY WEDNESDAY AND SATURDAY AND GOT CLEAN OVERALLS WHETHER WE NEEDED THEM OR NOT.

FOR LUNCH WE HAD BROWN BAGS WITH PEANUT BUTTER OR APPLE BUTTER SANDWICH OR SALMON. FOR SOME REASON WE ALWAYS HAD SALMON. MUST HAVE BEEN A DREG ON THE MARKET OR SOMETHING. I DON'T KNOW WHY WE

ENDED UP WITH SO MUCH SALMON AT THE HOME BECAUSE WE HAD HOG MEAT. BUT MAINLY APPLE BUTTER, PEANUT BUTTER, AND SALMON. SAME OLD STUFF EVERY DAY. NO TREATS. WHEN WE GOT OUT OF SCHOOL WE WERE STARVED.

THE MANY ORCHARDS IN ROANOKE COUNTY GAVE US ALL THE DROPPED APPLES. WE ALL WOULD TAKE A TRUCK AND PICK THEM UP. WE ALWAYS HAD PLENTY OF APPLES AND APPLE BUTTER. APPLE BUTTER WAS A BIG STAPLE. WE HAD A 50-GALLON KETTLE FOR MAKING APPLE BUTTER. BOTH GIRLS AND BOYS WORKED.

THE GIRLS DID ALL THE PEELING AND CUTTING UP AND BOYS OPERATED THE KETTLE, KEPT THE FIRE GOING AND OPERATED THE CIDER MILL, WHICH WAS PART OF THE PROCESS. THEY WOULD COOK ALL THE APPLES AND DUMP THE CIDER IN THE KETTLE TO KEEP THE PROCESS GOING—ALL DAY LONG. THE STIRRING WAS VERY TEDIOUS. WE WOULD STAY OUT OF SCHOOL TWO DAYS, BOYS AND GIRLS TOGETHER, TO MAKE APPLE BUTTER IN THE SEASON.

WE HAD MANY APPLE STORAGE PLACES WHICH WERE LOCKED, BUT WE FOUND WAYS—EITHER THROUGH CRACKS OR WHATEVER, TO GET APPLES, WHICH KEPT US GOING TILL SUPPERTIME. I WOULD TAKE MY APPLE TO THE BARN LOT, FIND MY FAVORITE COW, WHICH WOULD STAND STILL FOR ME. I WOULD KNEEL BESIDE HER AND TAKE A BITE OF APPLE AND A SQUIRT OF MILK, A BITE OF APPLE AND A SQUIRT OF MILK.

ONCE I STOLE A HAM OUT OF THE SMOKEHOUSE AND HID IT IN THE BULL PEN LOFT. I WOULD CRAWL INTO THE LOFT AFTER SCHOOL AND CUT A CHUNK OF THIS HAM AND CARRY IT AROUND IN MY POCKET, TAKING A CHAW EVERY NOW AND THEN LIKE TOBACCO. I WAS ABOUT 15 AT THE TIME.

BOYS AT THE AGE OF 14, 15, AND 16 NORMALLY EAT LIKE HORSES, BUT WE WERE NOT SUPPOSE TO EAT BETWEEN MEALS. THERE WAS JUST NOTHING TO EAT. THE MEALS WERE ADEQUATE AND NUTRITIOUS FOR THE TIME.

WHEN I WAS 15, ONE OF THE BOYS AT THE HOME, OTIS STATON, HAD AN APPENDECTOMY AND THE POST-OPERATIVE RESULTS INVOLVED INTESTINAL STRANGULATION AND PERITONITIS SET IN. HE DIED DURING CORRECTIVE SURGERY. HE WAS FROM RICHMOND, VIRGINIA AND SINCE I HAD AN AUNT—AUNT GOLDIE—IN RICHMOND, I WAS ASSIGNED TO ESCORT HIS BODY BY TRAIN TO RICHMOND.

I SPENT THE NIGHT AND MY AUNT PUT ME BACK ON THE TRAIN THE NEXT DAY. SHE WAS MY DADDY'S BROTHER'S WIFE. SHE WAS THE ONLY PERSON THAT CORRESPONDED WITH US. SHE SENT US CLOTHING AND MONEY—USUALLY A DOLLAR BILL PINNED INSIDE OF A PANTS POCKET (SHE WAS AFRAID MAYBE THEY WOULD TAKE IT OUT AT ADMINISTRATION.)

SAD PART OF THIS, OTIS HAD COMPLAINED FOR DAYS ABOUT HIS STOMACH BUT THE HOUSE MOTHER DISMISSED IT AS WHINING. TODAY, THIS KIND OF THING WOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED.

MANY OF OUR TASKS REQUIRED STAYING OUT OF SCHOOL OR SKIPPING SCHOOL. WE MIGHT STAY OUT OF SCHOOL ONE, TWO, OR THREE DAYS TO MAKE APPLE BUTTER, PLOW, SHUCK CORN, OR WHATEVER THE SEASON DEMANDED. ONE OF THE THINGS I DID, FROM ABOUT AGE 15 TO 17, WAS TO PLOW BEHIND TWO MULES, TOM AND BILL. THESE WERE TWO MULES JUST PICKED OFF A CAR LOAD FROM MISSOURI AND PUT TOGETHER AS A TEAM. THEY HAD NO PRIOR RELATIONSHIP. THEY WERE HARD TO HANDLE. BILL WAS WILD AND CRAZY AND WOULD KICK YOU. AND THE SUPERINTENDENT HAD ME HANDLE HIM BECAUSE OF THIS; I WAS GOOD WITH MULES AND COWS.

NOBODY COULD RIDE BILL. SO I DECIDED ONE DAY WHILE PLOWING I WOULD WORK HIM HARD ALL DAY AND WE ENDED UP IN THE MIDDLE OF A VERY LARGE FIELD. I UNHITCHED TOM AND BILL. I LET TOM GO TOWARD THE BARN AND I

JUMPED ON BILL'S BACK. HE STARTED RIGHT OFF BUCKING. BUT WE WERE IN PLOWED GROUND AND A LONG WAYS FROM THE ROAD, SO BY THE TIME WE GOT TO THE ROAD, HE WAS TIRED, SETTLED DOWN, AND LET ME RIDE HIM TO THE BARN. AFTER THAT, I RODE HIM AND HE WAS BROKEN.

I ALSO MANAGED THE DAIRY. WE MILKED 24 GUERNSEY COWS. WE WEREN'T ALWAYS PARTICULAR ABOUT WASHING UDDERS. AND THE MILK WE TOOK TO THE HOUSE IN THE FIVE-GALLON CANS ALWAYS HAD A NICE LAYER OF MANURE ON TOP. THE GIRLS WOULD TAKE THAT MILK AND SEPARATE IT AND MAKE BUTTER. THEY ALWAYS TALKED ABOUT THAT, BECAUSE WHEN WE TOOK THE LID OFF THE CAN, THERE WAS ALL THIS DEBRIS THAT HAD FALLEN OFF THE UDDERS.

WE RARELY SAW MONEY "UP AT THE HOME." ONE METHOD OF TRADING AMONG THE BOYS; IF SOMEONE HAD MARBLES OR A KNIFE OR A SLING SHOT YOU WANTED, YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO PURCHASE IT WITH A CAKE. WE HAD CAKE EVERY SUNDAY DINNER. THE MAIN MEAL ON SUNDAY WAS AT NOON. SO YOU MIGHT FIND YOURSELF OWING TEN SHARES OF CAKE YOU HAD TRADED FOR A SLING-SHOT OR OTHER—WHICH MEANT YOU HAD TO SURRENDER YOUR CAKE TO YOUR TRADING PARTNER FOR TEN CONSECUTIVE SUNDAYS—TOUGH TRADING, NO CAKE! WE GOT THE SLINGSHOT INITIALLY. WE TRUSTED EACH OTHER.

WE RECEIVED MONEY AT CHRISTMAS LIKE 50 CENTS IF YOU WERE 14, 75 CENTS AT 16, ONE DOLLAR AT 17, TO GO CHRISTMAS SHOPPING. WE (LARGER BOYS) WITH A STAFF MEMBER WOULD TAKE THE STREET CAR TO ROANOKE AND WE WOULD TOUR WOOLWORTH'S, KRESS'S, GRANTS, ETC. EVERYONE WANTED A FLASHLIGHT IN THOSE DAYS, SO WE WOULD ALL END UP GETTING OFF THE STREET CAR AT SALEM, FLASHING OUR FLASHLIGHTS AS WE WALKED BACK UP THE HILL TO THE HOME.

INCIDENTALLY, WE STILL HAD OUR MONEY ALLOTMENT PLUS A FULL SHOPPING BAG OF OTHER GOODIES PLUS, OF COURSE, OUR BELOVED FLASHLIGHT. STEALING IS WHAT IT WAS! FUNNY, RARELY WAS ANYONE CAUGHT.

WHAT WE HATED ABOUT BEING POOR AND IN THE ORPHANAGE WAS NOT HAVING A SLED WHEN IT SNOWED. I USED TO SLIDE DOWN THE HILL ON ONE OF THE GIRLS. "SHE GOT SO SHE LIKED IT."

ALTHOUGH WE WORKED ALL THE TIME, WE HAD SOME FUN, TOO. I BEGAN LISTENING TO THE RADIO IN ABOUT 1934. MY GREATEST INTEREST WAS IN POPULAR MUSIC OF THE DAY. WE HAD ONE OF THOSE OLD MAJESTIC RADIOS. IT WAS A TABLE MODEL WITH A WOOD CASE. WE WERE CONSTANTLY TUNING TO SEPARATE THE STATIC FROM THE MUSIC. THE BOYS THAT LOVED MUSIC—HALF A DOZEN OF US OUT OF 30—WOULD GATHER ALL AROUND IN THE EVENINGS AFTER 7:00 BEFORE STUDY HALL. THIS IS WHERE MY LOVE OF MUSIC STARTED.

IT WAS PROBABLY A RADIO DONATED TO THE ORPHANAGE BY SOME CHURCH MEMBER. WE USE TO TAKE TURNS WITH THE DIALS. IT WAS A DAILY ACTIVITY BECAUSE WE HAD VERY LITTLE ACCESS TO NEWSPAPERS.

WE LISTENED TO ANY BAND MUSIC WE COULD FIND, LIKE BEN BERNIE, "YOWSER, YOWSER!" HE PLAYED FROM CHICAGO. FOR NEWS WE LISTENED TO LOWELL THOMAS, BUT THE NEWS DID NOT MEAN A LOT TO US IN THOSE DAYS. "BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE A DIME?"

AT OTHER TIMES IN MY LIFE, THE RADIO WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO ME. I HEARD THE 1939 ORSON WELLE'S BROADCAST OF THE "WAR OF THE WORLDS." IT WAS A VERY REAL THING. I WAS ALREADY OUT OF THE ORPHANAGE. ONE SUNDAY, RIDING WITH MY WIFE AND SON, WE HEARD THAT THE JAPANESE HAD BOMBED PEARL HARBOR. THAT WAS AT WELLSBURG, WEST VIRGINIA.

T.A. GRAVES WAS A TOUGH TASKMASTER. AS I LOOK BACK, HE HAD TO BE, BUT IT WAS ROUGH. WORK, WORK, WORK, VERY LITTLE PLAY, NO PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES. ONCE THE OLDER BOYS, 16

TO 18-YEAR OLDS, REBELLED AND GANGED UP ON T.A. GRAVES, BEATING HIM PRETTY BADLY. HE GRADUALLY MOVED THOSE BOYS OUT OF THE HOME AND BACK TO WHERE THEY ORIGINALLY CAME. MANY OF THEM WENT INTO THE ARMY. REMEMBER, THIS WAS THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1932-1936; YOU COULDN'T 'BUY' A JOB.

GRAVES SEEMED TO LIKE ME, I THINK BECAUSE I WORKED SO HARD. HE TOLD HOUSEMOTHERS AND OTHERS I WAS THE BEST AND HARDEST-WORKING BOY HE EVER HAD.

DURING QUIET HOUR ON SUNDAY, I READ STREET AND SMITH'S 'WILD WEEKLIES', WHICH WERE HAND ME DOWNS FROM THE TOWN KIDS, ALSO, ZANE GREY BOOKS.

IF WE WERE CAUGHT SLEEPING IN CHURCH, WE WERE FORCED TO LEARN HYMNS DURING THE QUIET HOUR AND IF WE DIDN'T LEARN THEM, WE WEREN'T ALLOWED TO PLAY AT 3:00, WHEN QUIET HOUR ENDED. IF WE LEARNED OUR FIRST HYMN TOO QUICKLY, WE HAD TO LEARN ANOTHER, SAFE TO SAY I SLOWED DOWN. MY FIRST HYMN: "WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE? WHO WILL SERVE THE KING?"

WE USE TO BOX A LOT. WE WOULD HAVE BOXING MATCHES ON SUNDAY AND I REMEMBER BOYER HALL BEAT ME PRETTY BAD. I FINALLY DECIDED I WAS NO PUGILIST, JUST A BRAWLER.

I REMEMBER SEVERAL FIGHTS—FIST FIGHTS. I DON'T RECALL WHAT OVER OR WHAT ABOUT. BUT I DO RECALL CLASHING WITH THOMAS FITZ E. AS I REMEMBER, I GOT THE BEST OF THAT AND HE BACKED DOWN.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BOYS AND GIRLS WAS SOMEWHAT PROHIBITED. WE WERE KEPT APART AND CLOSELY MONITORED, EVEN ON OUR WALKS TO SCHOOL AND CHURCH. BOYS AND GIRLS WERE RARELY SEEN WALKING TOGETHER. FROM WHAT I NOW KNOW, GRAVES, THE SUPERINTENDENT, WAS FINALLY FOUND TO BE "TRYSTING" WITH SOME OF THE GIRLS DURING MY STAY AT THE HOME.

ALL OF MY FRIENDS, OF COURSE, WERE AT THE HOME. WE WERE PRETTY MUCH SEGREGATED FROM THE TOWN KIDS AND OTHER OUTSIDERS. MY BEST FRIENDS WERE CHARLIE BROWN, FRED FUQUA, HIS BROTHER LADD FUQUA, JIMMY TYNES, AND SILAS FULBRIGHT. CHARLEY BROWN REMAINS MY BEST FRIEND TODAY. HE WAS MY BROTHER, MY FATHER, MY ADVISOR, AND GOT ME MY FIRST JOB IN THE TELEPHONE INDUSTRY. HE NOW LIVES IN RICHMOND AND WE MAINTAIN CONTACT.

FRED IS DEAD. HIS BROTHER LADD WAS KILLED AT ANZIO DURING WORLD WAR II. I HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO LOCATE JIMMY TYNES AND SI FULBRIGHT.

THE GIRLS AT THE HOME USED TO "GET AFTER" THE BOYS. I DON'T KNOW WHAT WOULD PROVOKE THIS. THEY ACCUSED THE OTHER BOYS OF PUTTING ME ON A PEDESTAL; MAYBE BECAUSE I WOULDN'T GIVE THEM A TUMBLE. DON'T KNOW WHY I AM BRINGING THIS UP—THING THAT WERE DONE AND SAID, MUST HAVE BEEN IMPORTANT AT THE TIME.

THANKSGIVING WAS A FAVORITE HOLIDAY AND REMAINS THAT WAY TODAY. WE ALWAYS PLAYED THE BAPTIST ORPHANAGE FOOTBALL AND ALWAYS GOT BEAT. ALSO, IT WAS ALWAYS OUR GOAL TO HAVE ALL THE CORN SHUCKED AND THE FODDER SHOCKED BY THANKSGIVING. ALSO, OUR THANKSGIVING DINNERS WERE QUITE SUMPTUOUS. WE HAD THINGS LIKE GRAPES AND ORANGES THAT WE NEVER GOT ANY OTHER TIME OF THE YEAR EXCEPT CHRISTMAS. AND OF COURSE, THANKSGIVING IS THE ONLY TRUE AMERICAN HOLIDAY.

WE WERE NEVER LONELY. TOO MUCH MISERY IN ONE PILE, WE WERE SORT OF HAPPY WITH IT.

EVERY YEAR ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, THE ELKS LODGE IN ROANOKE WOULD TAKE US TO LAKESIDE PARK AT SALEM, WHERE WE DID ALL THE RIDES, SWIMMING, EVERYTHING ALL DAY LONG, TO OUR HEART'S CONTENT. THIS WAS THE MOST LOOKED-FORWARD-TO-EVENT IN OUR WHOLE YEAR. TO US, BPOE—WHICH IS THE BENEVOLENT PROTECTIVE ORDER OF ELKS—MEANT 'BEST PEOPLE ON EARTH'. MUCH LATER IN LIFE I BECAME AN ELK IN TRENTON, TENNESSEE. LATER TRANSFERRED IT TO ARDMORE, OKLAHOMA AND SINCE MOVED MY MEMBERSHIP TO CHARLOTTESVILLE. THE ELKS IS A GREAT ORGANIZATION, BUT NOTHING SEEMS AS EXCITING AS WHEN THEY WERE THE "BPOE" TO US UP AT THE HOME.

I LOVED POPULAR MUSIC OF THE DAY AND DANCING—I WAS AND STILL AM A FRUSTRATED HOOFER. THE OTHER BOYS WERE ALL ENCOURAGING ME TO DANCE—TAP, OR FLAT FOOT, OR WHATEVER YOU CALL IT.

CHARLEY BROWN, FRED FUQUA, AND I FORMED A BAND. WE WOULD MEET DOWN IN THE WASHROOM IN THE BASEMENT. I WOULD PLAY A KAZOO AND BEAT ON THE DOOR AND TAP DANCE. CHARLEY WOULD PLAY DRUMS, WHICH WAS A CARDBOARD BOX, AND FRED WOULD PLAY A KAZOO. WE EACH TOOK TURNS SHINING, WHETHER IT BE DANCING, SINGING, OR WHATEVER. FRED LATER FORMED A BAND WHILE WORKING FOR DUKE POWER COMPANY IN DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA, WHERE HE SPENT HIS TOTAL CAREER. HE WORKED FOR THE POWER COMPANY HIS ENTIRE LIFE.

MRS. WHEELER ABHORRED IT. SHE WOULD SAY, "LOOK AT MR. BAKER, ACTING LIKE A NIGGER!" SHE WOULD COME DOWN AND BREAK US UP, BUT THAT WAS THE ONLY PLACE WE COULD FIND. IT WAS APPARENTLY A GENETIC PREDISPOSITION WITH ME. MY MOTHER WAS THIS WAY. SHE WAS ALWAYS CLOWNING, SINGING, AND DANCING, AS I RECALL. MY UNCLE LEROY, MOTHER'S BROTHER, WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN BRINGING 'GENE AUSTIN' TO NEWPORT NEWS IN THOSE EARLY YEARS IN THE 20'S.

OCCASIONALLY A ROANOKE COLLEGE STUDENT WOULD COME AND TAKE US HIKING IN THE MOUNTAINS, ONLY ON SUNDAYS. OTHERWISE, WE COULD NOT GET AWAY FROM WORK.

MY FAVORITE SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER WAS EARL FISHER, A ROANOKE COLLEGE THEOLOGICAL STUDENT WHO GRADUATED TO BECOME A LUTHERAN PREACHER. I LATER FOUND OUT HE RAN OFF WITH ONE OF HIS PARISHIONERS, SO HE STARTED A NEW CAREER AND THAT WAS THE LAST I HEARD OF HIM. BEFORE HE GOT INTO TROUBLE, HE CAME TO WHEATLAND LUTHERAN CHURCH AT BUCHANAN AND DELIVERED A MOST INSPIRING SERMON. HE RECOGNIZED ME, REPEATEDLY, FROM THE PULPIT AS ONE OF THE BOYS FROM "UP AT THE HOME." ALMA INVITED HIM TO SUNDAY DINNER AT OUR HOUSE.

OUR FAMILY WAS THE HOME, SO WHENEVER WE WENT SOMEWHERE, IT WAS ALWAYS GOOD TO GET BACK.

ADOPTION

THE QUESTION OF ADOPTION CAME UP ONLY ONE TIME. I WAS INTERVIEWED BY A LUTHERAN MINISTER FROM KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE. I WAS ABOUT 11 YEARS OLD AT THE TIME AND HE DECIDED HE REALLY WANTED A YOUNGER BOY AND HE ADOPTED JAMES OSBORNE, WHO WAS ABOUT SEVEN YEARS OLD. HE RAISED AND EDUCATED HIM VERY WELL, INCLUDING GIVING HIM A MUSICAL EDUCATION. JAMES LATER DISCLAIMED ANY AFFILIATION WITH THE HOME. WHEN HE TOOK

JAMES, HE LEFT BEHIND HIS SISTER, WINCIE, AND A BROTHER, WILLARD, NOW DECEASED.

MRS. WHEELER CALLED ME, "MR. BAKER, GET UP HERE." I WAS STANDING THERE SHAKING, TALKING TO THIS PREACHER. I DIDN'T REALLY KNOW WHAT THE PURPOSE WAS UNTIL LATER ON. THEY MUST HAVE THOUGHT OF ME AS BRIGHT AND ACTIVE TO CONSIDER ME, BUT TOO OLD. I'VE BEEN AN OLD MAN ALL MY LIFE.

I FOLLOWED FAMOUS FOOTBALL HEROES AND MOVIE STARS—WE OCCASIONALLY SAW A MOVIE IN ROANOKE—FROM THE TIME I WAS ABOUT 10 YEARS OLD. WE WOULD ALL GO—THE GRANDIN THEATER WOULD INVITE US SEVERAL TIMES A YEAR. THEY WOULD GIVE US POPCORN AND WE WOULD LATCH ON TO SOME OF THE TRAITS OF THE STARS OF THE DAY LIKE GABLE, JOHN WAYNE, JACK HOLT, KEN MAYNARD, AND OTHERS. THE OTHER BOYS USED TO CALL ME "CLICK GABLE."

ONCE ANNUALLY, VIRGINIA HEIGHTS LUTHERAN CHURCH IN ROANOKE WOULD HAVE US ALL DOWN FOR MORNING SERVICE AND PARCEL US OUT TO THE PARISHIONERS FOR SUNDAY DINNER AND RETURN TO THE HOME LATER IN THE AFTERNOON BY "MILKING TIME."

I RECALL ONE INVITATION TO THE HOME OF J. LINDSEY ALMOND, WHO WAS PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF THE HOME AND ALSO, LATER BECAME GOVERNOR OF VIRGINIA. I WAS ABOUT 16 AT THE TIME. I NOW BELIEVE THAT BECAUSE SOME OF THE QUESTIONS I WAS ASKED DURING THAT VISIT HE WAS BEGINNING TO BUILD A CASE FOR THE DISMISSAL OF SUPERINTENDENT GRAVES BECAUSE IT WASN'T TOO LONG AFTER THAT—NEXT YEAR I LEFT THE HOME—A YEAR OR TWO AFTER THAT GRAVES WAS GONE.

DATING AT THE HOME

AS FOR FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS, NATURALLY AS WE BECAME OLDER WE BECAME BOLDER. UNKNOWN TO ME, ROBBINS HALL WAS DATING LUCY BELLE DENT AND THEY WERE GETTING VERY "CLOSE." HE WAS GETTING UP AT NIGHT, MIDNIGHTISH, I DON'T KNOW HOW HE AWOKE. HE HAD A SYSTEM. HE WOULD BOLDLY WALK ACROSS THE GROUNDS TO THE LARGE GIRLS' COTTAGE AND VISIT WITH LUCY.

SHE WOULD COME DOWN FROM HER BED AND THEY WOULD SIT ON THE STEPS AND NECK AND TALK. HE CONVINCED ME WITHOUT MUCH TROUBLE THAT I SHOULD START ACCOMPANYING HIM TO SEE JUNE, WHICH I DID. JUNE'S AND MY RELATIONSHIP BECAME SO INTENSE THAT SUPERINTENDENT GRAVES SENT HER AWAY FROM THE HOME TO FINISH HER SCHOOLING WITH A LUTHERAN PREACHER'S FAMILY IN NORTH CAROLINA.

WITH JUNE'S DEPARTURE, I STARTED THE SAME ROUTINE WITH WINCIE OSBORNE. WE WERE GETTING AWFULLY, AWFULLY CLOSE AND IF I HAD NOT LEFT THE ORPHANAGE WHEN I DID, SOMEBODY WOULD HAVE PROBABLY GOTTEN PREGNANT BECAUSE WINCIE HAD TOLD MY SISTER MAMIE HOW MUCH SHE LIKED ME AND I COULD DO MOST ANYTHING I WANTED WITH HER.

MUCH TO MY SURPRISE AND SHOCK, I LEARNED AT A RECENT HOMECOMING THAT AFTER I LEFT THE HOME, SUPERINTENDENT GRAVES USED WINCIE AS A COMPANION ON HIS MANY TRIPS TO CHURCHES IN FUND RAISING EFFORTS FOR THE HOME. THAT MAKES ME AWFULLY JEALOUS—

THE DAY BEFORE I WAS TO LEAVE THE ORPHANAGE, THE HOUSE MOTHER OF THE LARGE GIRLS COTTAGE HAD INTERCEPTED A NOTE WRITTEN FROM ONE GIRL

TO THE OTHER WHEREIN A COMMENT WAS MADE REVEALING THAT WINCIE AND I HAD BEEN HAVING THESE CLANDESTINE MEETINGS AND THIS BROUGHT ABOUT MY CONFRONTATION WITH ALL THE LARGE GIRLS CHAIRED BY THE ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT, MRS. LONG, AND THE HOUSE MOTHER. WE CALLED IT "THE TRIAL."

THEY MADE A BIG POINT OF THE INTERCEPTED NOTE, QUESTIONED ME A GREAT LENGTH ABOUT OUR ACTIVITIES. I FUMBLERED THROUGH IT, LYING AS BEST I COULD, AND CARING LESS BECAUSE I WAS LEAVING THE NEXT DAY. WINCIE WAS SITTING WITH ALL THE OTHER GIRLS AND I WAS SITTING LIKE A DEFENDANT ON TRIAL. WE WERE KEPT SEPARATED BECAUSE OF THE STRICT SUPERVISION. WE WERE NEVER ABLE TO DISCUSS THIS AND I LEFT THE HOME THE NEXT DAY.

SHE WAS ULTIMATELY, IN FINISHING HER EDUCATION INCLUDING COLLEGE, TRANSFERRED TO A LUTHERAN PREACHER'S HOME IN WYTHEVILLE, VA. I DON'T KNOW THE TIMING, BUT SOMETIME IN 1940 WHILE VISITING IN ROANOKE FROM WEST VIRGINIA, I CALLED WINCIE IN WYTHEVILLE AND PLANNED TO DRIVE TO WYTHEVILLE TO SEE HER ON MY WAY BACK TO WEST VIRGINIA BUT WE TALKED OURSELVES OUT OF THAT DUE TO THE TIME INTERVAL, ROADS, (THERE WAS NO INTERSTATE THEN). SO THAT WAS THE LAST OF WINCIE AND I.

IN 1985, WHILE IN ARDMORE, I SAW WINCIE'S ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER IN AN ALUMNI NEWSLETTER AND CALLED HER IN TEXARKANA, ARKANSAS. SHE WAS ALL PUT OUT THAT I CALLED. SORRY THAT SHE EVER GAVE THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION HER WHEREABOUTS AND WAS ASHAMED FOR ANYONE TO KNOW THAT SHE WAS EVER AT THE HOME. I BACKED AWAY AND POLITELY HUNG UP. THAT'S THE LAST I EVER CONTACTED HER.

SINCE FINDING OUT IN RECENT YEARS ABOUT SUPERINTENDENT GRAVES "USE" OF WINCIE ON HIS CHURCH TRIPS AND OTHER, IT LEFT ME WITH A FEELING THAT I HELPED START SOMETHING PREMATURELY IN HER YOUNG LIFE.

WINDING UP AT THE ORPHANAGE

WHEN I BECAME A SENIOR AT ANDREW LEWIS HIGH SCHOOL AT SALEM, OUR MOTHER STARTED WRITING TO US AGAIN AFTER MANY YEARS. NATURALLY, I GOT ALL FIRED UP AND WANTED TO "GET OUT" AFTER NINE YEARS THERE. SUPERINTENDENT GRAVES WANTED ME TO STAY. HE SAID A WAY COULD BE FOUND FOR ME TO GO TO COLLEGE, ETC. BUT I WOULD HAVE TO RETURN TO THE "HOME" WHEN SCHOOL WAS OUT EACH SPRING AND WORK AGAIN UNDER HIS SEEMINGLY TYRANNICAL RULE.

I OPTED TO LEAVE, AND HE DECREED, IF I LEFT, THE OTHER THREE CHILDREN MUST GO ALSO, WHICH WAS A TERRIBLY GROSS MISTAKE. BILLY AND MY SISTERS WENT THROUGH SOME TERRIBLY ROUGH TIMES. BILLY LATER WAS RETURNED TO THE HOME IN 1937.

THE POST-ORPHANAGE YEARS TO 1942

JUNE 1936, THE FOUR OF US BOARDED A "SHORTLINE" BUS IN ROANOKE TO GO TO MY MOTHER AND HER NEW-TO-US HUSBAND, GRANVILLE CRIZER, IN BALTIMORE. IT WAS SOON OBVIOUS WE HAD BEEN SOLD SHORT. GRANVILLE WAS A WONDERFUL GUY BUT AN ALCHOLIC; JUST COULDN'T GET ALL THE WAY HOME ON PAYDAY. I WON'T SAY HE DRANK A LOT BUT HE PICKED UP SO MUCH WET CHANGE OFF THE BARS THAT HE HAD RHEUMATISM OF THE HIP!

WE CONTINUED GOING TO CHURCH, AND I, GETTING GRANVILLE OUT OF THE BARS ON SUNDAY, BAD!

GRANVILLE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN ME GETTING A JOB AT THE BETHLEHEM STEEL REPAIR SHIPYARD. I CHANGED MY NAME TO GEORGE CRIZER TO GET HIRED AS GRANVILLE'S SON; HIS WORK REPUTATION WAS GOOD. THERE WASN'T ANY SOCIAL SECURITY THEN, SO THEY COULDN'T TRACK YOU. I WORKED FROM JULY THROUGH SEPTEMBER AND WAS THEN LAID OFF BECAUSE, AS A REPAIR SHIPYARD, THE WORK WAS QUITE INTERMITTENT.

EACH PAY DAY, I GAVE MY CHECK TO MY MOTHER SO WE COULD LIVE BUT WHATEVER I COULD SCRAPE UP, I WENT TO EITHER THE HIPPODROME AND/OR THE CENTURY THEATER BECAUSE THEY BOTH HAD VAUDVILLE FOLLOWING THE MOVIES AT THAT TIME. AND ON VAUDVILLE DAYS THE FARE WAS 25 CENTS INSTEAD OF THE 15 CENTS ON NON-VAUDVILLE DAYS. SO APPARENTLY I HAD AN INHERENT INTEREST IN SINGING, DANCING, AND COMEDY.

THE SITUATION WITH GRANVILLE AND HIS DRINKING WORSENER. IT WAS OBVIOUS HE COULDN'T STAND THE PRESSURE OF HAVING FOUR KIDS DROPPED ON HIS DOORSTEP. BILLY, MAMIE, AND I LEFT. WE WERE JUST THERE IN THE SUMMER AND LEFT FOR NEWPORT NEWS TO LOOK FOR A JOB. I WAS 17, MAMIE WAS 15, BILL WAS 10. THELMA STAYED WITH MY MOTHER. SHE WAS 12 OR 13. I DON'T KNOW WHAT SHE DID AFTER WE LEFT.

WE STAYED WITH MY MOTHER'S SISTER, AUNT FANNIE, WHOSE HUSBAND, OSCAR, WAS A LONG TIME SHIPYARD EMPLOYEE WITH A GOOD REPUTATION. THROUGH THIS RELATIONSHIP, AUNT FANNIE WAS ABLE TO GET ME A JOB IN THE SHIPYARD. SHE HAD FIVE KIDS OF HER OWN TO WORRY ABOUT, SO ONE NIGHT, SHE WENT AND GOT THE PRESIDENT OF THE SHIPYARD OUT OF HIS BED TO GET ME A JOB. I WENT WITH HER, BUT SHE DID ALL THE TALKING. DUMB AS I WAS, JUST COMING OUT OF THIS CLOISTERED LIFE AT THE ORPHANAGE, I STOOD IN THE CORNER AND HOPED "NOBODY WOULD ASK ME NOTHING!"

LITTLE BILLY JUST FELL IN WITH FANNIE'S FAMILY, AND MAMIE ALSO. SHE WAS ROUGH AS A COB AND HER HUSBAND, OSCAR, WAS A BOOZER, BUT A STEADY WORKER.

I LIED ABOUT MY AGE, WHICH GOT ME 45 CENTS AN HOUR INSTEAD OF 38 CENTS, BUT I GAVE THEM MY RIGHT NAME THIS TIME. I GAVE AUNT FANNIE \$8 A WEEK FOR US THREE KIDS. AUNT FANNIE'S HOUSE WAS SO CROWDED WITH US THREE, FANNIE'S SIX, PLUS LOLA (FANNIE'S DAUGHTER) AND HER HUSBAND, ARCHIE, PLUS THEIR TWO BOYS, JOHNNIE AND HENRY. WE SLEPT EIGHT IN A BED. I USED TO COME IN LATE SO I COULD GET ON TOP! GRANDMA ABERNETHY WAS THERE TOO, ELIZABETH; "AUNT BET" SHE WAS CALLED.

I MUST HAVE HAD \$5 OR \$6 TO GO TO THE MOVIES WITH AND TO SEE THE STAGE SHOWS AT THE RIALTO.

I DIDN'T HAVE ANY CLOTHES, BUT FANNIE GOT ME A CHARGE ACCOUNT AT A CLOTHING STORE WHERE I BOUGHT A SUIT AND PAID ON IT BY THE WEEK WHEN I GOT MY CHECK. OUR COUSINS PASSED CLOTHES AROUND. I DON'T RECALL HOW ALL THE ENDS WERE MET. FANNIE PACKED ME A LUNCH TO TAKE TO WORK.

I WORKED AS A MACHINIST'S HELPER, INSTALLING THE AIRCRAFT ELEVATOR LOCKING GEAR ON THE AIRCRAFT CARRIERS 'ENTERPRISE' AND 'YORKTOWN'. THE 'YORKTOWN WAS SUBSEQUENTLY SUNK IN THE BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA WITH TWIN BROTHERS WILBUR AND GILBERT FULMER, WITH WHOM I HAD BEEN RAISED "UP AT THE HOME."

SOMETIME LATER IN THE YEAR, MY MOTHER SHOWED UP AGAIN. SHE HAD LEFT GRANVILLE AND PLACED MY SISTER THELMA WITH HER SISTER ROSA IN NORFOLK. SO WITH MAMA ON THE SCENE AGAIN, I FOUND AN APARTMENT FOR MAMA, BILLY, AND ME. WE MOVED OUT, LEAVING MAMIE AND AUNT FANNIE. THELMA FINALLY

ENDED UP WITH MY MOTHER'S BROTHER, CLEVELAND ABERNETHY, AND WAS WELL TREATED BY THAT FAMILY. THELMA IS CERTAIN BOB ABERNETHY OF NBC IS PART OF CLEVELAND'S CLAN. I WROTE HIM TO CONFIRM BUT RECEIVED NO REPLY.

THINGS WERE GOING PRETTY WELL. I WOULD TURN OVER MY CHECK EACH WEEK TO MAMA. SHE WOULD GIVE ME \$2 OR \$3 AND THE REST WENT FOR FOOD AND RENT FOR THE THREE OF US.

THE LUTHERAN PASTOR AT TRINITY LUTHERAN, PASTOR BAYME, WAS VERY CONCERNED THAT I WAS TIED DOWN SUPPORTING MY MOTHER AND BROTHER AND FURTHER CONCERNED THAT THE ENVIRONMENT WAS LESS THAN IDEAL FOR BILLY. HE ARRANGED FOR BILLY TO BE RETURNED TO THE ORPHANAGE AT SALEM. PASTOR BAYME WAS VERY INTERESTED AND HELPFUL TO ME WITH HIS INSISTENCE THAT I GET THE PROPER OPPORTUNITIES.

THERE IS A LESSON IN THIS FOR TODAY. I DIDN'T REALIZE WHAT STRAITS I WAS IN, AFTER GETTING NOWHERE, JUST DOING WHAT "MAMA SAID." PASTOR BAYME SAW IT! PARENTS, ADULTS, "NEED TO SEE IT" IN GUIDING YOUNG FOLKS FOR TODAY!

SHORTLY AFTER BILLY'S DEPARTURE IN MAY OF 1937, 8,000 OF US WERE LAID OFF AT THE SHIPYARD. THE BULK OF THE WORK ON THE CARRIERS 'YORKTOWN' AND 'ENTERPRISE' WAS COMPLETE AND WE WEREN'T NEEDED. WHEN I LOST MY JOB, WE COULDN'T HOLD ON TO THE APARTMENT.

IN THE MEANTIME, GRANVILLE "FOUND MY MOTHER" AGAIN. THEY PICKED UP THEIR RELATIONSHIP AND IT WAS YEARS BEFORE I HEARD FROM THEM AGAIN. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY DID AS SHE JUST LEFT. HE WAS HER ONLY MEANS OF SUPPORT, AS BAD AS HE WAS. A LOT OF THAT IS FUZZY TO ME NOW.

OUT OF NOWHERE COMES A LETTER FROM MY OLD FRIEND "UP AT THE HOME" BUDDY, CHARLEY BROWN, TELLING OF AN OPENING WITH THE WESTERN ELECTRIC COMPANY INSTALLATION DEPARTMENT IN CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA, WHERE HE WAS WORKING. HE EVEN SENT ME THE BUS FARE. WE HAD SOME CONTACT PRIOR TO THAT. HE HAD BEEN WORKING AT VIRGINIA BEACH AND WOULD COME OVER TO SEE ME. HE KNEW MY SITUATION.

I GOT OFF THE BUS IN CHARLESTON WITH 35 CENTS IN MY POCKET. CHARLEY MET ME AND TOOK ME TO HIS BOARDING HOUSE AND PAID MY BOARD AND ROOM UNTIL I COULD GET A CHECK.

WE RAN INTO A LITTLE BIT OF A "FLAP" INITIALLY DUE TO THE FACT THAT I WAS NOT YET 19, WHICH WAS A REQUISITE FOR THE JOB. THE JOB WAS INSTALLING TELEPHONE SWITCHING EQUIPMENT IN THE VARIOUS C&P TELEPHONE CENTRAL OFFICES THROUGHOUT THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA. SOMEHOW CHARLEY PERSUADED THEM TO LET ME TRY. THERE WAS NO FORMAL TRAINING AT THE TIME, WE LEARNED ON THE JOB. AS CHARLEY TELLS IT, THEY WERE SO PLEASED WITH MY PERFORMANCE, THEY FORGOT ABOUT THE AGE REQUIREMENT AND ASKED HIM WHERE HE COULD GET SOME MORE LIKE ME.

I WAS PAID 45 CENTS AN HOUR. THE SOCIAL SECURITY LAW HAD JUST RECENTLY BEEN ENACTED. THEY TOOK 20 CENTS A WEEK OUT OF MY PAY FOR SOCIAL SECURITY. I HAD A TAKE-HOME PAY OF \$17.80. I WAS LIVING HIGH. CHARLEY WOULD NEVER LET ME REPAY HIM FOR THE BUS FARE AND THE TIME AT THE BOARDING HOUSE.

CHARLEY AND I MOVED TO MRS. PEMBERTON'S BOARDING HOUSE AT 110 BRADFORD STREET IN CHARLESTON, WHICH I DROVE BACK TO VIEW JUST RECENTLY. THIS WAS A HIGH-CLASS PLACE FOR US. THE CLIENTELE WAS ALL WOMEN WHO WORKED AT THE STATE CAPITOL, A FEW BLOCKS AWAY, SO CHARLEY AND I WERE SPOILED WITH ALL THE GOOD FOOD AND ATTENTION.

CHARLEY AND I SLEPT TOGETHER IN AN ATTIC ROOM; WITH THAT WE GOT ROOM AND BOARD INCLUDING TWO MEALS A DAY (BREAKFAST AND DINNER) FOR \$7 A WEEK. AS FOR CHARLEY AND I SLEEPING TOGETHER, I JOKED ABOUT IT IN RECENT YEARS, SAYING "CHARLEY AND I WERE GAY BEFORE GAY WAS COOL." SLEEPING TOGETHER WAS JUST A MEANS OF SAVING MONEY, "GETTING BY" DURING THE DEPRESSION.

I MEAN, WE HAD THE BEST FOOD! THE PEMBERTONS WERE DISTRIBUTORS FOR THE RATHE PACKING COMPANY, A BIG MEAT PROCESSOR IN IOWA. IN A FEW MONTHS, I WEIGHED 185 POUNDS—A GAIN OF 25 POUNDS OR SO FROM "UP AT THE HOME."

I BECAME ENCHANTED WITH A WAITRESS NAMED MARY NEAL, WHO WORKED AT THE CHIMNEY RESTAURANT OF QUARRIER STREET. SHE WAS OLDER THAN ME, BUT IT TOOK ME A LONG TIME TO GET RID OF THIS INFATUATION, ALONG WITH A LOT OF KIDDING FROM THE GUYS. YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER HOW "SOCIALLY DUMB" I WAS AFTER ALL THOSE CLOISTERED YEARS "UP AT THE HOME."

IN JANUARY OF 1939, I WAS TRANSFERRED TO MORGANTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA AS PART OF A CREW TO INSTALL A NEW DIAL TELEPHONE EXCHANGE. CHARLEY, IN THE MEANTIME, HAD BEEN TRANSFERRED BACK TO ROANOKE BECAUSE HIS MOTHER, MARY BROWN, WAS HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME. HE HAD ALWAYS ASSISTED HER. BEFORE HIS TRANSFER I HAD VISITED ROANOKE A FEW TIMES WITH HIM, ALWAYS HOPING TO REVIVE MY RELATIONSHIP WITH CHARLEY'S SISTER, JUNE. BUT SHE HAD OTHER PLANS BY THEN.

AS THE MORGANTOWN JOB WOUND DOWN, IN THE SPRING OF 1939, A BUDDY OF MINE, HAROLD COVERT, THROUGH HIS DATE, MARIE FERGUSON, GOT ME A DATE WITH ALMA LEONARD. ON THE JOB, WE WERE WORKING NIGHT SHIFT AT THE TIME, SO HAROLD AND I, WITH MARIE AND ALMA, WERE DATING ALMOST DAILY, INCLUDING TRIPS TO CHEAT LAKE, TO THE WHIPPOORWILL CLUB, A ROADHOUSE ON THE LAKE WITH A JUKE BOX, SWIMMING, AND DANCING. G.A. AND I, LEAH, FEBE (G.A.'S FRIEND), AND AUNT BARBARA VISITED THERE RECENTLY IN JUNE, 1995, TOOK A BOAT TOUR ETC.

FOR SOME REASON, I COULD NEVER GET A DATE WITH ALMA ON WEEKENDS. SHE WAS DATING AND TO BE ENGAGED TO A RECENT WVU GRADUATE NAMED HAROLD RIST. SO I JUST ACCEPTED THIS.

IN 1940, WHEN I WAS ABOUT 21—I BOUGHT MY FIRST CAR, A 1936 FORD 2-DOOR SEDAN, \$360--\$25 DOWN, \$10 A MONTH. I DIDN'T HAVE A DRIVERS LICENSE. I WAS STOPPED ONCE IN FAIRMONT, WEST VIRGINIA, GOING THE WRONG WAY ON A ONE WAY STREET. LUCKILY, THE OFFICER DID NOT ASK FOR MY LICENSE. A FEW MONTHS LATER I GOT A LICENSE IN MULLINS, W.VA., WHERE I WAS WORKING AT THE TIME FOR WESTERN ELECTRIC, CONVERTING THE TOWN FROM MANUAL SWITCHBOARDS TO DIAL TELEPHONES.

I WAS TRANSFERRED FROM MORGANTOWN TO WHEELING THAT SUMMER AND TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE SCHEDULED CUTOVER OF THE NEW MORGANTOWN OFFICE, SEVERE TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES AROSE. I WAS CALLED BACK TO MORGANTOWN ON AN EMERGENCY BASIS. ON THE WAY BACK, THE BUS BROKE DOWN. I STRUCK UP A CONVERSATION WITH A YOUNG FELLOW WHILE WAITING A REPLACEMENT BUS. HE WAS TELLING ME ABOUT HIS GIRLFRIEND IN MORGANTOWN HE WAS GOING TO SEE, HOW SHE WAS ANXIOUS TO GET MARRIED, AND SO WAS HE. BUT HE FIRST WANTED TO GET BETTER SITUATED WITH A JOB AND SO FORTH. AS IT TURNED OUT, THE GIRL HE WAS TELLING ME ABOUT WAS ALMA.

NOW I UNDERSTOOD BETTER WHY I COULD NEVER GET A DATE ON WEEKENDS.

SO BACK TO MORGANTOWN TEMPORARILY, I PICKED UP DATING ALMA AGAIN. OUR RELATIONSHIP REACHED A POINT WHERE SHE FINALLY BROKE HER

ENGAGEMENT WITH RIST. WE BECAME ENGAGED AND WERE MARRIED JULY THE 6TH, 1940 IN OAKLAND, MARYLAND—BECAUSE THERE WAS NO WAITING PERIOD. BEFORE LEAVING FOR OAKLAND, WE WENT TO SEE ALMA'S AUNT LYDA. WE WANTED HER TO GO ALONG AND NOT TELL ANYONE ELSE. SHE WOULDN'T HAVE THAT, BUT INSISTED THAT WE TAKE ALMA'S MOTHER "MONGEE" INSTEAD, WHICH WE DID, (SEE 'ODE TO JAHMS').

WHEN WE GOT BACK FROM OAKLAND, MONGEE GAVE US THE MONEY TO GO TO UNIONTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA SO WE COULD SPEND A HONEYMOON NIGHT AT THE WHITE SWAN HOTEL. THAT WAS SATURDAY. ON SUNDAY EVENING I RETURNED HER TO HER MOTHER'S HOME AND DROVE AWAY TO SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA TO WORK AND DIDN'T RETURN FOR ALMOST TWO WEEKS. IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE ALMA BECAME PREGNANT. IN WEST VIRGINIA, THEY CALL THAT "GETTING BIT BY THE TROUSER WORM."

WE BOUNCED AROUND WEST VIRGINIA TOGETHER FOR A COUPLE MONTHS, WHICH WAS VERY DIFFICULT, LIVING CONDITIONS BEING WHAT THEY WERE, SO WE FINALLY AGREED SHE SHOULD JUST STAY HOME WITH HER FOLKS AFTER THE BABY CAME.

BILL WAS BORN AT MONONGAHELA GENERAL HOSPITAL IN MORGANTOWN, MAY 28, 1941. SHORTLY AFTER THAT, I WAS ABLE TO SCRAPE UP ENOUGH OF A DOWN PAYMENT ALONG WITH MY 1936 FORD TO BUY A NEW 1941 FORD TWO-DOOR SEDAN FOR \$840. BY THIS TIME, I WAS DOING SHORT TWO WEEK STANDS AT VARIOUS SMALL WEST VIRGINIA TOWNS SO WE BOUGHT A SMALL 19-FOOT HOUSE TRAILER TO PULL WITH THE FORD. I WORKED IN PLACES LIKE CLARKSBURG, SALEM, WELLSBURG AND OTHERS, UNTIL I FINALLY WRECKED THE TRAILER IN A SNOW STORM IN THE WINTER OF 1941 AND WAS PERMANENTLY ASSIGNED TO WORK IN CHARLESTON AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THAT. THE BOSS WAS FEELING SORRY FOR ME—AFTER I RAISED HELL WITH HIM FOR GIVING ME THESE TWO WEEK STANDS WHEN HE KNEW I HAD A WIFE AND KID.

WE TOWED THE TRAILER TO A LOT IN CHARLESTON AND LIVED IN IT WITH A TARPAULINE COVERING THE BROKEN, DAMAGED SIDE. WE LIVED HERE FROM FEBRUARY 1942 UNTIL WE SOLD THE TRAILER FOR WHAT WE OWED ON IT AND MOVED INTO AN APARTMENT. WE HEATED WITH AN OIL HEATER. THE BABY'S CRIB WAS IN THE END WHERE THE TRAILER WAS BROKEN AND ALMA CONSTANTLY WORRIED ABOUT THE BABY'S HEALTH IN THAT RESPECT, BUT IT HAD NO ILL EFFECTS AND HE DIDN'T GET ANY COLDS.

THE REST OF THE YEAR WAS SPENT IN CHARLESTON WITH MY PLANNING TO GO INTO THE SERVICE. I WOULD NOT HAVE HAD TO GO AS I WAS IN AN ESSENTIAL JOB WITH TWO DEPENDENTS, BESIDES. HOWEVER, ALL MY BUDDIES WERE GOING INTO THE SERVICE AND I COULDN'T STAND IT. I HAD TO GO. I EVEN WENT TO THE YMCA TO WORK OUT SO I WOULD BE IN GOOD SHAPE FOR MY PHYSICAL. I HAD TO GO TO COLUMBUS, OHIO FOR MY PRELIMINARY PHYSICAL AND HAD A HARD TIME GETTING MY PULSE DOWN TO ACCEPTABLE LIMITS. BUT I PASSED.

AS A PART OF THIS TRIP, I HAD TO OVERNIGHT IN A HOTEL AND WHEN I UNPACKED MY BAG THERE WAS A NICE NOTE FROM ALMA, WISHING ME GOOD LUCK. THIS, DESPITE ALL OF HER MISGIVINGS ABOUT ME ENTERING THE SERVICE, SHE WAS A GEM.

DURING THIS WHOLE PERIOD OF TIME THERE WAS ALMOST NO CONTACT WITH MY MOTHER AND SISTERS. I HAD VISITED BILLY A COUPLE TIMES AT THE ORPHANAGE, AND MAMIE ONCE IN NEWPORT NEWS, WHERE SHE WAS WORKING IN A LAUNDRY. I REALLY FELT SORRY FOR HER BUT I HAD NO WAY TO HELP HER. I GAVE BILLY A FEW DOLLARS WHEN I WOULD VISIT.

MY MOTHER, DURING THIS PERIOD, WAS OFF TRYING TO MAKE A RENEWED LIFE WITH GRANVILLE. HIS DRINKING HAD DIMINISHED, I FOUND OUT LATER, AND HE WAS REALLY TRYING TO DO THINGS RIGHT.

GREAT FRIENDS DURING MY WESTERN ELECTRIC YEARS:

HUGH WILLIAMS AND HIS WIFE, AGNES. HUGH WAS A TALENTED GUY, A COUPLE OF YEARS OLDER THAN ME; HAD GONE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY A COUPLE YEARS. HE WENT IN THE NAVY (SEABEES) DURING THE WAR.

BILL COREY—A REAL GENTLEMAN—ARMY SIGNAL CORPS. WWII

WILSON ASHLEY—SHARP, LOCAL CHAS. BOY—NAVY PILOT, FLEW OFF CARRIERS
CREDE ADKINS—A REAL BREED APART—HEAVY DRINKER—HAD A BAD ACCIDENT, DEFERRED IN WWII.

HAROLD COVERT—SMART, TALL, HANDSOME, RED HEAD GUY; NEVER WENT IN SERVICE, DRANK HIMSELF TO DEATH WITH GIRLFRIEND LOUISE BEFORE AGE 35.

BILL LOEFFLER—MY BOSS—NEW YORKER, HEAVY DRINKER, HARD-DRIVING OLD TIMER, NO CHILDREN, WIFE BETTY. THEY LIKED ALMA AND ME.

AL MORRISON—MY BOSS AT TIMES AND MY LAST WECO BOSS, A GREAT, SMART GUY, MARRIED LATE IN LIFE. HE PLAYED THE STOCK MARKET, DID WELL, RETIRED TO SALUDA, VIRGINIA. I LAST TALKED TO HIM IN 1987. HE WAS 83 AND HAS SINCE DIED.

AL, BILL LOEFFLER, AND HUGH WILLIAMS LEFT THEIR MARK ON ME. THEY WERE ALL WORTHY ROLE MODELS.

ERIC PARSONS—GREAT OLD TIMER—MARRIED EARLY, DIVORCED, NEVER REMARRIED. HE AND I WORKED A LOT TOGETHER. HE AND HIS GIRLFRIEND, RUTH LAWRENCE, AND ALMA AND I DOUBLE-DATED A LOT. HE MAY HAVE MET RUTH THROUGH ALMA. ERIC DIED SHORTLY AFTER WWII.

BERNIE SMITH, PETE CROSSON, JACK BERRY, LOU NELSON, GEORGE DEHART, NELSON REED, C.L. CROWDER, CHUCK ROWELL, AL KANDLE, WERE ALL GREAT WECO FRIENDS.

WE HAVE TO REMEMBER, SO MANY OF THESE OLDER GUYS HAD BEEN LAID OFF DURING THE DEPRESSION AND WERE JUST RETURNING TO WORK IN THE MID TO LATE THIRTIES.

WESTERN WAS GOOD TO ME AND FOR WHATEVER I BECAME, I OWE A LOT TO MY 'WESTERN YEARS.' I RECEIVED PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT IN THE ARMY BECAUSE OF THIS BACKGROUND. WENT IN A PRIVATE, CAME OUT A CAPTAIN. I THOUGHT PRETTY GOOD FOR A KID FROM 'UP AT THE HOME.'

OTHERS: I BROUGHT NELSON REED AND GEORGE DEHART TO USI IN CHARLOTTESVILLE IN THE 1955-1956 PERIOD AND THEY DID WELL. NELSON DIED IN 1981, I BELIEVE, AND GEORGE ALSO DURING THE SAME PERIOD. "WE GROW TOO SOON OLD AND TOO LATE SMART," SOMEBODY SAID.

THE WORLD WAR II YEARS

DECEMBER 1942, I PUT ALMA AND BILLY ON A BUS TO MORGANTOWN TO SPEND THE WAR YEARS WITH MONGEE AND POP-POP. I'LL NEVER FORGET STANDING ON THE CORNER IN CHARLESTON WAVING GOODBYE.

I THEN WALKED DOWN TO THE RECRUITING OFFICE AND 15 OF US WERE PUT ON A BUS FOR THE ARMY INDUCTION CENTER AT HUNTINGTON, WVA. THEY GAVE ALL THE PAPERWORK TO ME, I GUESS BECAUSE BAKER WAS HIGH ON THE ALPHABET.

WE WERE SENT TO FORT THOMAS, KENTUCKY FOR PROCESSING AND FROM THERE I WAS SENT TO CAMP CROWDER, MISSOURI FOR BASIC TRAINING AND THEN ASSIGNED TO OFFICER CANDIDATE PREP SCHOOL OCPS.

THE CAMP CROWDER WEATHER WAS MEMORABLE AND ROUGH ON FIELD ACTIVITIES. WE ALL HAD THE CROWDER CROUP, WHICH WAS A COUGH AND SOME OF US COULDN'T EVEN TALK. THE WIND BLEW ALL THE TIME AND IT WAS COLD.

WHILE IN CROWDER I MET WIP ROBINSON, III, A RADIO ANNOUNCER. G.A. LATER KNEW OF HIM IN HARRISONBURG, VA, WHERE HE DIED DURING THE EIGHTIES. "WIP" USED TO HOLD THE MESS TABLE WHILE I DANCED ON IT AT SOME OF OUR PARTIES.

IN JULY 1943, I COMPLETED OCPS AND WAS SENT TO THE ARMY SIGNAL CORPS OFFICER CANDIDATE SCHOOL, FORT MONMOUTH, NJ. IN LOOKING AT ALL THE CANDIDATES THAT ARRIVED WHEN I DID, I KNEW RIGHT AWAY I WOULD MAKE IT (NOT BUST OUT) ALTHOUGH THE SURVIVAL RATE WAS LESS THAN 60 PERCENT.

I GRADUATED FROM OCS OCTOBER 1943 AS SECOND LIEUTENANT, THEN WAS SENT TO A TECHNICAL SCHOOL, LONG LINES INSIDE, FOR FOUR WEEKS, AND THEN TO OFFICER COMBAT TRAINING SCHOOL FOR SIX WEEKS THEN SHIPPED OUT TO CALIFORNIA TO CAMP STONEMAN NEAR PITTSBURGH, CALIFORNIA. WHILE IN COMBAT TRAINING OUR FINAL TEST WAS TO CHECK OUR TIME RUNNING 250 YARDS IN FATIGUES, "G.I.", SHOES AND LEGGINGS. I HAD SECOND BEST TIME OUT OF 350 OFFICERS. A TALL, LONG LEGGED GUY NAMED YEASLEY WAS FIRST.

WE THEN SHIPPED OUT ON HOSPITAL SHIP, CAPE MENDOCINO TO BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA. OUR SHIP WAS ALONE, SO WE TOOK 21 DAYS TO ZIGZAG OUR WAY, AVOIDING SUBS ON THE WAY TO BRISBANE.

WE SPENT TWO WEEKS IN BRISBANE. MY FIRST ASSIGNMENT WAS TAKE A DETACHMENT OF MEN TO SORT THROUGH AND SEPARATE FOR SHIPMENT THE FINAL EFFECTS OF THE FIRST MARINE DIVISION FROM GUADALCANAL, NOT A VERY PLEASANT JOB, BLOODY BARRACKS BAGS, CLOTHING, ETC.

CHRISTMAS DAY 1943 FOUND A MIXTURE OF TROOPS, REPLACEMENT OFFICERS, NON-COMS, AND ENLISTED MEN FROM ALL BRANCHES ON THE WAY TO NEW GUINEA ON A DUTCH BANANA BOAT, THE NAME I CANNOT RECALL. THE SEAS WERE ROUGH AND SOME OF US GOT SICK, "HANGING OVER THE WALL." THE CHAPLAIN PASSED BY AND SLAPPED ME ON THE BUTT WITH, "WHAT'S THE MATTER WEAK STOMACH?"

I SAID, "WEAK STOMACH, HELL! I'M THROWING IT AS FAR AS THE REST OF THEM!"

MY FIRST ASSIGNMENT WAS TO THE 832ND SIGNAL SERVICE COMPANY AT PORT MORESBY. OUR MISSION, AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE TOTAL ARMY SIGNAL CORPS EFFORT TO INSTALL COMMUNICATIONS ISLAND-WIDE, WAS TO INSTALL AND MAINTAIN TELEPHONE CARRIER EQUIPMENT—WHICH WE DID AT PORT MORESBY, BUNA, ORO BAY, MILNE BAY, LAE, FINCHAFEN, AND HOLLANDIA, WHERE WE WERE TO JUMP OFF SOME 12 MONTHS LATER FOR THE LUZON INVASION.

WHILE AT MORESBY AND LAE, I FORMED A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH ANOTHER SECOND LIEUTENANT, JAMES FRED SIMPSON, FROM SAVANNAH, GA. HE MOVED ON UP AHEAD OF ME TO GO ON THE LEYTE INVASION, WHERE HE WAS LOST. THIS REALLY BROKE MY HEART. SIMPSON AND I HAD TALKED MANY TIMES ABOUT OUR POST-WAR PLANS. I WANTED TO FARM AND HE WANTED TO RETURN TO AT&T, HAVE CHILDREN, AND JUST GO ABOUT BEING A GOOD CITIZEN.

HIS WIFE'S NAME WAS PORTER. I RECALL CENSORING ONE OF HIS LETTERS TO PORTER. THIS WAS A STANDARD PROCEDURE WHEREBY OFFICERS HAD TO CENSOR ALL OUTBOUND MAIL. SOME OF THE LANGUAGE IN HIS LETTER TO PORTER WAS REALLY OVERWHELMINGLY WARM, DEVOTED, AND SINCERE. I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER JAMES FRED SIMPSON.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1944, I WAS ASSIGNED AS A LIAISON OFFICER TO AN AUSTRALIAN SIGNAL CORP GROUP AT BUNA, NEW GUINEA, A DELIGHTFUL BUNCH OF "BLOKES" COMMANDED BY LT. ALLEN GRANT. WITH ME, I BROUGHT NICK

BLEASHKA OF KENOSHA, WISCONSIN, (THE MAD RUSSIAN) AND BILL JACKLE FROM CHAMPAGNE, ILLINOIS. OUR MISSION, TO ASSIST THE AUSSIE'S TECHNICALLY, LOGISTICALLY, IN MAINTAINING A KEY LINK IN THE FIFTH AIR FORCE WEATHER NETWORK BETWEEN NADZAB, NEW GUINEA (HEADQUARTERS FOR THE FIFTH AIR FORCE) AND SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA. THIS INVOLVED RADIO AND A PHYSICAL TWO-WIRE PLASTIC COATED WIRE LINE FROM BUNA UP AND OVER THE OWEN-STANLEY MOUNTAINS TO PORT MORESBY AND THENCE TO THE MAINLAND OF AUSTRALIA FOR RADIO TRANSMISSION.

THIS AUSSIE GROUP HAD JUST RETURNED FROM THE WARS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND WERE "TOURNAMENT TESTED," TOUGH AND PROFANE. WE HAD A LOT OF LAUGHS COMPARING THE YANKS AND THE AUSSIES.

THEY ALWAYS MARVELED AT THE TOOTHPASTE ADS IN OUR MANY MAGAZINES. THEIR STANDING COMMENT "YOU BLOODY YANKS AND YOUR TEETH!" FOR SOME STRANGE REASON, MOST OF THESE SOLDIERS HAD DEFECTIVE TEETH AND/OR COMPLETE FALSE TEETH, EVEN IN THEIR 20'S, HENCE THEIR ADMIRATION FOR OUR TEETH.

BING CROSBY SINGING "WHITE CHRISTMAS" SEEMED TO HAVE BECOME THEIR NATIONAL ANTHEM.

ONCE THIS MISSION WAS COMPLETE AT BUNA, WE WERE TO REPORT BACK TO MORESBY. I DECIDED TO WALK BACK AS A PART OF INSPECTING ALL OF THE AUSSIE "LINE WAY-STATIONS" ALONG THE SOME 125 MILE ROUTE. LT. ALLEN GRANT INSISTED ON GOING WITH ME. SO I PUT BLEASHKA AND JACKLE ON A PLANE BACK TO MORESBY AND GRANT AND I TOOK OFF.

GRANT HAD "JUNGLE ROT" PRETTY BAD AND HE WOULD SAY TO ME FREQUENTLY, "MY BLOODY OATH, BAKER, YOU'RE WALKING FASTER AND FASTER."

AND HIS JUNGLE ROT GOT "WORSER AND WORSER," SO BAD, IN FACT, WHEN WE TOPPED THE OWEN STANLEYS, SOME 11,000 FEET UP TO KOKODA, I LEFT HIM WITH HIS "MATES". I LATER LEARNED, HE WAS FLOWN FROM KOKODA TO MORESBY TO SYDNEY AND ULTIMATELY MUSTERED OUT OF THE ARMY AS HIS CONDITION BECAME SO BAD.

I PROCEEDED ON ALONE, STOPPING AT EACH WAY STATION, WHICH WERE FOUR TO SIX HOURS APART.

THE AUSSIES WERE GREAT HOSTS. THEIR BUNKS WERE ALL HOMEMADE FROM TREE LIMBS AND PIECES OF AIRCRAFT INNER TUBES THAT HAD CRASHED IN THE VICINITY. I CARRIED ONLY A MUSSETTE BAG, A CHANGE OF UNDERWEAR AND SUN TANS, TOOTHBRUSH, TWO PAIR OF AUSSIE BOOTS, AND A .45 PISTOL.

I ARRIVED AT ONE STATION LATE ONE EVENING. BEFORE I ARRIVED, THEY WERE WORRIED AND SENT A NATIVE OUT TO FIND ME. WHEN I GOT THERE, THEY HAD HEATED WATER FOR ME TO HAVE A SHOWER AND GAVE ME PARACHUTE SILK SHEETS FOR MY BUNK. ROYAL TREATMENT!

I CONTINUED ON TO MORESBY. I CAME TO A SWOLLEN STREAM ONCE, WHICH SEEMED IMPASSABLE. I WALKED UP AND DOWN THE BANK, NOT SURE ABOUT THE DEPTH OR WHERE TO CROSS. A NATIVE GIRL APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE ON THE OPPOSITE BANK AND MOTIONED ME UPSTREAM. I WENT UPSTREAM AND SURE ENOUGH, FOUND A PLACE I COULD GET ACROSS WHERE IT WAS NOT MUCH OVER WAISTE DEEP. SO WITH MY PISTOL BELT JOHN WAYNE STYLE, I WADED ACROSS. I FINALLY ARRIVED IN MORESBY SOME 15 POUNDS LIGHTER WITH DYSENTERY.

FROM MORESBY I TOOK A CONTINGENT OF MEN TO VISIT AND INVENTORY ALL SIGNAL CORPS EQUIPMENT AT ALL BASES IN NEW GUINEA, JUST PRIOR TO THE LUZON INVASION. WITH THE "NORTHWARD" PRESSURES OF THE WAR, AND AIR TRAVEL HARD TO COME BY, I WAS ISSUED A SPECIAL TICKET THAT ALLOWED ME TO RIDE ON ANY AVAILABLE MILITARY PLANE WITH THE WORDS "TO DELAY THIS OFFICER WILL SERIOUSLY HINDER THE WAR EFFORT."

GENERAL MACARTHUR HAD NEVER ALLOWED BEER OR ALCOHOL IN NEW GUINEA UNTIL JUST PRIOR TO THE LUZON INVASION AND PERSONALLY, I THOUGHT THIS WAS A GOOD IDEA BECAUSE DRINKING IS FOR CELEBRATING AND BEING HAPPY AND WE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH TO CELEBRATE. SO WHILE IN HOLLANDIA, THE BAN WAS LIFTED ON BEER. AND WHEN WE BOARDED THE LST IN HOLLANDIA FOR LUZON, I PERSONALLY OWNED SIX CASES OF SCHLITZ. THERE WAS NO REFRIGERATION. I GOT USE TO DRINKING HOT BEER AND EVEN HAD TO HEAT MY BEER AWHILE WHEN I FIRST GOT HOME.

AS FOR OUR LST RIDE TO LUZON, WE SANG A LOT AND PRAYED A LOT BECAUSE KAMIKAZES WERE EVERYWHERE. I ESPECIALLY REMEMBER OLLIE JENKINS AND I SINGING "I DIDN'T SLEEP A WINK LAST NIGHT."

WE FINALLY ARRIVED AT LINGUYEN GULF, LUZON, PHILIPPINES. WE WENT ASHORE NEAR A SMALL TOWN, SAN FABIAN. THE JAPS WERE SHELLING THE BEACH AND ALL THE NAVY COULD THINK ABOUT WAS GETTING US UNLOADED AND GETTING OUT OF THERE. WE WERE "DUMPED OFF" QUITE A WAYS OUT IN THE WATER AND HAD ONE HELL OF A TIME GETTING OUR VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT TO DRY SAND. EVERY SHIP IN THE CONVOY HAD TO TAKE A QUOTA OF 55-GALLON DRUMS OF GASOLINE FOR THE AIR FORCE. I REMEMBER WHAT A TIME WE HAD SWIMMING THOSE DRUMS ASHORE IN THAT ROUGH WATER.

OUR FIRST NIGHT WAS SPENT ON THE BEACH. THE ARMY ENGINEERS HAD DUG A HUGE TRENCH WITH A BULLDOZER AND WE SACKED OUT IN IT. WE DIDN'T SLEEP TOO MUCH, WITH THE SHELLS OVERHEAD—TWO-WAY—OUR CONVERSATION WAS "IS THAT THEIRS? OR IS THAT OURS?" WHEN WE HEARD THE SHELLS WHISTLE, WE'D WONDER IF ONE HAD OUR NAME ON IT.

AT SAN FABIAN, WE BECAME INTEGRATED WITH OTHER SIGNAL UNITS AND BECAME INVOLVED IN ALL TYPES OF COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES, RADIO OPERATION, STRINGING WIRE IN COCONUT TREES, FIXED STATION TELEPHONE CARRIER, AND OTHER. THIS WE CONTINUED ON DOWN THE COAST TO MANILA, WHERE WE BECAME PART OF THE LUZON SIGNAL CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, WHERE MYSELF, AND THE GROUP WERE ASSIGNED TO REHABILITATE THE BINONDO TELEPHONE EXCHANGE, WHICH HAD BEEN TORPEDOED BY THE JAPANESE.

ALONG THE WAY WITH THIS ASSIGNMENT, I MET SOME GREAT PEOPLE, UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTERS LIKE GEORGE SINCLAIR, ALLEN C. MINNIX FROM WASHINGTON, D.C., AND MANY OTHERS, SOME OF WHICH I MAINTAINED POST-WAR CONTACT.

AT ONE STAGE OF THE GAME, AT ANGELES, WE WERE ASSIGNED FOR RATIONS ONLY TO A 78TH SIGNAL CONSTRUCTION BATTALION, ALL BLACK, EXCEPT THE OFFICERS WERE ALL WHITE AND WERE FROM THE SOUTHERN STATES, ALABAMA, NORTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE, AND GEORGIA.

STRAGGLER JAPANESE WERE EVERYWHERE. ONE DAY A SEARGENT FROM THE 78TH BATALLION WAS WALKING DOWN THE ROAD IN ANGELES WITH HIS CARBINE "SLUNG." AN EMACIATED, STARVED LOOKING JAP WAS COMING TOWARD HIM WITH HIS WEAPON "AT PORT." THEY BOTH JUST SMILED, PASSED EACH OTHER, AND KEPT GOING. THE JAP WAS AFRAID TO MAKE ANY NOISE BUT HE HAD THE DROP ON THE YANK.

OUR FINAL EFFORT—AS PART OF THE "LUZON SHOW" WE INSTALLED A HUGE COMMUNICATION TERMINAL IN ANGELES (CLARK FIELD), WHICH WAS RIGHT ALONG SIDE THE MANILA RAILROAD WHERE THE 60TH SIGNAL BATTALION HAD BUILT AND REHABBED A SIX-ARM TELEPHONE LINE FROM MANILA TO SAN FERNANDO LA-UNION-NORTHERN LUZON.

ONE NOW HUMOROUS INCIDENT—ONE NIGHT TWO OF MY MEN DIDN'T SHOW UP BACK AT CAMP. I WENT TO A WELL KNOWN BORDELLO TO SEE IF THEY WERE

THERE. I KNOCKED ON THE DOOR, TRYING TO FAKE SOME TAGALOG, (THEIR LANGUAGE) BUT THE OCCUPANTS WOULD NOT OPEN THE DOOR, SO I KICKED THE DOOR DOWN, WENT UPSTAIRS, AND LOOKED IN THE BEDROOMS. I OBVIOUSLY HAD GOTTEN THE WRONG HOUSE. I STARTED BACK DOWN THE STEPS AND LOOKED BEHIND ME. HERE COMES THIS PHILLIPINO WITH A CARBINE. I PICKED UP A 2X4 THAT WAS LYING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STEPS. THREW IT AT HIM AND RAN OUT THE DOOR.

I WENT BACK TO THE CAMP AND FOUND THAT THE TWO FELLOWS HAD RETURNED, SO WE WERE ALL SITTING AROUND, DRINKING BEER AND CELEBRATING, AND A MP ALONG WITH A NATIVE PHILLIPINO WOMAN SHOWS UP AT THE TENT DOOR.

THE MP SAYS, "NOW LADY, IF YOU WILL POINT TO THE MEN HERE YOU THINK WERE INVOLVED, WE'LL TAKE CARE OF THE SITUATION."

HE SAID, "NOW, WHY DON'T YOU GO AROUND THE ROOM AND POINT THEM OUT?" SHE REVOLVED SLOWLY, POINTING, "HEEM, AND HEEM, AND HEEM." AND THEN SHE POINTED TO ME. "AND HEEM."

AND THE SERGEANT SAID, "THE CAPTAIN?" "YES, HEEM!"

THE SERGEANT BASHFULLY SAID, "SIR, I GUESS YOU'LL HAVE TO COME WITH ME."

HE TOOK ME TO THE PROVOST MARSHALL'S OFFICE IN ANGELES. THEY HAD TO CALL AN OFFICER BECAUSE OF MY STATUS. AN OFFICER SOON CAME, DROVE ME BACK TO MY CAMP, EXPLAINING THAT THEY HAD TO DO THIS TO SHOW THE PEOPLE THEY WERE PROTECTING THEIR INTERESTS. THAT WAS THE END OF THAT.

ONE NIGHT IN NOVEMBER 1945 THEY LOADED HUNDREDS OF US OUT OF ANGELES ON CATTLE CARS. THAT WAS THE MOST MISERABLE TIME I'VE EVER SPENT; NOT ENOUGH ROOM TO SIT DOWN OR LAY DOWN OR ANYTHING; JUST STANDING UP ALL NIGHT, THIS WAS THE FIRST LEG OF GOING HOME.

BY MORNING WE WERE AT SAN FERNANDO. WE SHIPPED OUT OF THERE LAST OF NOVEMBER, HOMEWARD TO SAN FRANCISCO. ALL WE HEARD ON THE SHIP'S SPEAKER SYSTEM WAS BING AND PERRY SINGING "WHITE CHRISTMAS," "I'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS," AND OTHER SUCH SONGS.

WE WERE ALL CERTAIN WE WOULD NEVER BE HOME BY CHRISTMAS. ONE DAY THE TRANSPORT COMMANDER CAME ON THE SPEAKER SYSTEM WITH "MEN, I UNDERSTAND THERE IS A LOT OF COMPLAINING AMONG YOU THAT YOU WON'T GET HOME FOR CHRISTMAS. I WANT TO ASSURE EACH AND EVERY MAN ON THIS SHIP YOU WILL BE HOME BY CHRISTMAS."

THE NEXT MORNING WE WERE TIED UP AT, ENAWETOK, THE ATOLL WHERE THEY DID THE ATOM BOMB TESTING. THE NAVY WAS PAINTING THE SHIP.

WE HAD A LOT OF LAUGHS ABOARD SHIP. I MET BERNARD P. BOND, A CAVALRY OFFICER, WHO WAS A HORSE TRAINER FROM BALTIMORE. I OFTEN WONDERED WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM. I WAS NEVER ABLE TO FIND HIS NAME IN A BALTIMORE AREA DIRECTORY.

AS WE SAILED UNDER THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE, A WELCOMING SHIP CAME TO GREET US WITH THE BANDS PLAYING. IT WAS A HAPPY TIME.

THE TRANSPORT COMMANDER CAME ON THE SPEAKER SYSTEM WITH, "MEN, LET'S ALL STAND AT ATTENTION AND OFFER A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENT PRAYER FOR THOSE THAT DIDN'T RETURN." IN THE MIDST OF THIS VERY SOLEMN INTERVAL, THE CHIEF STEWARD CAME ON THE SPEAKER WITH, "ALL RIGHT GUYS, LET'S GET THIS DAMN GARBAGE OVERBOARD!" IT WAS HARD TO KEEP A STRAIGHT FACE.

JUST BEFORE THIS, EVERYONE ON SHIPBOARD THAT WANTED IT HAD BEEN GIVEN A QUART OF MILK. WE HAD NOT EVEN SEEN MILK IN YEARS.

AS SOON AS WE DOCKED, WE WERE ALL HUSTLED TO A MESS HALL WHERE ANOTHER QUART OF MILK AND A STEAK DINNER WITH ALL THE TRIMMINGS WERE WAITING. THEN THE TROUBLE STARTED.

WE WERE ALL LIKE A BUNCH OF ANIMALS. I WAS BAD ENOUGH, BUT SOME OF MY FELLOW OFFICERS, I WAS REALLY ASHAMED.

A GROUP OF US ONE EVENING GOT IN A CAB TO GO TO SAN FRANCISCO. ON THE WAY BACK, THE CABBIE WAS IN SUCH A HURRY THAT BEFORE EVERYBODY GOT OUT OF THE CAB, HE STARTED TO TAKE OFF AGAIN. ONE OF MY MEN ENDED UP WITH A HAND UNDER ONE OF HIS TIRES. I WAS LIVID. I WALKED OVER AND PUNCHED THE CABBIE.

A M.P. SAW ME. HE SAID, "CAPTAIN, WHY DID YOU DO THAT?"

I SAID, "HE WAS PARKED ON MY MAN'S HAND."

HE SAID, "I'LL HAVE TO HOLD YOU. AND YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT HERE. SINCE YOU ARE AN OFFICER, I'LL HAVE TO GET ANOTHER OFFICER."

IN A LITTLE WHILE A M.P. SECOND LIEUTENANT SHOWED UP IN A JEEP, PICKED ME UP, DROVE ME AROUND AWHILE, AND TOOK ME BACK TO THE POST, ALMOST APOLOGETIC.

I TOLD HIM I WAS JUST MAD ABOUT THE GREED SHOWN BY THE CAB DRIVER. HE RETURNED ME TO THE DEPOT AT STONEMAN. THAT WAS THE END OF THAT.

TIME WAS REALLY WEARING ON US, EVERYONE WANTED TO GET HOME. WE HAD A CAB DRIVER OFFER TO TAKE A GROUP OF US FROM CALIFORNIA TO BALTIMORE FOR \$500. HE WOULD DROP US OFF AT OUR VARIOUS HOMES ON THE WAY. BETWEEN US, WE COULDN'T SCRAPE UP \$500 AS WE HADN'T BEEN PAID IN SEVERAL MONTHS.

ONE DAY A GROUP OF US WERE SITTING AROUND IN THE TENT TALKING ABOUT POST-WAR. ONE FELLA SAID "IT WOULD BE NICE TO HAVE A BIG TENT LIKE THIS TO GO CAMPING WITH THE FAMILY." ALMOST IN UNISON, WE ALL LAUGHED, SAYING WE HAD ENOUGH DAMN CAMPING TO LAST US FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES.

WITH ALL THE GOOD INTENT TO GET US HOME, WE NEVER MADE IT BY CHRISTMAS. ON CHRISTMAS DAY, 1945, CAPTAIN GEORGE A. BAKER WAS TROOP TRAIN COMMANDER WITH SOME 1,500 MEN OF ALL SERVICES AND RANK ROLLING ACROSS TEXAS.

WE FINALLY GOT TO FORT KNOX AND IN THE SEPARATION PROCESS, THE ARMY WAS ASKING ANY AND ALL OFFICERS TO COME BACK ON DUTY AFTER A SHORT LEAVE. THEY ASKED US TO AGREE TO AS LITTLE AS 30 DAYS AND/OR ANY MULTIPLE THEROF AS THE ARMY WAS TRULY FALLING APART DUE TO THE INSISTENCE OF THE MOTHERS, WIVES, AND FAMILY PRESSURE "TO GET THE BOYS HOME." THEY EVEN OFFERED PERMANENT RANK, WHICH WAS ENTICING, AS DID ALL OTHERS WITH WHOM I SPOKE.

I BOARDED A TRAIN AT FORT KNOX HEADING TO GRAFTON, WVA ALONG WITH OTHERS WHO MIGHT BE GOING IN THAT DIRECTION. WE STOPPED IN CINCINNATI AND AT THAT POINT I FOUND MY MALARIA ATTACKS STARTING TO HAPPEN AGAIN. THE TRAIN PROCEEDED AND I GOT OFF AT GRAFTON AND TOOK A BUS TO MORGANTOWN.

I WENT TO A FLOWER SHOP AND BOUGHT A HOME COMING BOUQUET FOR ALMA. SHE HAD NO IDEA WHERE I WAS. THE LADY IN THE FLOWER SHOP SAID TO ME, "YOU BOYS ARE GOING TO GIVE SOME OF THESE GIRLS A HEART ATTACK AS YOU ARE THE SIXTH SOLDIER TO COME IN HERE TODAY WITH THE WIFE NOT KNOWING YOU ARE HOME."

I TOOK THE BOUQUET, WENT TO POP-POP'S TAILOR SHOP, GREETED HIM, AND FOUND THAT ALMA WAS IN TOWN AND WOULD BE BACK SHORTLY.

IN A FEW MINUTES SHE DID RETURN. I HID BEHIND A CURTAIN AND SURPRISED HER AS SHE WALKED IN. THIS WAS A JOYOUS REUNION AFTER OVER THREE YEARS. SON BILL OF COURSE, WAS AT HOME WITH MONGEE.

I WAS VERY THIN, YELLOW/JAUNDICED-LOOKING FROM THE MANY MONTHS OF ATABRINE TAKING, BUT IT WASN'T TOO LONG THAT I STARTED TO FILL OUT, ONCE BACK ON HOME COOKING.

NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1946, WAS MEMORABLE BECAUSE MY MALARIA ATTACK WAS A REALLY BAD ONE AND I HAD NO ATABRINE TO SUPPRESS IT. AUNT BARBARA (ALMA'S SISTER) CALLED A FELLOW PROFESSOR IN THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY AND GOT ME SOME ATABRINE.

THE FIRST NIGHT OUT THAT WE HAD WAS BACK TO THE RAINBOW GARDEN AT DELLSLOW, A PLACE WE FREQUENTED BEFORE THE WAR. I DIDN'T HAVE A CAR, SO WE TOOK THE BUS, ALMA AND I AND BARBARA AND HER BOY FRIEND. WE DANCED THE NIGHT AWAY.

A WEEK OR SO OF THIS LEISURE LIFE HAD ME "ANCY" TO GET BACK TO WORK. ALL OF MY PRE-WAR WORK WITH WESTERN HAD BEEN IN WEST VIRGINIA AND I HAD VOWED THAT AFTER THE WAR, I WOULD RETURN TO MY NATIVE VIRGINIA, WHICH I DID.

WESTERN LOCATED ME TEMPORARILY IN ROANOKE. ALMA AND I MOVED INTO A FURNISHED APARTMENT AND SETTLED THERE FOR A WHILE. THOSE WERE HAPPY DAYS, AS VIRTUALLY EVERYONE I WORKED WITH WAS A RETURNEE. I FOUND OUT LATER THAT COMPANY POLICY WAS TO HAVE ANYONE RETURNING FROM THE SERVICE WITH RANK OF CAPTAIN OR HIGHER WOULD BE GIVEN PREFERENTIAL JOB TREATMENT. AS FAR AS I WAS CONCERNED, I WAS HAPPY TO BE HOME AND WILD WITH THE IDEA OF FINDING A FARM.

ALL I THOUGHT ABOUT WHEN I WAS IN THE SERVICE WAS GETTING OUT AND FARMING. I WROTE TO THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE. THEY SENT ME SOIL MAPS OF VIRGINIA'S BEST FARM LAND, BUT SADLY ENOUGH, I BOUGHT A POOR FARM. SOME OF MY LAND WAS SO POOR, YOU COULDN'T RAISE A DISTURBANCE ON IT.

SOME PEOPLE LATER SAID BAKER BOUGHT THE POOREST FARM IN BOTETOURT COUNTY, NAMED AFTER ONE OF THE EARLY GOVENORS OF VIRGINIA, LORD B. FROM ENGLAND.

I DID ALL THIS UNDER THE AEGIS OF USDA, THE COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE, AND THE COUNTY AGENT. I MIGHT HAVE BOUGHT A BETTER FARM, BUT THEN MIGHT NEVER HAVE GOTTEN OUT OF FARMING.

THE POST WORLD WAR II YEARS, 1946-1953 RETURN TO INDUSTRY AND FARM YEARS, BUCHANAN, VIRGINIA

THE MOST IMPORTANT YEARS, 1947-1959

WHILE MY "ODE TO JAHMS" WAS AN EFFORT TO LET HER KNOW MY APPRECIATION FOR WHAT SHE DID FOR ME AND ALL OF US, MUCH NEEDS TO BE SAID ABOUT THE YEARS AT BUCHANAN. I CAME HOME FROM THE WAR "BUSTING A GUT" TO GET INTO FARMING, AN INFECTION I CARRIED WITH ME FROM "UP AT THE HOME."

ALMA, BILLY, AND I SETTLED FIRST AT SUNSET VILLAGE, SALEM BECAUSE I HAD VOWED TO RETURN TO VIRGINIA AFTER THE WAR. WECO LOCATED ME IN ROANOKE, FROM WHERE I WORKED ALL OVER VIRGINIA. THE NEXT TWO YEARS WAS THE "OUT OF TOWN" AND HOME ON WEEKENDS KICK AND THE CONSTANT

SEARCH FOR A FARM I COULD BUY, WITH VIRTUALLY NO MONEY OR CREDIT. I HAD JUST ABOUT USED MY G.I. LOAN ELIGIBILITY FOR THE SUNSET VILLAGE PURCHASE.

AS A SURPRISE, I RECEIVED TWO CHECKS FROM MY AUNT EMMA'S ESTATE TOTALING SOME \$1300—MY TICKET TO FARM PURCHASE. INCIDENTALLY, THE BATTLE OVER AUNT EMMA'S ESTATE ENSUED WHILE I WAS IN THE PACIFIC. AND MAMIE'S AND BILL'S EFFORTS SAW TO IT, ALONG WITH A COURT APPOINTED ATTORNEY, THAT THE WILLIAM BAKER KIDS DIDN'T "GET DONE OUT OF IT" BY MY UNCLE JOE AND COUSIN STEVE AHERN (AUNT YETTLE'S SON). YETTLE HAD PASSED AWAY.

STEVE EVEN WENT SO FAR AS TO TRY TO PROVE OUR PARENTS, BILL AND ANNIE, WERE NOT EVEN MARRIED, SO THEY WERE GOING TO DO "THE FOUR LITTLE BAKER BASTARDS" OUT OF IT. THE COURT APPOINTED ATTORNEY FOUND MY PARENTS' MARITAL RECORD IN RICHMOND, WHERE THEY WERE MARRIED, AND FOILED THE ATTEMPT.

WE (ALMA AND I AND BILLY) BOUGHT THE FARM AT AUCTION FOR \$13,250—182 ACRES, A 120 YEAR OLD HOUSE AND A SMALL LEAKY BARN AND A CHICKEN HOUSE. BLIND INEXPERIENCE IS WHAT IT WAS. STILL CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY THE COUNTY AGENT BURTNER AND P.D. HUGHSTON, THE SOIL CONSERVATIONIST, DIDN'T COUNSEL ME MORE. I WAS WORKING, THOUGH, AT THE TIME AND HAD ALREADY PURCHASED, SO THEY MUST HAVE ASSUMED I WOULD CONTINUE TO "SUPPORT THE FARM" THAT WAY.

EARLY ON, I BOUGHT A TEAM OF HORSES FROM THE ORPHANAGE, MOLLY AND BILL FOR \$250. I TALKED A LOT ABOUT GETTING MOLLY BRED, SO WE'D HAVE A COLT COMING ALONG.

ALMA, BILLY, AND I WERE PLANTING OUR FIRST GARDEN; ALMA SAYS, "JUST THINK, WITH THE GARDEN AND THE COWS ALL WE'LL HAVE TO BUY IS BREAD."

BILLY INNOCENTLY REPLIED, "YEAH, BUT MAMA, DADDY SAID HE WAS FOING TO GET MOLLY BRED!" I GUESS IN HIS MIND THAT TOOK CARE OF THE "BREAD." BILLY WAS 5 YEARS OLD AT THE TIME.

NATHAN BROWN, AN ORPHANAGE BUDDY AND THEN FARM MANAGER THERE, WAS ALWAYS AT OUR BECK AND CALL. HE HELPED US MOVE FROM SALEM TO THE FARM AND WAS ALWAYS AVAILABLE WITH ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE AS NEEDED.

I CAN'T SAY ENOUGH ABOUT ALMA. SHE DID IT ALL, BUILT FIRES IN THE A.M. FOR HEATING AND COOKING, PUT UP WITH THE DIRT AND PROBLEMS OF FARM LIVING. SHE HAD KUST GIVEN UP A NICE LITTLE BRICK HOUSE IN SALEM FOR THIS. I KNOW SHE HATED IT, BUT IT RARELY SHOWED. SHE JUMPED IN WITH THE FARM CHORES, CANNING, DIRECTING THE CHURCH CHOIR, PRESIDENT OF THE LITHIA HOME DEMONSTRATION CLUB, AND SOME "MORE KID HAVING," AND AN UNSURPASSED MOTHER.

NEXT BORN WAS GEORGE AUGUST (JULY 1947), THEN BARBARA SUE (JULY 1950), THEN JOSEPH LAWSON (SEPTEMBER 1951). WE KEPT THE ROAD TO ROANOKE HOT FOR A FEW YEARS BETWEEN HER DR. GROSECLOSE VISITS, HOSPITAL VISITS, FALSE ALARM TRIPS AND OTHER. THE KIDS CAME ALONG QUICK. I DON'T KNOW WHY. I WOULD GET IN BED AT NIGHT AND SAY, "DO YOU WANT TO SLEEP OR WHAT?"

SHE'D SAY, "WHAT???????"

ANYWAY, THESE WERE "GREAT DAYS BEFORE MICROWAVE, WHEN WOMEN COOKED AND CHOPPED WOOD."

I QUIT MY JOB WITH WESTERN ELECTRIC IN APRIL 1948 TO BE A FULL TIME DAIRY FARMER WITH A 10 STALL MILKING BARN, A 12X30 FOOT SILO, AND A LARGE 60'X72' HAY BARN UNDER CONSTRUCTION BY WALTER MARTIN WITH

TIMBER CUT FROM THE FARM, (SOME 23,500 BOARD FEET) BY LEONARD AND CLARENCE TRAIL.

SO THE STRUGGLE BEGAN, WITH CASH FLOW, MASTITIS, AND ALL THE STANDARD PROBLEMS INHERENT WITH A DAIRY OPERATION.

DURING THE 1949-1950 PERIOD, ALMA'S FOLKS HARRY AND VELMA—POP-POP AND "MONGEE" MOVED DOWN WITH US, AND ALONG WITH ALMA'S BROTHER ELTON, ENDURED THE PRIVATION OF THE OLD HOUSE ON THE CREEK. ELTON EARLY ON SAW THE ECONOMIC IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE FARM SUPPORTING US ALL. HE LATER MOVED BACK TO MORGANTOWN, WVA AND "MONGEE" SOON FOLLOWED. I CAN'T SAY ENOUGH ABOUT ELTON. HE AND HIS AGGIE DEGREE FROM WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY AND HAD DONE MUCH WORK ON HIS MASTER'S AT MICHIGAN STATE. WE WORKED LIKE DOGS TO MAKE IT GO, BUT IT WASN'T TO BE.

POP-POP STAYED ON, GOT A JOB IN ROANOKE SELLING MEN'S CLOTHING, AND LATER OPENED A TAILORING AND CLEANING BUSINESS IN BUCHANAN. MONGEE VISITED ET CETERA AND, WITH HER SUDDEN DEATH, POP-POP MOVED BACK TO MORGANTOWN.

ALMA'S COMMENT AFTER HANGING UP THE PHONE WITH POP-POP'S CALL ABOUT MONGEE'S PASSING, CRYING, SHE SAID, "MOTHER WON'T GET TO SEE THE KIDS GROW UP. HOW SAD, NOBODY, EVER HAD BETTER IN-LAWS THAN ME, WHOLESOME, POOR, DOWN TO EARTH, FUN TO BE WITH—JUST UNBEATABLE. THEY NEVER MEDDLED IN ALMA'S AND MY AFFAIRS.

WE FINALLY, WITH A FARM HOME ADMINISTRATION LOAN, BUILT A NEW HOME TO WHICH WE MADE AN EMERGENCY OCCUPATION IN 1951, RIGHT AFTER MY DISC OPERATION, AND THE BACK CREEK FLOOD WHICH DROVE US OUT OF THE OLD HOUSE. I KNOW ALMA WAS HAPPY TO HAVE NICE CABINETS AFTER ALMOST 3 YEARS USING A MADE OVER TELEPHONE SWITCHBOARD.

MY VETERAN'S HOSPITAL TRIP IS A STORY IN ITSELF. I APPARENTLY HAD SLIPPED THIS DISC IN THE LAST WEEKS IN THE PHILLIPINES DURING WHICH I PLAYED A LOT OF SPORTS; BASKETBALL WITH AN ALL-PHILLIPINO TEAM, FOOTBALL, AND HIGH JUMPING. THIS NAGGED ME AFTER THE SERVICE RIGHT ON INTO FARMING, WHEN IT BECAME HERNIATED.

I FINALLY GAVE IN AND WENT TO THE VA HOSPITAL IN ROANOKE. I HAD TO GO PRACTICALLY "ON ALL FOURS" AND, ON ARRIVAL, WAS PUT IN A WARD FULL OF GUYS ON ALL FOURS UP IN BED LIKE ME. THE PLACE LOOKED LIKE A DOG KENNEL!

I HAD A LEFT GROIN HERNIA THAT I DIDN'T MENTION UP TILL NOW. I SAID TO THE DOCTOR, DOUGLAS FEAR, "DOC, HOW ABOUT PATCHING UP THIS HERNIA SO I CAN BE GETTING WELL FROM TWO OPERATIONS INSTEAD OF JUST ONE, THE DISC?"

THEY OPERATED FOR THE DISC ONE DAY AND, A FEW DAYS LATER, THE HERNIA. WHILE LYING OUTSIDE THE OPERATING ROOM AWAITING MY HERNIA SURGERY, DR. FEAR CAME OUT ALL SCRUBBED WITH BOTH HANDS IN THE AIR SAYING, "BY THE WAY BAKER, WAS THAT THE LEFT GROIN OR THE RIGHT GROIN?"

I SAID, "MY GOD, DOC, IT'S THE LEFT! JUST THINK, YOU MIGHT HAVE SLICED ME ON THE WRONG SIDE!"

WE LAUGHED ABOUT IT AND I WAS WHEELED ON IN FOR THE GRAND OPENING AND PATCH JOB. IT'S STILL HOLDING!

WITH THE "LITHIA FARM" CAME SO MANY GOOD MEMORIES, NO BAD ONES, REALLY JUST THE "HAPPY MISERY" OF TRYING TO MAKE A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING FOR MY FAMILY, WANTING THEM TO GROW UP RIGHT AND BE "GOOD PEOPLE."

SON BILLY GAVE US OUR GREATEST CONCERN. SOMETHING LIKE 18 MONTHS OLD WHEN I WENT INTO THE SERVICE, HE AND ALMA SPENT THE NEXT 45 MONTHS

(WAR YEARS) IN MORGANTOWN WITH HER FOLKS, "MONGEE" AND "POP-POP." ALMA WAS ALWAYS LOVING, FORGIVING, PERMISSIVE MOTHER AND ME ALWAYS THE TYRANT—MAKE THEM DO RIGHT OR KICK THEIR ASS!

BILL HAD ENJOYED TOTAL ADULATION FROM "MONGEE AND "POP-POP" AS THE ONLY GRANDCHILD, AND FROM ALMA, WHO TOOK COMFORT WITH HER "CHILD REARING STYLE" WITH "HE'S ALL I HAVE IF GEORGE DOESN'T MAKE IT BACK FROM THE WAR."

MY POINT, WHEN I REAPPEARED ON THE SCENE IN 1946; TO BILL I WAS "THE ENEMY." OUT OF THIS THEN GREW THIS "FRICTIONAL RELATIONSHIP" THAT CAUSE BILL'S KICKING THE TRACES, HIS EARLY DELINQUENCIES, AND MAYBE SOME OF HIS LATER ONES.

DESPITE THIS, BILL'S EFFORTS—AND G.A.'S, WHO WAS MUCH YOUNGER—HELPING ME AND HIS MOTHER, ESPECIALLY THE 1953-1955 PERIOD WHEN I KNEW I HAD TO GO BACK TO "PUBLIC WORKS," PREVENTED AN EVEN GREATER LOSS IN THIS TRANSITION OUT OF LITHIA TO CHARLOTTESVILLE. A LOT OF BILL'S PROBLEMS WERE TRACEABLE TO MY MISMANAGEMENT OF HIM. THE MORE I WRITE, THE MORE I BELIEVE "ODE TO JAHMS" TELLS THIS WHOLE STORY.

I MUST TRY TO EXPLAIN HOW ALMA GOT THE NAME "JAHMS." MY VERSION: JOE AND SUE USE TO GIGGLE AND LAUGH AT THE MAMA AND RHYMED WITH "JAMAS" STOLEN FROM PAJAMAS. SO IT BECAME, WITH G.A.'S HELP, I THINK, "JAMAS." THEN, TO GIVE IT MORE CLASS, WE ADDED THE "H" TO MAKE IT "JAHMS." I'LL STAND CORRECTED ON WHAT THE KIDS SAY. THEY STARTED IT!

A VERY MEMORABLE EVENT HAPPENED DURING THE BUCHANAN FARM YEARS; IT WAS LABOR DAY WEEKEND, SEPTEMBER 1953.

I WAS WORKING IN STAUNTON, VIRGINIA. ALMA DROVE THROUGH WITH THE KIDS, PICKED ME UP AFTER WORK, AND WE TOOK OFF TO VISIT MONGEE AND POP-POP IN MORGANTOWN, WVA. AS WE APPROACHED ELKINS ON CHEAT MOUNTAIN, A CAR CAME AROUND THE CURVE ON OUR SIDE OF THE ROAD. WE HAD A HEAD ON COLLISION.

ALMA AND I AND THE FOUR CHILDREN WERE IN THE GOLDEN MEMORIAL CLINIC IN ELKINS, WVA. I HAD A CRUSHED CHEST AND A SHATTERED KNEE CAP, ALMA WITH A FRACTURED SKULL AND SEVERE FACIAL LACERATIONS, BILL WITH WHAT WAS THOUGHT TO BE A BASAL SKULL FRACTURE PLUS ASSORTED CUTS AND BRUISES. SUE AND JOE WITH CUT LIPS, BLACK EYES, AND CAKE ICING FROM A CAKE THAT WE WERE TAKING TO GRANDMA. G.A WAS TRAPPED UNDER THE FRONT SEAT BUT OKAY.

THE DRIVER OF THE OTHER CAR WAS AN AGED BLACK MAN NAMED RUFUS "CLICK" CLARK, WAS DRUNK AND UNHURT. HIS COMPANION, A VERY YOUNG BLACK GIRL WAS KILLED. A GROUP OF MINERS ON THE WAY HOME HAPPENED ON OUR SCENE AND WANTED TO LYNCH THE BLACK GUY. I STEPPED OUT OF THE CAR AND NOT KNOWING WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO MY LEG, AND JUST FELL FLAT DOWN ON THE ROAD. I LOOKED AT ALMA, WITH HER FACE TORN OPEN, AND HER HEAD ACHING, AND FELT SO FRUSTRATED THAT I WAS HELPLESS TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT, MY CHEST PUSHED IN AND ACHING.

THIS REALLY MADE 1953 A YEAR THAT WOULD LIVE IN INFAMY AND DROVE US OFF THE FARM.

- 1) THE COW HERD GOT BANGS DISEASE. WITH BANG'S DISEASE, A COW IS UNABLE TO CARRY A CALF TO TERM (9 MONTHS), AND ABORTS ABOUT THE THIRD OR FOURTH MONTH. THIS RENDERS HER WORTHLESS AS A MILK PRODUCER AS SHE NEVER ACHIEVES FULL LACTATION. BANGS COWS ARE SOLD AND SLAUGHTERED AS THE MILK CAUSES UNDULANT FEVER IN HUMANS.

- 2) ALMA'S FIFTH CHILD WAS PURPOSELY ABORTED AS HER HEART COULDN'T STAND ANOTHER CHILD ACCORDING TO DR. GROSECLOSE.
- 3) I GOT "SILO FILLER'S DISEASE."

AS YOU FILL A SILO AND STOP AT THE END OF THE DAY, A GAS FROM THE FERMENTATION PROCESS OF THE CORN BEGINS TO BUILD UP OVERNIGHT IN THE SILO. ON START-UP AGAIN IN THE MORNING, THE BLOWER SHOULD BE ACTIVATED TO BLOW THIS GAS OUT OF THE SILO. WE FAILED TO DO THAT. I ENTERED THE SILO AND A FEW DAYS LATER I WAS DISCOVERED TO HAVE "SILO FILLER'S DISEASE" WHICH IS DIAGNOSED AS PNEUMONIA ATYPICAL. THIS GAS IS SO DEADLY, THERE ARE REPORTS OF CHICKENS, RUNNING AROUND THE BARNYARD, ENTERING THIS AREA AROUND THE SILO WHERE THE GAS HAS FORMED AND JUST KEELING OVER DEAD, RIGHT ON THE SPOT.

I HAD JUST COMPLETED A RECENT TREATMENT SERIES FOR MALARIA, WHICH I BROUGHT HOME FROM THE WAR, AND MY SYMPTOMS CONVINCED ME—AND I IN TURN CONVINCED THE DOCTOR—THAT IT WAS A MALARIA ATTACK AGAIN. SO HE GAVE ME QUININE. THIS DIDN'T HELP.

I CHECKED IN TO THE VETERANS HOSPITAL IN ROANOKE AND TOLD THE ADMISSIONS DOCTOR, SINCE IT WASN'T MALARIA AND NOT SERVICE CONNECTED, THAT THEY WOULDN'T BE ALLOWED TO TREAT ME. HE SAID, "FORGET IT. COME ON IN. WE'RE GLAD TO HAVE YOU. WE'LL PUT YOU IN BED AND I'LL BE IN TO GIVE YOU A SHOT TO MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER."

I DESCRIBED TO HIM HOW ACHEY I WAS. HIS REPLY, "YOU MEAN YOUR BODY IS ALL ACHEY AND WRACKED WITH PAIN?"

I AGREED. IT SEEMED SO SUPERFLUOUS.

1953 WAS AN APOCALYPTIC YEAR, I THOUGHT I'D CROSSED THE RUBICON FOR GOOD.

GLIMPSSES BACK TO THE BUCHANAN FARM YEARS

ALMA SENT BILLY WITH A GLASS OF WATER DOWN TO THE CORNFIELD WHERE POP-POP AND I WERE HOEING. BILLY SAT THE GLASS DOWN AT THE END OF THE ROW (WHERE WE WOULD SEE IT WHEN WE "HOED" BACK) AND TOOK OFF. HE OBVIOUSLY DIDN'T WANT ANY PART OF BEING AROUND ME.

JOE WAS "BABY." BILL WAS "SIX" (THIX). HE COULDN'T SAY HIS "S's" YET. SUE WAS BUSIE. G.A. WAS BAY.

BILL AND G.A. BOTH WANTED TO DRIVE THE FARMALL SUPER C TRACTOR, WHICH WE BOUGHT NEW. THER WAS ALWAYS AN ARGUMENT. BILL USUALLY WON OUT AS HE WAS REALLY THE ONLY ONE OLD ENOUGH. HE REALLY WORKED AND SO DID G.A. SUE GOT PRETTY GOOD AT GOING UP IN THE PASTURE TO BRING THE COWS DOWN. JOE WAS STILL A BABY.

THE FLOOD, IN THE FALL OF 1950 BACK CREEK ROSE HIGH AND WIDE TO FLOOD US OUT OF THE OLD HOUSE. LUCKILY WE HAD THE NEW HOUSE UNDER CONSTRUCTION AND NEAR COMPLETION. I REMEMBER STEPPING OUT OF THE BACK DOOR OF THE OLD HOUSE WITH SUE IN MY ARMS AND INTO WATER OVER MY WAISTE. I HAD LEFT THE JEEP RUNNING ON HIGH GROUND, WHICH WE RAN TO AND TOOK OFF TO THE NEW HOUSE. ALMA, BILLY, AND G.A. WERE ALREADY SAFELY OUT. JOE HADN'T ARRIVED YET.

THANKSGIVING, WOULD ALWAYS INVITE GEORGE TAYLOR, OUR NEIGHBOR ACROSS THE CREEK, OVER FOR DINNER. HE WAS IN HIS LATE SEVENTIES AND

SPUN TALL TALES FROM THE PAST AND HOW HE HAD WORKED SO HARD. HE LIVED WITH HIS SISTER OLLIE, BUT SHE WORKED AWAY AND FINALLY HAD TO COME HOME TO TAKE CARE OF GEORGE AS HE GRADUALLY WENT BLIND. OLLIE HAD NEVER MARRIED EITHER.

I RENTED A FIVE ACRE TRACT FROM HER, WHICH WAS PART OF HER HOMESTEAD. I PLANTED IT IN ALFALFA, WHICH GREW WELL THERE. ONE DAY WHILE MOWING THE ALFALFA, OUR DOG, "MOUNTIE" WAS IN THE FIELD UNSEEN AND BILLY ACCIDENTALLY CUT HER LEGS OFF. BILLY FELT BAD. WE ALL DID. BUT IT COULDN'T BE HELPED. THE KIDS HAD FORMED QUITE AN ATTACHMENT TO "MOUNTIE." I'VE FORGOTTEN WHERE WE BURIED HER. SUE KNOWS.

AT THE OLD HOUSE, ALMA WOULD LET G.A. PEE PEE OFF THE SIDE PORCH OF THE HOUSE, WHICH WAS ONLY ABOUT 6 INCHES OFF THE GROUND. ONE DAY G.A., THEN ONLY ABOUT 2 YEARS OLD, SAID TO ALMA, "MOMMA, I WON'T TO PEE PEE IN THE SUNSHINE."

SHE LET HIM GO OUT ON THE EDGE OF THE PORCH TO DO HIS THING, AND IN THE PROCESS, ONE OF THE BIG ROOSTERS PECKING AROUND IN THE YARD LATCHED ONTO G.A.'S PEE PEE-ER. HE LET OUT A SCREAM AND ALMA CAME RUNNING AND DISCOVERED WHAT HAPPENED. THE ROOSTER APPARENTLY WAS NO RESPECTER OF WORMS REGARDLESS OF THEIR ATTACHMENT.

UNCLE BILL WAS ALWAYS ON HAND WHEN ALMA WAS DUE FOR DELIVERY AND FOR AWHILE THEREAFTER. HE WOULD FIX OUR MEALS, WASH DIAPERS, ETC. WHILE ALMA WAS IN THE HOSPITAL HAVING SUE, UNCLE BILL WAS THERE TO TAKE CARE OF G.A. WHO WAS TWO-ISH AT THE TIME. HIS METHOD OF CONTROLLING G.A. WHILE HE WAS DOING THE CHORES WAS TO TIE HIM WITH A SLIDING RING TO THE CLOTHS LINE AND LET HIM ROAM UP AND DOWN THE LINE, WHICH KEPT HIM HAPPY AND OUT OF BILL'S HAIR.

WHILE ALMA WAS BUSY IN THE BASEMENT WASHING CLOTHES ONE DAY, SUE AND JOE TOOK OFF DOWN THE RAILROAD TRACK "NEAR NAKED" TO FRAZIER'S STORE TO SEE IF HE WOULD LET THEM CHARGE SOME CANDY TO OUR ACCOUNT. HE WOULDN'T, AND ALMA, IN THE MEANTIME, DISCOVERED THEM MISSING AND ALMOST HAD A HEART ATTACK, I'M SURE. THEY GOT A TASTE OF THE BIG WOODEN SPOON SHE ALWAYS THREATENED THEM WITH BUT RARELY USED.

A VISIT FROM "POP-POP" COMING FROM MORGANTOWN, WVA BY BUS WAS ALWAYS A HAPPY TIME. HE WOULD TAKE BILL (WHEN SEVEN OR EIGHT) TO ROANOKE FOR THE DAY. THEY WOULD GO ON THE TRAIN FROM LITHIA. "POP-POP" WOULD HAVE A FEW BEERS AND INSIST ON BILL TAP-DANCING WHEN HE SLUGGED THE JUKE BOX. THIS EMBARRASSED BILL, HE WOULD LATER TELL ME.

SUNDAY PICNICS AT DOUTHAT PARK WITH THE SPRINKLES, MOOMAWS, OTHERS, SOMETIMES ONLY US, BUT ALWAYS A LOOKED FORWARD TO EVENT.

WE WERE SAVING A PUREBRED AYRSHIRE HEIFER CALF FOR BILL TO SHOW IN THE 4-H FAIR. THE MOTHER WAS REYMANN LIVELY BETTY, A PUREBRED AYRSHIRE WE BOUGHT FROM WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY AT MORGANTOWN; ABOUT THREE WEEKS BEFORE SHOW TIME, IT WAS STOLEN. WE WERE PRETTY SURE ELMER CALDWELL STOLE IT, BUT HAD NO PROOF. SAM MCGEE, MY AG TEACHER IN THE VETERANS AG PROGRAM I WAS IN, SAID HE DIDN'T THINK ELMER WOULD STEAL FROM HIS FRIENDS, BUT HE DID. ELMER AND I HAD BEEN BUDDIES—SOMEWHAT.

THE VETERANS AG PROGRAM ADMINISTERED UNDER THE G.I. BILL PAI US \$97 MONTHLY TO GO TO EVENING CLASSES TWICE WEEKLY PLUS FIELD EVENTS. IT WAS TOUGH GOING AT NIGHT AFTER WORKING ON THE FARM ALL DAY BUT THE \$97 BOUGHT OUR GROCERIES. OF COURSE, ALL OF US GRADUATED MAGNA CUM ROWDY!

WHEATLAND LUTHERAN CHURCH, WE ATTENDED FAITHFULLY EACH SUNDAY EXCEPT DURING SUMMER PICNIC SEASON. G.A., SUE, AND JOE WERE BAPTISED

THERE. BILL AND G.A. WERE ACOLYTES AND SANG IN THE CHOIR. BILL TOOK CATECHISM CLASSES AND WAS CONFIRMED THERE. G.A., SUE, AND JOE LATER STUDIED THE CATECHISM AND WERE CONFIRMED AT ST. MARK'S IN CHARLOTTESVILLE.

SUE, 13 MONTHS OLDER THAN JOE, WAS ALWAYS DOMINATING DURING AGES FOUR THROUGH EIGHT; ALWAYS PLAYING SCHOOL TEACHER, HAVING JOE SIT QUIETLY AS SHE STOOD BEFORE HIM, OPEN BOOK IN HAND, SAYING, "JOE, YOU'D BETTER PAY ATTENTION, YOU'RE GOING TO FAIL!"

THE BACK TO INDUSTRY YEARS U. S. INSTRUMENT CORPORATION

JANUARY 1955 I WENT TO WORK FOR UNITED STATES INSTRUMENT CORPORATION IN CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA. I WAS STILL STRUGGLING TO HOLD ON TO THE FARM IN LITHIA—WITH ALMA AND THE KIDS KEEPING THE DAIRY OPERATING UNDER PRESSURE FROM OUR WASHINGTON MILK PRODUCERS TO GET IN OR GET OUT.

BILL GIBSON, OUR TENANT, AND HIS FAMILY LIVED IN OUR OLD HOUSE. BILL GIBSON AND COMPANY LEFT, WE GOT A LOAN TO BUILD A TENANT HOUSE ON THE SITE OF THE OLD HOUSE AND HIRED WANK CRONISE AND HIS FAMILY TO RUN THE FARM. BILL, IN THE MEANTIME HAD ENROLLED AT AMA IN STAUNTON. SO IT WAS ALMA, G.A., SUE, AND JOE HOLDING THE FORT TILL WANK CAME.

I LEFT USI AUGUST 1958 AND CAME BACK TO LITHIA. THIS AFTER MOVING THE FAMILY TO THE CHARLOTTESVILLE AREA, LIVING AT IVY IN A TENANT HOUSE (HAD 2 FRONT DOORS) RENTED FROM A NEW ZEALANDER, A.N. WRIGHTSON, WHERE THE YOUNGER KIDS WENT TO MERIWETHER LEWIS ELEMENTARY AND BILL TO ALBEMARLE HIGH SCHOOL. SUE'S FIRST GRADE TEACHER, SARAH T. DUNN, WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED; ALSO, G.A.'S STORIES ABOUT HIS CLASSMATE, EARLY BELEW, 17 YEARS OLD IN THE FOURTH GRADE, WHO DROVE A PICK-UP TO SCHOOL AND PARKED BESIDE THE TEACHERS.

IN APRIL 1959, I RETURNED TO USI WITH FAMILY STILL IN LITHIA. IN MAY 1959 WE AUCTIONED OFF FARM MACHINERY AND CATTLE AND MOVED TO CHARLOTTESVILLE. WE RENTED ON RIO ROAD SOME OF THE PERIOD AT TWO LOCATIONS, A FRIEND AND CO-WORKER, GORDON MARSHALL'S PLACE; ALSO ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE NUTTYCOMBS ON RIO ROAD. IN 1955-1958 WHEN WE MOVED TO CHARLOTTESVILLE WE LIVED AT THE WHITE GATE ESTATE NEAR CROZET. WE RENTED THERE UNTIL SUE AND JOE SET THE PLACE ON FIRE. WE WERE FORCED TO MOVE. THEN WE MOVED TO WRIGHTSON'S IN IVY, VA.

IN THE MEANTIME, THE SALE OF THE FARMLAND AT LITHIA DID NOT GO THROUGH. THE LADY, HESTER FRINGER, WHO BID IT COULD NOT CONSUMATE THE SALE, SO WE WORRIED WITH THE FARM BACK AND FORTH ON WEEKENDS, THE BOYS AND I, UNTIL IT WAS FINALLY SOLD TO THE RANSOME FAMILY AT \$36,000 OR THEREABOUTS, SOME \$7,000 LESS THAN THE AUCTION BID PRICE SOME TWO YEARS EARLIER.

WE SCRAPED TOGETHER ENOUGH MONEY FROM THE SALE OF THE LITHIA FARM TO BUY A LOT AND BUILD A SPLIT LEVEL HOME ON 5.8 ACRES IN CHAPEL HILL SUBDIVISION. THIS WAS THE ONLY THING OF ITS KIND AT THE TIME; LARGE LOTS WITH A MINIMUM OF 3.5 ACRES. I WALKED DOWN THROUGH THE WOODS TO WORK AT USI ON ROUTE 29.

THIS WAS TRULY DELIGHTFUL LIVING, BUT AGAIN I COULDN'T STAND IT. "I HAD TO HAVE A FARM AGAIN!" SO AFTER A YEAR OR TWO OF THIS ALMOST

BLISSFUL EXISTENCE, I'M FARM HUNTING AGAIN. ALMA SAID I COULD IF I BOUGHT HER A PIANO.

IN NOVEMBER 1962 WE BOUGHT THE FRAY FARM AT ADVANCE MILLS WHERE THE ADVANCE MILLS SUBDIVISION NOW EXISTS. IT WAS 282 ACRES WITH GOOD FENCES, PLENTY OF WATER FOR CATTLE, NICE FEEDING BARN AND SILO WITH OTHER OUTBUILDINGS, ALL FOR \$37,500. WE WERE ALL SET FOR LIFE! WE BOUGHT ALL THE MACHINERY AND COW HERD FOR \$11,500. A DREAM CAME TRUE FOR ME WITH MINIMUM AWAY FROM HOME TRAVEL.

I SHOULD HAVE JUST STAYED AT ADVANCE MILLS, SAT ON THE STEPS, AND WHITTLED, INSTEAD OF RUNNING ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, "MESSING UP" PEOPLES' LIVES, MINE INCLUDED. THIS TIME THE REAR VIEW MIRROR ISN'T MUCH FUN TO LOOK AT.

MY MOTHER'S FATE

MY MOTHER DURING THIS PERIOD WAS OFF TRYING TO MAKE A NEW RENEWED LIFE WITH GRANVILLE. HIS DRINKING HAD DIMINISHED, I FOUND LATER, AND HE WAS REALLY TRYING TO DO THINGS RIGHT. WE VISITED THEM ONCE WHEN THEY WERE BACK IN NEWPORT NEWS AFTER HAVING LIVED IN INDIANAPOLIS FOR SEVERAL YEARS. MAMIE WAS THE ONLY ONE OF US CHILDREN WHO ALWAYS KNEW WHERE MOTHER WAS. THEY HAD MAINTAINED CORRESPONDENCE.

ONCE, ALMA AND I AND THE KIDS VISITED MY MOTHER AND GRANVILLE. THEY WERE LIVING AT BUCKROE BEACH AT THE TIME. LATER THEY MADE A SURPRISE VISIT TO US WHILE WE WERE LIVING AT ADVANCE MILLS. MY DAUGHTER SUE, AT THE AGE OF 13, EVEN WENT DOWN AND SPENT A WEEK OR SO WITH MOTHER AND GRANVILLE IN BUCKROE, A VISIT WITH WHICH SUE WAS NEVER VERY HAPPY. I HAD ONLY MINIMAL CONTACT WITH THEM THEREAFTER. AN OCCASIONAL CALL AT MY FARM IN BRADFORD, TENNESSEE FROM WHERE I ATTENDED GRANVILLE'S FUNERAL WHEN HE DIED.

IN FEBRUARY 1975, WHILE WORKING AT FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA, MY COUSIN CORNELIUS APPLE CALLED ME, SAYING THAT MY MOTHER HAD BEEN MURDERED AT THE AGE OF 85. AN 18 YEAR OLD BLACK BOY FOLLOWED HER HOME FROM THE LOCAL GROCERY STORE AND HAD COME INTO HER APARTMENT, (SHE NEVER LOCKED THE DOORS), APPARENTLY DRUG-CRAZED, LOOKING FOR MONEY, JEWELRY, OR WHATEVER. DRESSER DRAWERS WERE PULLED OUT AND DUMPED ON THE FLOOR, DRAPES WERE SEARCHED AND BLOODSTAINED (ELDERLY WOMEN HAVE A PENCHANT FOR HIDING JEWELRY IN DRAPES).

MY COUSIN, CORNELIUS APPLE (FANNIE'S SON), AND HIS WIFE KYLENE, HAD FOR YEARS LOOKED OUT FOR MOTHER—THEIR "AUNT ANNIE"—AND GRANVILLE, VISITING, CHECKING ON THEIR NEEDS, AND SO ON. THEY CONTINUED TO VISIT ANNIE AFTER GRANVILLE'S PASSING.

KYLENE HAD GONE TO VISIT MY MOTHER AS USUAL. WHEN SHE ARRIVED, SHE FOUND THE POLICE HAD CORDONED OFF THE AREA. THEY ADVISED HER NOT TO ENTER, AS IT WAS TOO GRUESOME. MAMA WAS ALMOST BEHEADED WITH ONE OF HER OWN BUTCHER KNIVES, AND WAS FOUND LYING ON HER BLOOD-SOAKED COUCH. THAT'S WHEN I GOT MY CALL.

I WENT TO NEWPORT NEWS AND TOOK CARE OF THE FINAL ARRANGEMENTS, COSTS, AND SO FORTH, FOR HER BURIAL. MAMIE, THELMA AND BILL, ALL SHARED IN THEIR PART OF THIS. THELMA'S COMMENT, "SHE WASN'T MUCH OF A MOTHER, BUT SHE DIDN'T DESERVE TO DIE LIKE THIS."

THIS ENDED THE MOSTLY UNHAPPY, CHAOTIC, SOMETIMES HAPPY EXISTENCE OF ANNA MAE ABERNETHY.

"MAMA TRIED," AS MERLE HAGGARD SINGS ABOUT "MAMA," BUT WITH ALL OF THE "MISSED YEARS" WE HAD "UP AT THE HOME" AND THE MINIMUM CONTACT THEREAFTER, THERE'S NOT MUCH ELSE TO TELL, EXCEPT TO SAY THAT HER LAST 15 YEARS OR SO WITH GRANVILLE HAD BEEN PEACEFUL. HE HAD QUIT DRINKING AND HAD A JOB IN INDIANAPOLIS WHERE THEY OWNED AND LIVED IN A TRAILER. THEY LATER SOLD THE TRAILER AND MOVED BACK TO NEWPORT NEWS TO LIVE IN A GOVERNMENT-SUBSIDIZED LOW RENT HOUSING PROJECT WHERE FIRST GRANVILLE PASSED AWAY AND THEN MAMA MET HER FATE.

THE BOY (MURDERER) LATER, AT HIS HEARING, SAID HE FELT LIKE HE HAD TO KILL HER AS SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO IDENTIFY HIM. I DO NOT KNOW THE DISPOSITION OF THIS CASE, BUT HAVE RECENTLY LOCATED KYLENE AND CORNELIUS IN RICHMOND, VA AND PLAN TO CALL/VISIT THEM SOON, TO SEE IF THEY KNOW.

USI, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

BILL HAD GONE IN THE SERVICE BY NOW. JOE WENT TO BROADUS-WOOD ONE YEAR. THEN THE THREE CHILDREN, G.A., SUE, AND JOE WENT INTO CHARLOTTESVILLE TO ALBEMARLE HIGH SCHOOL. MANY DAYS I DROVE THEM AS I WENT TO WORK. IT WAS 1963.

G.A. AND JOE HELPED WITH THE CATTLE FEEDING, FENCE BUILDING, HAYMAKING, AND OTHER WORK ON THE ADVANCE MILLS FARM. I KEPT G.A. OUT OF SCHOOL ONE DAY DURING "SILO FILLING." HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL MR. HURT GOT ON MY CASE, SAYING, "THAT'S THE LAST TIME, MR. BAKER!"

JUST A CASE OF SOME MORE "UP AT THE HOME" STUFF THAT I THOUGHT EVERYONE SHOULD DO, GROWING UP, "STAY OUT OF SCHOOL AND HELP!" A BAD PRACTICE.

AS I REFLECT NOW, I HARDLY GAVE A THOUGHT TO MY KIDS' PROGRESS IN SCHOOL AND HOW ALL THE MOVING—BUCHANAN TO CHARLOTTESVILLE AND BACK AGAIN—OVER THE 1956-1959 PERIOD, AND THE VARIOUS SCHOOL CHANGES, WOULD AFFECT THEM. EVEN THOUGH THEY MADE AVERAGE GRADES, THEY WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER WITHOUT ALL THE MOVING AND CHANGE.

WHEN BILL FINALLY GOT OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL, ROCK HILL ACADEMY, ON GRADUATION DAY THE AUDIENCE APPLAUDED WHEN HIS NAME WAS CALLED TO COME FORTH FOR HIS DIPLOMA. I TOLD HIM, "YOU COULDN'T GET INTO COLLEGE WITH A SEARCH WARRANT!" HE ENLISTED IN THE AIR FORCE. THEN I KNEW THE COUNTRY WOULD BE SAFER!

G.A. GRADUATED FROM ALBEMARLE HIGH SCHOOL AND STAYED IN VIRGINIA AND GRADUATED FROM VIRGINIA TECH IN 1970 WITH A B.S. IN BUSINESS. SUE WENT TO SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY FOR TWO YEARS. JOE ENROLLED AT IOWA WESLEYAN FOR ONE YEAR, THEN WENT TO INDIANA STATE GRADUATING WITH A DEGREE IN JOURNALISM. HE RECENTLY ACHIEVED HIS GOAL AS PUBLISHER OF A SMALL TOWN NEWSPAPER IN ILLINOIS.

WITH ALL THREE BOYS, THOUGH THEY WERE ALL INTERESTED IN SPORTS, JOE IS THE ONLY ONE TO PLAY COLLEGE LEVEL FOOTBALL AND WRESTLING. G.A. RAN ONE YEAR OF TRACK AND WON MOST VALUABLE TRACK ATHLETE IN 1966.

ONE YEAR THERE, WE HAD THREE OF OUR CHILDREN IN COLLEGE AT ONE TIME. WHEN SUE DROPPED OUT TO GET MARRIED, I ALMOST APPLAUDED. I WOULD JUST GO TO THE BANK EACH YEAR, BORROW THE MONEY, PAY IT BACK BY NEXT SCHOOL YEAR, THEN START ALL OVER AGAIN.

MUCH NEEDS TO BE SAID ABOUT LIFE AT USI, A COMPANY OWNED BY HERBERT WARNKE, MOVED TO CHARLOTTESVILLE IN THE LATTER PART OF 1954, WHEN I WENT WITH THEM, WITH MY FIRST WORKDAY BEING IN JANUARY 1955. I HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN INTERVIEWED BY MR. WARNKE AT GRAYBAR ELECTRIC, LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK. SOME GRAYBAR FRIENDS THAT I HAD BEEN IN THE PACIFIC WITH HAD RECOMMENDED ME TO WARNKE.

I HAD TO GET OFF THE ROAD WITH WESTERN; I WAS A QUALITY ANALYST LIVING IN VIRGINIA REPORTING TO WECO, NEW YORK AND COVERING THE SOUTHEAST. WITH FOUR CHILDREN, I NEEDED TO BE HOME.

LIFE AT USI WAS NEW AND EXCITING AS MANAGER OF INSTALLATION. GRAYBAR HAD MARRIED USI TO SEIMENS OF MUNICH, GERMANY. WE WERE EMBARKED ON BRINGING SEIMENS SWITCHING EQUIPMENT; PABX INITIALLY AND CENTRAL OFFICE SWITCHING LATER, WHICH BECAME OUR DOWNFALL AS WE WERE ILL-EQUIPPED TO RUN WITH INDUSTRY GIANTS LIKE AUTOMATIC ELECTRIC (GTE), STROMBERG-CARLSON, AND NORTH ELECTRIC.

WE DID WELL WITH THE PABX LINE, CAPTURING SOME 50% OF THE MARKET DESPITE THE "FOREIGN MADE CONNOTATION." WE HAD FEATURES AT THAT TIME WAY AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION, INCLUDING BELL SYSTEM, A MARKET WE NEVER WERE ABLE TO CRACK. OUR BALLPARK WAS THE INDEPENDENT TELEPHONE INDUSTRY, OF WHICH THERE WERE SOME 1,800 COMPANIES AT THE TIME.

OUR YOUNG INEXPERIENCED COMPANY HAD A LOT TO LEARN. DEALING WITH SEIMENS (THE GERMANS) DIDN'T MAKE IT ANY EASIER. USI BROUGHT TOGETHER SOME TALENTED, WHOLESOME PEOPLE—ENGINEERS, MANUFACTURING, AND ACCOUNTING TYPES—ALL FUGITIVES FROM OTHER COMPANIES TRYING TO "MAKE IT UP THE LADDER." WE HAD OUR UPS AND DOWNS, BUT A LOT OF LAUGHS.

MY OLD FRIEND, JACK PEYTON, (WHO WITH HIS WIFE OPAL OWN A PRINTING SHOP NEARBY), AND I TALK OFTEN OF THINGS WE DID AND SAID. JACK WAS AND IS A BRAINY, ANALYTICAL TYPE FROM WHOM I LEARNED A LOT. HE HAD COME TO USI FROM LEXINGTON TELEPHONE COMPANY IN LEXINGTON, VA AND WAS A REAL ASSET TO USI. OPAL COULD REALLY "DO CORNBREAD" GOOD!

THEN THERE WAS OUR MUTUAL FRIEND AND CO-WORKER, LANGLEY ARMENTROUT, OUR SALES OFFICE MANAGER, WHO KEPT ALL OF US IN SALES CLERICALLY STRAIGHT. HIS WIFE, MILDRED, AN RN, IS A GREAT PERSON. THEY MOVED RECENTLY TO HARRISONBURG.

DURING MY EARLY MONTHS AT USI, I WAS "BACHELORING" AS ALMA AND THE KIDS WERE STILL AT THE FARM IN BUCHANAN. I TENDED TO KEEP JACK AND LANGLEY TOO LONG AT OUR BEER-DRINKING SESSIONS AT THE TAVERN. WE WERE ALWAYS WORRYING ABOUT WHETHER THE COMPANY WAS GOING TO MAKE IT OR NOT, WITH "WHAT THEY OUGHT TO DO IS," AND "WHERE THEY MADE THEIR MISTAKE WAS," AND "IF IT WAS UP TO ME, I'D FIRE THE S.O.B.," AND ON AND ON, AS WE RESTRUCTURED THE COMPANY ALMOST DAILY.

THEN THERE WERE MY OLD BUDDIES, NELSON REED, GEORGE DEHART, AND AL KANDLE, ALL OF WHOM I WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN HIRING. GEORGE "DRANK A LITTLE," AND IT GRADUALLY TOOK ITS TOLL WHEN HE BEGAN "TAKING THE CORK OUT OF HIS LUNCH."

ADD TO THE AFOREMENTIONED GEORGE KEY, TO WHOM I WAS A FATHER FIGURE. THE LAST TIME I SAW HIM WAS IN 1968 AT THE VIRGINIA TECH (HIS ALMA MATER)- WEST VIRGINIA FOOTBALL GAME. WE MET ON THE 50-YARD LINE AFTER THE GAME AND COMMISERATED ABOUT OLD TIMES. HE HAS SINCE PASSED AWAY.

MY OLD BUDDY, BOB POOLE, IS STILL AROUND AND GOLFING A LOT. HE AND HIS WIFE, NORMA, A GREAT LADY, SPLIT UP; SAD, LIKE ALMA AND I.

THEN THERE WAS "THE GREAT DANE," CLETUS JUUL NIELSEN, AN EXCELLENT MECHANICAL ENGINEER, ENTIRELY OUT OF HIS ORBIT IN THE TELEPHONE BUSINESS, BUT ONE HELL OF A LOT OF FUN! HE, TOO, HAS PASSED. I SEE HIS WIFE STACY, OCCASIONALLY AT THE STORE, ETC.

I MENTION THESE WORKADAY FRIENDS BECAUSE THEY WERE/ARE FRIENDS AND WE SOCIALIZED ON A CONTINUING BASIS WITH OUR CHILDREN INCLUDED.

BILL ROCKWOOD FROM STROMBERG, A GREAT GUY, BROUGHT IN SEVERAL OF HIS PEOPLE: ED HOY, WHO BECAME OUR DIRECTOR OF MANUFACTURING, AND JERRY SASS, PERSONNEL DIRECTOR. GOOD PEOPLE. ED HOY AND I FOUGHT A LOT ABOUT SHIPPING ON TIME, WITH ME CALLING HIM "NO SHIP AHOY," ETC.

THESE REALLY WERE TIMES OF FRIENDLY STRIFE, BUT IT DIDN'T ALWAYS SEEM THAT WAY THEN. WE SEE ED AND HIS WIFE, ANN, OCCASIONALLY; ANN, ANOTHER GREAT LADY.

HERB WARNKE FINALLY LOST CONTROL OF USI. BILL ROCKWOOD OF STROMBERG-CARLSON BECAME OUR PRESIDENT, AS PART OF DELIVERING US OVER TO STROMBERG, THUS CONSUMMATING THE PAYSON/TRASK STRATEGY.

STROMBERG-CARLSON, CHARLOTTESVILLE AND CHICAGO

USI HAD BEEN FINANCED WITH VENTURE CAPITAL THROUGH THE FIRM PAYSON AND TRASK. DORTHY PAYSON, OWNER OF THE METS BASEBALL TEAM, WAS A PARTNER IN THIS VENTURE. USI WAS A PROFITABLE COMPANY WHEN THEY MOVED FROM ORANGE, NEW JERSEY TO CHARLOTTESVILLE IN 1954 AND HAD CAUGHT GRAYBAR ELECTRIC'S FANCY BY DESIGNING A FREQUENCY-SELECTIVE RINGER FOR THE WESTERN ELECTRIC 500 TELEPHONE SET. THE MOVE INTO THE SWITCHING MARKET AND ITS DEMAND FOR ENGINEERS AND OTHER TECHNICAL TYPES PRESENTED A-HARD-TO-BARE FINANCIAL BURDEN AND SEVERAL LEAN YEARS. ONCE PAYTON AND TRASK GOT US LESS RED AND MORE BLACK, WE WERE SOLD TO STROMBERG-CARLSON JANUARY 1965, AN EVENT THAT CHANGED MY LIFE DRAMATICALLY, BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND BUSINESS-WISE.

AT HOME, WE HAD WORKED HARD TO REFURBISH THE BIG FARM HOUSE. THE BOYS, G.A., JOE, AND I, SKIDDED LARGE BOXWOODS FROM A BOXWOOD GARDEN MR. FRAY HAD, UP TO THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE, PUT UP A THREE BOARD FENCE, REALLY DRESSED THINGS UP! THEN WHAT!

AS I SAID, IN JANUARY 1965 USI WAS ACQUIRED BY STROMBERG-CARLSON. IN JUNE 1965 I WAS TRANSFERRED TO CHICAGO AS BRANCH MANAGER FOR NINE MID-WEST STATES.

WITH THIS TRANSFER WENT NOT ONLY THE FARM AT ADVANCE MILLS BUT ALSO MY MARRIAGE. THINGS, THOUGH SO PERFECT, WERE STRAINED BY ALMA'S "CHANGE OF LIFE." THOUGH SEEMINGLY INCIDENTAL, THIS CARRIED OVER TO 112 PEAR TREE LANE, A TOWNHOUSE IN AN ALL-EVERYTHING-SINGLE-RESIDENCE-TOWNHOUSE COMPLEX WE PURCHASED IN REGENT PARK, ACROSS FROM MT. PROSPECT HIGH SCHOOL IN ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, ILLINOIS.

I WAS TRAVELING AGAIN. ALMA WAS MISTRUSTING WITHOUT REASON TO BE. THIS WENT ON, AND SHE FINALLY HAD REASON.

ON A BUSINESS TRIP TO MINNEAPOLIS, I MET—BY PURE HAPPENSTANCE AT A MINNESOTA TELEPHONE CONVENTION—ONEY (LEONA BELL SCOTT), A WIDOW OF 11 YEARS WITH TWO CHILDREN, TIM AND BONNIE. I WAS INFATUATED WITH HER AND PURSUED HER WITH CALLS AND, ULTIMATELY, VISITS. I HAD NEVER, AND I MEAN NEVER, PHILANDERED AND MY INEXPERIENCE SHOWED. I FELT GUILTY.

WHEN I WAS GUILTY, I FINALLY ASKED JAHMS FOR A DIVORCE. SHE SAID "NO". I MOVED OUT TO A ROOMING HOUSE.

IN THE MEANTIME, BILL HAD GOTTEN OUT OF THE SERVICE AND GONE TO WORK, FIRST WITH USI, THEN STROMBERG VIA THEIR MERGER WITH USI. CLYDE SESSIONS NOW DECEASED AND BOBBY GRAVES TOLD INTERESTING STORIES ABOUT BILL'S ENDOCTRINATION AND LEARNING IN THE TELEPHONE SWITCHING BUSINESS. BOBBY SAYS BILL WAS THE FIRST ORIGINAL HIPPIE. BOTH CLYDE AND BOBBY "PERSEVERED GREATLY" WITH BILL.

ANYWAY, BILL LATER WENT WITH ITT THEN TO N.E.C. I ASKED HIM WHY HE QUIT ITT AND WENT WITH N.E.C.?

HIS ANSWER, "I WANTED TO PROVE I COULD DO SOMETHING WITHOUT YOU STANDING IN THE WINGS."

BILL MARRIED LINDA OLSEN DURING HIS SRROMBERG TENURE. OUT OF THIS UNION CAME CRISSY, WHOM I FIRST SAW AND HELD WHEN BILL WAS WORKING IN OHIO.

DURING ALMA'S AND MY ESTRANGEMENT, SUE AND BUD WERE MARRIED. DURING THESE FESTIVITIES ALMA CAME TO BILL ONE EVENING AROUND BEDTIME AND TEARFULLY TOLD BILL, "DADDY'S NOT COMING BACK!" BILL TOLD ME LATER IN THE EVENING. THIS HAS BEEN HARD TO LIVE WITH AND CONTINUES TO BE.

BILL LATER DIVORCED LINDA, AND AFTER A YEAR OR SO, MARRIED NANCY SELVAGGIO, DAUGHTER OF MARY AND SAM SELVAGGIO OF ARLINGTON HEIGHTS. (GOD WHAT A BAD EXAMPLE I SET). OUT OF THIS UNION CAME KATIE AND DAVID, WHO STILL LIVE WITH NANCY IN LEWISVILLE, TEXAS, AS BILL AND NANCY SPLIT IN 1986. I SHOULDN'T BE WRITING ALL THIS; MAKES ME LOOK BAD AND FEEL BAD AS A "WHAT NOT TO BE" FATHER.

BACK TO SUE AND BUD—BUD BREWER, SON OF MARGE BREWER, WHOM SUE MET WHILE AT SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY. BUD HAS A SON, KEVIN, FROM A PREVIOUS MARRIAGE WHO IS GROWN AND "CAREERING ALONG" OUT IN WASHINGTON STATE. SUE AND BUD'S UNION PRODUCED:

- 1 KELLI, NOW AN RN WORKING IN THE SOUTHERN ILLINOIS AREA FOR A HEALTH MAINTENANCE ORGANIZATION.
- 2 "THE GREAT SHAWN," WHO IS BEING DETAINED AT PRESENT IN ARIZONA. I RECENTLY WENT TO A REUNION OF MY GROUP LIKE SHAWN'S IN KANSAS. THE WARDEN EVEN REMEMBERED MY NUMBER! ANYWAY, SHAWN HAS WHAT IT TAKES AND I'M SURE HE WILL BECOME GREAT AGAIN.
- 3 ALLISON, WHO IS NOW IN COLLEGE, WORKING AND LIVING AT HOME. BOTH KELLI AND ALLISON WERE "LITTLE MISS HERRIN" ON THE WAY UP, BUT ALLISON STILL THINKS SHE'S A GREAT ENTERTAINER LIKE GRANDPA GEORGE. I PLAN TO SHOW HER UP AT OUR FORTHCOMING FAMILY REUNION AUGUST 4-6, 1995.
- 4 LAST, THERE'S THE "BABY," JULIANNE, WHO WILL BE WINDING UP HIGH SCHOOL NEXT SEMESTER AND THEN, ON TO JOHN LOGAN, AND THEN ON TO HARVARD OR EQUIVALENT.

G.A. IS ON HIS SECOND MARRIAGE. (I NEED A CYANIDE CAPSULE). FIRST TO A LADY FROM VIRGINIA BEACH, ROBERTA JEAN, WHOM HE MET WHILE AT VIRGINIA TECH AND MARRIED TO KEEP FROM BEING LONELY ON HIS TRANSFER WITH ITT FROM MILAN, TENNESSEE, WHERE HE WORKED A SHORT STINT OUT OF COLLEGE TO LAS VEGAS. THIS UNION CULMINATED IN NO CHILDREN, THANK GOODNESS, AS THEY LATER SPLIT.

G.A. THEN MARRIED SUZANNE REID OF LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA, OUT OF WHICH UNION CAME GEORGE A. BAKER, III, WHO WILL START COLLEGE IN DALLAS THIS FALL. GUS, AS WE CALL HIM, STILL LIVES WITH HIS DAD G.A., AS HE AND

SUZANNE HAVE ALSO DIVORCED. (I THINK I'LL BUY A CHEAP GUN AND END IT ALL. WHAT HAVE I DONE?)

BABY JOE HAD A "BARELY CAN TELL IT" MARRIAGE TO SOMEBODY WHICH LASTED A FEW MONTHS. JOE HAS CONSISTENTLY BEEN A HARD WORKING NEWSPAPER MAN AND HAS NOW FOUND HIS NICHE AS A PUBLISHER. I THINK HE HAS SWORN OFF MARRIAGE AND ME, TOO, AS HE HAS NEVER FORGIVEN ME LEAVING HIS MOTHER. I DON'T BLAME HIM.

GLIMPSES USI CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA YEARS

WHILE LIVING AT "WHITE GATE" NEAR CROZET; ON THE WAY HOME FROM CHURCH ONE SUNDAY, BILL, G.A., AND I WERE ARGUING ABOUT WHICH ONE OF "US THREE" WERE FASTEST. ALMA STOPPED THE CAR JUST INSIDE THE "WHITE GATE" ENTRANCE AND WE RACED UP THE LANE TO THE HOUSE. AS I RECALL, I WON. BUT MAYBE BILL DID. G.A. ALSO RAN.

LATER AT CHAPEL HILL, I RACED G.A. AND BEAT HIM. THIS WAS WHEN HE WAS A STAR ATHLETE AT ALBEMARLE HIGH. JOE REALLY RAZZED G.A. G.A. COMPLAINED HE HAD A SORE LEG OR A POOR START OR SOMETHING. I'M SURE IT WAS A FLUKE THAT I WON AT AGE 44.

THE FIRST ITALIAN PIZZA PLACE HAD JUST OPENED IN CHARLOTTESVILLE AND THELMA AND DANNY, WHILE VISITING, INSISTED WE TRY IT. SO WE DID. AND SENA AND CATHY (THELMA'S KIDS) ATE LIKE THEY WERE STARVED. ALMA'S BILL OF FARE OF HAM, ROAST BEEF, AND CHICKEN OBVIOUSLY DIDN'T SATISFY THESE ITALIANS.

JOE'S FACE ALMOST RUPTURED WHEN ALMA PULLED OFF A SLIC OF PIZZA WITH THE CHEESE STRINGING DOWN AND OFFERED IT TO HIM. IT WAS TOUGH ON A GREEN BEANS, ROAST BEEF, AND POTATOES MAN.

ALMA AND I, ALONG WITH JIM AND SALLEY GARTH AND OTHERS, WERE ACTIVE IN THE ALBEMARLE HIGH SCHOOL BOOSTERS CLUB, SUPPORTING THE FOOTBALL TEAM. BOTH G.A. AND DAVID GARTH WERE ON THE TEAM. IN AN EFFORT TO RAISE MONEY, WE INVITED TEX RITTER, A COWBOY SINGER, HOT OFF HIS BACKGROUND RENDITION OF THE TITLE SONG IN THE MOVIE "HIGH NOON" STARRING GARY COOPER. WE TOOK A LOT OF RIBBING FOR THIS; TEX PACKED THEM OUT!

WE ALL MET AT MOUNTAIN LAKE TO CELEBRATE G.A.'S GRADUATION FROM V.P.I. IN JUNE 1970. ALMA AND I WERE DIVORCED THEN, BILL AND LINDA, SUE AND BUD, JOE AND I, AND I THINK CRISSY. I WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER BILL, LINDA, AND I IN THE HOTEL BASEMENT REC ROOM SINGING, "I'LL NEVER FALL IN LOVE AGAIN." YOU KNOW, WHAT DO YOU GET WHEN YOU KISS A GIRL? YOU GET ENOUGH GERMS TO CAUSE PNEUMONIA, ETC., ETC.

REMEMBERING BARBARA ANN AND NANCY AND KK VISITING, ESPECIALLY AT ADVANCE MILLS. NANCY AND KK WERE REAL BUBBLY, HAPPINESS SPREADERS. THEY COULD "OUTGUSH" AUNT LYDIA. "UNCLE" DON BARNES COMING TO ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, GETTING WITH ADMIRAL AND REVIVING HIS SELF ESTEEM AND TELLING HIM OF ALMA'S AND MY IMPENDING SPLIT. THIS REARVIEW MIRROR IS KILLING ME.

ITT MILAN, TENNESSEE AND BRADFORD FARM, 1967-1974

I FINALLY QUIT MY JOB WITH STROMBERG-CARLSON AND WENT, IN JANUARY 1967, WITH ITT TELECOM IN MILAN, TENNESSEE AS DIVISION DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND SALES. STILL HAUNTED BY MY GUILT, I FLEW BACK TO O'HARA AIRPORT, CHICAGO AND MET JAHMS IN THE PARKING LOT. WE SAT AND TALKED. I ASKED TO RETURN.

HER ANSWER, "YOU'LL HAVE TO START ALL OVER AGAIN; YOU'LL HAVE TO WINE ME AND DINE ME, AND DO ALL THE NICE THINGS A COURTSHIP REQUIRES."

I LOOKED HER RIGHT IN THE EYES WHEN SHE SAID THAT, AND TO ME IT MEANT, "I'LL NEVER LET YOU FORGET," i.e., "I'LL REALLY NEVER FORGIVE YOU." SOMETIME AFTER THAT, IN 1968, WE DIVORCED.

SOON AFTER THAT I FLEW TO ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA, ONEY'S HOME, RENTED A U-HAUL AND MOVED ONEY TO JACKSON, TENNESSEE, 97 MONTCLAIR DRIVE, A NICE LITTLE SUBURBAN SETTING. WE WERE UNMARRIED. THIS ADDED TO MY EXISTING GUILT (LEAVING ALMA), WHICH MADE OUR RELATIONSHIP UNWORKABLE AT THAT TIME. I COMMUTED DAILY, JACKSON TO MILAN.

LIFE WITH ITT WAS INTERESTING; FORMED MANY STRONG BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS AND PERSONAL FRIENDS. ANOTHER BOOK COULD BE WRITTEN JUST ON THIS SUBJECT. SUE AND CHILDREN AND I AND ONEY EXCHANGED VISITS FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER DURING THIS 1967-1973 PERIOD. MY VISITS TO SUE'S HOUSE WERE ALWAYS SHORT. THEY WERE THE BEST. THE FAMILY ALL TOGETHER, KIDS IN SCHOOL, THE GREAT SHAWN AND HIS PAPER ROUTE.

MANY OF MY VISITS WERE ALONE SO SUE AND I COULD TALK MORE FREELY OF LIFE AT BUCHANAN, ADVANCE MILLS, AND THE MOVE TO CHICAGO (ARLINGTON HEIGHTS). MANY TIMES ALMA WOULD BE THERE AS SHE STAYED WITH SUE DURING A CONVALESCENCE PERIOD BEFORE MOVING OVER TO RETIREMENT CENTER.

AT THIS POINT, ALMA HAD A CONGENITAL HEART VALVE DEFECT CORRECTED AND LATER REPLACED, HAD BREAST CANCER, A STROKE, AND WAS FOUND TO HAVE DIABETES. AT ONE POINT, G.A. AND I DROVE FROM HARRISONBURG, VA TO MORGANTOWN, WVA TO VISIT ALMA DURING ONE OF HER STAYS AT THE UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER. I TALKED TO THE DOCTOR POST-OP. HIS COMMENT TO BARBARA ANN (ALMA'S SISTER) AND ME WAS, "I HAVE NEVER SEEN A WOMAN WITH SO MANY THINGS WRONG WITH HER. JUST TAKE HER BACK TO WHERE SHE WANTS TO BE, SO SHE CAN ENJOY WHATEVER IS LEFT."

LIFE WITH ONEY

A FEW MONTHS OF THIS AND ONEY WAS IN TEARS. SO ANOTHER U-HAUL AND I MOVED HER BACK TO ST. PAUL FROM JACKSON, TENNESSEE. I WENT ON MY BUSINESS ITINERARY. HERE I WAS, A GUY WHO HAD "MESSED UP" TWO WOMEN'S LIVES, ESPECIALLY ALMA'S, MOTHER OF MY CHILDREN AND WIFE OF ALMOST 28 YEARS, AND ONEY'S, TO SAY NOTHING OF THE CHILDREN WHO WERE STILL AT HOME, JOE AND SUE.

ONE FRIDAY I'M AT THE MINNEAPOLIS AIRPORT AND CALL ONEY TO MAKE THE FINAL BREAK. HER WORDS, "YOU CAN'T LEAVE ME NOW," RESULTED IN THE NEXT MORNING DRIVING TO MILLBANK, SOUTH DAKOTA, WHERE WE WERE MARRIED BY A JUSTICE OF THE PEACE, AND THEN I U-HAULED HER BACK TO TENNESSEE. THUS IN TRUE EARNST BEGINS THE SAGA OF GEORGE AND ONEY WITH ITT AND OTHER EXPERIENCES INCLUDING THE FARM (YES, AGAIN), FIRST AT CADES, TENNESSEE, 56 ACRES, AND THEN TO BRADFORD, 216 ACRES.

WE LIVED AT FIRST ON 56 ACRES OUTSIDE OF MILAN AT CADES, TENNESSEE. THE POST OFFICE WAS IN A COUNTRY STORE OWNED BY A REAL CHARACTER, JUNE POWELL. THE STORE/POST OFFICE WAS THE EPITOME OF DISORDER; YOU WONDERED, "WILL THIS EVER GET THERE?" EVERYTIME YOU MAILED SOMETHING. THE STORE INVENTORY HADN'T BEEN TAKEN "SINCE MOBY DICK WAS A MINNER." SOME CEREAL BOXES HAD BEEN ON THE SHELF SO LONG THAT ESTHER WILLIAMS DOLLS IN THEM HAD WRINKLES. JUNE WAS A BIG HELP AND A LOT OF LAUGHS IN GETTING STARTED IN FARMING IN TENNESSEE.

JUNE LOANED ME HIS CATTLE TRAILER ONE DAY TO MOVE SOME COWS. I HAD FOUR FLAT TIRES. FOUR OUT OF SIX AIN'T BAD! I WAS TEMPORARILY STRANDED ON THE HIGHWAY WITH FIVE 1,000-POUND COWS ON BOARD, AND HAD TO SWEAT MY WAY OUT OF THESE SITUATIONS. HE WAS ALWAYS HELPFUL.

ON ELECTION DAY, WE VOTED AT JUNE'S STORE. ONE ELECTION DAY, NOT KNOWING, I WALKED INTO THE STORE ASKING, "WHERE DOES A FELLOW VOTE AROUND HERE?"

JUNE SAID, "WELL, I DON'T KNOW," WITH A TWINKLE IN HIS EYE.

I SAID, "WELL, WHERE DOES A DISPLACED VIRGINIA BYRD DEMOCRAT VOTE HERE?"

JUNE IMMEDIATELY SAID, "COME RIGHT ON BACK. WE'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU BACK HERE!"

IT WASN'T A DISGRACE TO BE A DEMOCRAT IN TENNESSEE!

ONEY AND I STAYED AT CADES LONG ENOUGH TO DRILL A NEW WELL AND BUILD A BIG CATTLE BARN. ALONG ABOUT YEAR-END 1969 WE BOUGHT 91 ACRES AT BRADFORD AND MOVED OUR 20-COW HERD OF CHAROLAIS AND SANTA GERTRUDIS CATTLE TO THE BRADFORD 91 ACRES.

IN THE MEANTIME WE STARTED BUILDING A NEW HOME ON THE BRADFORD FARM. L.B. HICKMAN BUILT IT (ANOTHER CHARACTER—TENNESSEE'S FULL OF THEM!) WE MOVED AND, IN THE PROCESS OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS, ACQUIRED ANOTHER 124 ACRES AND BUILT THE COW HERD, MOSTLY CHAROLAIS, TO 100 MOTHER COWS. HAD HELP FROM A LOT OF BIG BULLS LIKE MY FIRST HILARIO ("BIG CALF") I CALLED HIM AND A ONE-TESTICLE BULL NAMED RANGER. HE DID JUST AS WELL WITH THE "LONE ONE" AS OTHERS DID WITH TWO.

I DID ALL MY OWN FARM WORK AND JUST HIRED KIDS FOR HAYING. ONEY REALLY PITCHED IN AND BEGAN TO LIKE FARM LIVING AFTER HER RELUCTANT CONVERSION FROM A ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA "CITY GIRL." SHE DEVELOPED QUITE A KNACK WITH "COW HANDELING." EVEN THE VETERINARIANS MARVELED.

SHE WAS GREGARIOUS AND GREAT WITH KIDS; CHILDREN LOVED HER. SON BILL'S DAVID SAID RECENTLY, "LET'S STOP BY AND SEE ONEY. I LIKE HER!"

MORE BULL! ONE LAST BULL, WE HAD "VIKING I," A PUREBRED SOLID RED MAINE ANJOU; HE HAD NEVER KNOWN NATURAL SERVICE HAVING AT TEN MONTHS OF AGE GONE TO THE ABS BREEDING CENTER AT DEFOREST, WISCONSIN, FROM WHICH I LEASED HIM FOR ONE YEAR AT \$1,100. HE WAS TRULY A BEAUTIFUL, DOCILE, NOBLE ANIMAL THAT PEOPLE CAME FROM EVERYWHERE TO SEE.

WHEN HE FIRST ARRIVED, A COW WAS IN HEAT, NEEDING HIS SERVICE. HE IGNORED HER—HE DIDN'T KNOW THAT ROUTINE. HIS SEX LIFE UP TO THAT POINT HAD BEEN A TECHNICIAN WITH AN ARTIFICIAL VAGINA (AV). HE SAW ME COMING ACROSS THE FIELD WITH A BUCKET, THINKING I WAS A TECHNICIAN. I BANGED HIM UPSIDE THE HEAD WITH THE BUCKET, TURNING HIM AND TELLING HIM, "HER!" AND, POINTING TO THE COW IN HEAT, "NOT ME!"

HE LATCHED ON AND HIS INEXPERIENCE NEVER SHOWED AGAIN. HE HAD A 90% CONCEPTION RATE. I BRED ALL MY COWS TO HIM, THEN SOLD THE WHOLE HERD TO A MAN IN PENNSYLVANIA AND VIKING WAS RETURNED TO ABS IN WISCONSIN.

MEANWHILE, LIFE WITH ITT WAS HECTIC AT FIRST WITH MY MARITAL SITUATION AND THE TOTALLY DIFFERENT BUSINESS ATMOSPHERE WHERE WE SEEMED TO PLAN FOR THE SAKE OF PLANNING. ANYWAY, THIS ALL STRAIGHTENED ITSELF OUT AND I "ENDED UP" BEING A HERO OF SORTS AS ITT MILAN SALES ROSE FROM \$10 MILLION TO \$50 MILLION DURING MY SEVEN YEAR TENURE. I WAS NUMBER TWO OR THREE MAN IN THE OPERATION, DEPENDING ON WHO IS TALKING OR LISTENING.

I HAD GREAT GENERAL MANAGERS TO WORK FOR: COREY WIMMERS, A DUTCHMAN WITH WIDE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE WITH ITT. "WE'VE GOT TO MAKE A PWOFFIT!" (PROFIT) HE WOULD SAY; THAT'S THEY WAY THE WORD SOUNDED OUT OF HIS DUTCH MOUTH.

COREY WAS REPLACED BY GEORGE THIERGARTNER, THE HARDEST-WORKING BOSS I EVER HAD, ALTHOUGH WE DIDN'T EXACTLY "FALL IN LOVE" INITIALLY, WITH HIS "MAYBE I NEED TO GET ME A NEW MARKETING DIRECTOR."

AND MY REPLY, "GOOD LUCK, I'LL HELP YOU FIND ONE!"

I ALMOST TOOK A JOB WITH NORTH ELECTRIC AT THIS POINT, FLEW TO GALION, OHIO FOR INTERVIEW, AND OFFER.

IN THE MEANTIME, BOTH GEORGE T. AND NEW YORK MANAGEMENT SAW THAT I KNEW MY BUSINESS AND THE DECREE CAME DOWN FROM HAROLD GENEEN, PRESIDENT OF ALL ITT, "LET BAKER DO WHAT HE FEELS HAS TO BE DONE TO SWELL SALES FOR MILAN." I WAS VINDICATED!

GEORGE T. WAS REPLACED BY DICK DERTINGER, A GREAT GENERAL MANAGER WHO ENCOURAGED EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION AT EVERY LEVEL, AND IT PAID OFF. DICK LEFT IN 1973 TO GO TO LYNCH COMMUNICATIONS IN RENO, NEVADA, WITH SALES VOLUME AT AN ALL TIME HIGH!

ED KENT, A TECHNICAL TYPE FROM ITT NEW YORK STATE, BECAME OUR NEW GENERAL MANAGER. A BRILLIANT FELLOW, HE WAS PLACED IN AN UNTENABLE POSITION WITH THE CORPORATE LACK OF COMMITMENT TO THE LONG TERM PROFIT REALITIES OF THE TELEPHONE SWITCHING BUSINESS. ITT WAS/IS A SHORT TERM PROFIT OBJECTIVE COMPANY.

I HAD GREAT WORKERS AND CO-WORKERS AT ITT MILAN. IN ADDITION TO GENERAL MANAGERS ALREADY MENTIONED THERE WAS: CLYDE SESSIONS, OUR ACCOUNT MANAGER FOR CENTEL LAS VEGAS. HE DIED ABOUT ONE YEAR AGO. BOBBY GRAVES AND I FLEW DOWN TO SOUTH CAROLINA AND I DID THE EULOGY FOR HIM.

KEN HUEY—LEFT ITT AND IS NOW A PROSPEROUS ENTREPRENEUR IN THE "USED MARKET" SAME AS BOBBY GRAVES. LARRY BATCHEL, HARRY LINDGREN, BUZZ BAUDO, BILL TIDWELL WITH WHOM I STILL MAINTAIN CONTACT, JOHN MYERS, RAY "KOHOUTEK" (LIKE THE COMET), TOM WILLIAMS, DAVE WEATHERFORD, BOB MEINERT, HERB MCCORMACK (DECEASED), JACK SHRINER, AND JOE KOWALESKI, "THE MAD POLLOCK."

A FELLOW GOES IN A CHICAGO BAR, SAYS TO THE BARTENDER, "WANT TO HEAR A GOOD POLISH JOKE?"

BARTENDER SAYS, "LOOK, IF I WERE YOU, I WOULDN'T TELL THAT JOKE IN HERE."

"WHY?" SAYS THE FELLOW.

BARTENDER: "SEE THAT GUY AT THE END OF THE BAR? HE'S POLISH. SEE THAT GUY OVER BY THE JUKE BOX? HE'S POLISH. NOT ONLY THAT, I'M POLISH."

FELLOW: "THAT'S OKAY. I'LL TELL IT SLOW."

HAD TO TIE THAT IN WITH JOE K. HE AND ONEY HAD A LOT OF EXCHANGE. SHE WAS POLISH.

I WAS STAR WITNESS FOR ITT IN OUR SUIT—ITT vs GT&E. WE (ITT) CONTENDED THAT GTE TACTICS FORECLOSED THE MARKET TO US. MY NAME WAS ON MANY DOCUMENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE WITH GTE, SO I WAS DEPOSED AND THEN HAD TO GO TO HAWAII AS A WITNESS. IT WAS ON THIS TRIP THAT I WROTE "ODE TO JAHMS."

I APPARENTLY DID WELL AS A WITNESS; TED BROPHY, THEIR (GTE) SENIOR LEGAL COUNSEL AT THE TRIAL, RAN INTO ME IN THE HOTEL ELEVATOR AND ASKED IF I WAS LEAVING TO GO HOME. I SAID "YES." HE SAID, "GOOD!" HE LATER MADE PRESIDENT OF GTE AND IS NOW CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD.

LIFE WITH ONEY WAS HAPPY AND SAD BECAUSE WE (ESPECIALLY ME) WERE TAINTED WITH THE GUILT OF MY LEAVING ALMA AND ONEY'S ACCEPTING, EVEN ENCOURAGING, ME. WE HAD MANY GOOD TIMES BUT GRIEF ONE WAY OR ANOTHER FINALLY CAME OUT AND I LEFT ONEY SOMETIME IN 1985 AFTER WE HAD FORTHEDED TO: AITC GULFPORT, MISSISSIPPI (THIS COMPANY WAS BANKRUPT WHEN I GOT THERE AFTER LEAVING ITT), TO PULSECOM AT FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA TO WESCOM AT OAKBROOK, ILLINOIS, TO ITEC IN HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA TO XY RESOURCES IN ARDMORE, OKLAHOMA.

I LEFT ITT AUGUST 1973 FOR AITC, A BANKRUPT INTERCONNECT COMPANY. WE LIVED IN GULFPORT, MISS., A SHORT TIME, THEN MOVED TO FALLS CHURCH, VA WHERE I WAS DIRECTOR OF MARKETING FOR PULSECOM; ONEY HAD A JOB IN THE CAFETERIA HERE WITH THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

I LEFT FALLS CHURCH YEAR END 1977, (WE KEPT THE BRADFORD FARM IN ALL THIS PROCESS) AND TOOK A JOB WITH WESCOM AT OAKBROOK, ILLINOIS. THE WESCOM JOB HAD BEEN PROMISED TO ME ORIGINALLY BUT THEY WEREN'T READY WHEN I WENT TO PULSECOM.

THINGS WERE BECOMING MORE AND MORE DIFFICULT FOR ONEY AND ME, THIS PLUS THE STRESS OF BRINGING A NEW PRODUCT ONLINE AT WESCOM. WHILE WALKING ONE MORNING-MARCH 23, 1978-I HAD MY FIRST HEART ATTACK; WAS IN THE HOSPITAL AT HINSDALE, ILLINOIS FOR 15 DAYS, TOOK DISABILITY FROM WESCOM AND BACK DOWN TO BRADFORD AGAIN AS A FULL-TIME CATTLE FARMER, ALTHOUGH SOMEWHAT SUBDUED! THIS COMPOUNDED BY THE LOOMING MARITAL STRAIN WITH ONEY.

JUST PRIOR TO THIS HEART ATTACK, I HAD PURCHASED AN 84-ACRE TRACT KNOWN AS "AIRPORT PLACE" AND HAD A SUBSTANTIAL MORTGAGE. G.A., ON VISITING ME IN THE HOSPITAL AT HINSDALE, SAID, ALMOST AS SOON AS HE ARRIVED, "DAD, I KNOW YOU HAVE THIS MORTGAGE ON THE 84 ACRES. I'LL TAKE THAT OFF YOUR HANDS, IF YOU WANT ME TO." THE UPSHOT, HE BOUGHT THE PLACE AND LATER SOLD IT AT AUCTION AT A LOSS.

TIM SCOTT, (ONEY'S SON), MY STEPSON, SAID TO ME, "GEORGE, THAT WAS GREAT, G.A. TAKING THAT OFF YOUR HANDS. YOU DIDN'T NEED THAT. THAT'S A TRUE SON FOR YOU." I'M NOT SURE IF THEY EVER MET. OH, YES THEY DID.

SEPTEMBER 21, 1981 I AWOKE WITH THE SAME CHEST TIGHTNESS I HAD EXPERIENCED WITH MY FIRST HEART ATTACK. I TOLD ONEY, "HERE I GO AGAIN!" SHE CALLED MY FRIEND, AMBULANCE DRIVER BOB REYNOLDS. HE PICKED ME UP. THE OXYGEN SYSTEM IN THE AMBULANCE WASN'T WORKING. A FEW MILES FURTHER, THE AMBULANCE DEVELOPED TROUBLE. WE HAD TO STOP IN HUMBOLDT AND TRANSFER ME TO ANOTHER AMBULANCE. I FINALLY MADE IT TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM AT GENERAL HOSPITAL, JACKSON, TENNESSEE.

RIGHT AWAY THEY GAVE ME A VASODILATOR DRUG TO DILATE MY ARTERIES. WITHIN A FEW SECONDS I STARTED TO FADE, SAYING TO MY ATTENDANT, I'M LEAVING HERE, GOODBYE!"

ONE NURSE SCREAMED TO A DOCTOR IN ANOTHER ROOM, "YOU'D BETTER GET IN HERE!"

THE DOCTOR TOLD ME LATER THEY HAD OVER DILATED MY ARTERIES. I SAID, "YOU MEAN, YOU GOT THE PIPES SO BIG THE PUMP (HEART) WOULDN'T FILL IT UP?"

"THAT'S THE BEST DESCRIPTION OF THAT I EVER HEARD!" SAID THE DOCTOR. MY STAY THIS TIME WAS ANOTHER TWO WEEKS. WHILE THERE I WAS FEELING LOW AND MY FRIEND HUGH ALLEN CALLED ME. I SAID, "HUGH, IS ALL THERE IS? LUTHERAN ORPHANAGE, WESTERN ELECTRIC, U.S. INSTRUMENT, AND STROMBERG-CARLSON?"

HUGH SAID, "DAMN, YOU DIDN'T EVEN MENTION ITT!"

ITT WAS A GREAT COMPANY; MY ONLY REGRET WAS I HAD NOT GONE WITH THEM TEN YEARS EARLIER.

CAME MY RELEASE DAY FROM THE HOSPITAL, DR. HUMPHREY AND A HEART SURGEON, GERRY GOOCH, CAME TO MY ROOM SAYING, "MR. BAKER, THIS IS YOUR SECOND HEART ATTACK. WE'RE AFRAID IF YOU HAVE ANOTHER, YOU'LL BE IN SERIOUS TROUBLE. BETTER LET US MAKE YOU A RESERVATION AT BAPTIST HOSPITAL, MEMPHIS!"

I SAID, "DAMN, SOUNDS LIKE A RESERVATION AT THE RAMADA OR THE HOLIDAY INN!"

NOVEMBER 1, 1982, I HAD AN OPEN HEART SURGERY AT BAPTIST HOSPITAL, MEMPHIS (INCIDENTALLY, THE WORLD'S LARGEST COMMERCIAL HOSPITAL). THEY'LL TREAT YOU FOR THINGS YOU'VE ALREADY DIED FROM????

SEVEN DAYS LATER, I WAS OUT AND ON MY WAY TO BRADFORD; STOPPED IN JACKSON TO HAVE A PIZZA AND BEER TO CELEBRATE MY SURVIVAL. ONEY HAD CLOSELY ATTENDED ME THROUGH ALL THIS, BUT ONCE BACK HOME THINGS "TIGHTENED UP" AGAIN. DOCTOR TOLD HER SHE COULD HELP ME IF SHE WOULD QUIT SMOKING; SHE DIDN'T, UNTIL A YEAR OR SO LATER, WHEN SHE BEGAN TO HAVE THE SAME SYMPTOMS I HAD, THEN SHE GAVE IT UP. FUNNY, I HAD ALWAYS LIVED WITH SMOKERS, THOUGH I NEVER DID. WE NEVER KNEW THEN THE DANGERS OF "SECOND HAND SMOKE."

ONCE WHILE ON "DISABILITY LEAVE" ONEY AND I WENT TO MISSOURI AND BOUGHT A LOAD OF "COMING FIRST CALF" CROSSBRED ANGUS/HEREFORD "AND OTHER" HEIFERS. WHEN THE TRUCK DELIVERED THEM IN ZERO AND BELOW MARCH WEATHER, THIS ONE HEIFER WAS DOWN, TRYING TO CALVE. WE DRUG HER OUT, AND AS WE PUSHED HER OFF THE TRUCK, HER CALF JUST "FELL OUT OF HER." I QUICKLY DRIED HIM OFF AND ISOLATED HIM FROM HIS MAMA, MAKING SURE HE STARTED NURSING. WE CALLED HIM "HARD TIMES," BUT HE GREW OUT WELL AND BROUGHT A RESPECTABLE PRICE SOME EIGHT MONTHS HENCE.

SHE (ONEY) ENDED UP WITH THE FARM AT BRADFORD, WHICH HAD BEEN REDUCED TO 31 ACRES AFTER MY HEART ATTACK AND OPEN HEART SURGERY. WE'RE STILL ON KISSING TERMS. SHE TOLD ME TO KISS HER A.....

GLIMPSES

ON MOVING FROM OAKBROOK, CHICAGO, (AFTER MY FIRST HEART ATTACK), BACK DOWN TO THE FARM AT BRADFORD, WITH ME DRIVING THE U-HAUL AND ONEY THE CAR, WE GOT AS FAR AS MARION, ILLINOIS, RIGHT DOWN THE ROAD FROM HERRIN, SUE'S HOME, BY THE END OF THE OUR FIRST DAY.

I GOT UP EARLY THE NEXT MORNING AND TOLD ONEY I WAS GOING OVER TO SEE SUE, AND CALLED SUE TO TELL HER I WAS COMING. ALMA WAS STAYING WITH SUE AT THE TIME, POST-STROKE, AND OF COURSE SUE TOLD ALMA I WAS ON THE WAY.

WHEN I PULLED UP IN THE DRIVEWAY, WE MET AND EMBRACED AND I SAID, "JAHMS, I'M BROKE DOWN NOW, TOO." SUE AND BUD WATCHED US THROUGH THE LIVING ROOM WINDOW—A TENDER MOMENT!

MUCH MORE COULD BE WRITTEN ABOUT MY LIFE WITH ONEY, BUT NO PURPOSE WOULD BE SERVED EXCEPT TO FURTHER CLOUD MY REAR VIEW MIRROR. HER TWO KIDS NEVER DID MEET ALL OF MY FOUR.

AFTER ONEY

I BECAME A "SWINGING SINGLE" AGAIN. WHILE MANAGING THE OLD STROMBERG-CARLSON PLANT IN ARDMORE, OKLAHOMA, MET DOLLY DICKINSON, AN R.N., DIVORCED FROM A DOCTOR WITH FOUR GROWN, AWAY FROM HOME CHILDREN.

WE HAD A LOT OF FUN, BUT SHE WAS VERY UNTRUSTWORTHY DUE TO HER CRAZY LIFE WITH THE DOCTOR. SHE WAS STILL PLAYING THE FIELD WITH A HAREM SHE HAD ACQUIRED DURING HER PHILANDERING YEARS WHILE MARRIED.

"I NEEDED TO BELONG TO SOMEONE" AFTER HAVING BEEN MARRIED OVER 47 YEARS, BUT IT WAS NOT DOLLY. SHE WAS "MY VEHICLE" OUT OF A BADLY ERODING MARRIAGE TO ONEY.

WE HAD A LOT OF GOOD AND BAD TIMES—TRIPS TO VEGAS, RENO, A CARIBBEAN CRUISE, DRIVING HER BIG WHITE LINCOLN. SHE HAD \$30,000 ANNUAL ALIMONY PAYMENT FROM THE DOCTOR, PLUS SHE WORKED. SHE DIDN'T SPEND IT ON ME OR US. I DID THAT SPENDING. SHE SPENT IT ON HER KIDS, WHOM SHE EDUCATED AND CLOTHED.

I MUST TELL THIS ONE. I WAS ALWAYS A FANATIC THAT "MY WOMAN'S" TEETH BE AS PRETTY AS ALMA'S HAD BEEN, FREAKISHLY UNIFORM, WHITE, AND BEAUTIFUL. ONEY HAD PRETTY TEETH, ALSO. DOLLY HAD THE MOST DECEPTIVE FALSE TEETH I HAD EVER SEEN.

MY FRIEND, HUGH ALLEN, VISITED ME IN ARDMORE AND, WITH DOLLY, WE HAD DINNER. AT OUR FIRST RESTROOM BREAK HE WHIRLED ON ME WITH, "BAKER, THE NUT YOU ARE ABOUT PRETTY TEETH, AND THIS GAL HAS FALSE TEETH!"

I SAID, "YES, I FINALLY FIGURED IT OUT."

MANY TIMES PRIOR TO THIS, HUGH AND I HAD DISCUSSED DOLLY'S AND MY ESCAPADES. HIS SUMMARY COMMENT, "I'M GLAD YOU MET SOMEONE LIKE HER BEFORE YOU DIED!"

WHILE IN ARDMORE, MET WALTER HOGUE, A WIDOWER, AND HE WAS DATING A LADY NAMED BILLIE, A WIDOW. WE ALL BECAME GOOD FRIENDS AND HAD MANY GOOD TIMES. WALTER ALWAYS SAID I WAS "TOO ELEGANT FOR DOLLY."

I STILL CONTACT WALTER OCCASIONALLY. WE HAD SHARED AN APARTMENT DURING AN INTERIM BEFORE HIS MARRIAGE TO BILLIE; HE WAS AN UNPREDICTABLE FUN GUY RETIRED FROM MOBIL OIL CORPORATION.

I RECEIVED WORD RECENTLY THAT DOLLY HAD PASSED AWAY. SHE HAD INTESTINAL CANCER. FUNNY, DURING OUR RELATIONSHIP, SHE CHRONICALLY COMPLAINED OF A PAIN IN HER SIDE. SHE WAS 63.

DIVERSIFIED COMMUNICATION SERVICES
WAYNESBORO, VA, 1989-1994

THE ARDMORE FACILITY WAS SOLD AND, JUST PRIOR TO THAT, MY OLD BUDDY AND FORMER CO-WORKER (ACTUALLY, I WAS HIS BOSS) BOBBY GRAVES CALLED ME. WE HAD JOKED ABOUT THIS OVER THE YEARS, BAKER, WHEN ARE YOU COMING BACK HERE TO WAYNESBORO TO HELP ME?

TO MAKE THIS STORY SHORTER, I STARTED TO WORK FOR HIM IN OCTOBER, 1987.

SO HERE I AM, BACK TO MY ROOTS, BACK TO WHERE I CAME FROM, STARTING OVER AGAIN AT AGE 69 WITH DCS WAYNESBORO, VIRGINIA. DCS= DIVERSIFIED COMMUNICATION SERVICES.

THIS WAS A FUN JOB; NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR "PEOPLE" FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, JUST RESPONSIBLE FOR SELLING PRODUCT. HE CALLED ME HIS SALES MANAGER.

BOBBY'S STORY IS A REAL "HORATIO ALGER BOOT-STRIPPING SAGA," TELLING HOW HARD WORK AND PERSEVERANCE PAYS OFF. WE HAD SOME 15-16 PEOPLE TOTAL; SELLING, SHIPPING, AND INSTALLING TELEPHONE SWITCHING EQUIPMENT TO PRIMARILY THE INDEPENDENT TELEPHONE COMPANY MARKET (NON-BELL) AND SOME TO BELL COMPANIES.

WHEN I STARTED WITH HIM IN OCTOBER 1987 HIS COMPANY WAS DOING SLIGHTLY OVER ONE MILLION ANNUALLY; WHEN I LEFT YEAR-END 1993 TOTAL SALES WERE SLIGHTLY OVER SEVEN MILLION. WE BOTH FELT GOOD ABOUT THAT. I WAS SOMEWHAT OF A "FATHER FIGURE" TO HIM AND IT SHOWED.

SO HERE I AM IN WAYNESBORO IN AN APARTMENT. BOBBY MOVED ALL MY JUNK FROM ARDMORE AND HAD IT IN MY PRE-ARRANGED APARTMENT WHEN I GOT THERE. BACK ON LONELY STREET AGAIN, I JOINED A SINGLES CLUB THAT MET WEEKLY AT OLD ENGLISH INN, CHARLOTTESVILLE. THEN LATER AT DAYS INN I MET SOME OTHER FINE FRIENDS.

I MET A LOT OF DISPLACED, LONELY, NICE PEOPLE IN THE SINGLES GROUP. I DATED SOME SIX DIFFERENT ONES, SOME YOUNG ENOUGH TO BE MY CHILDREN, PRIMARILY BECAUSE I WAS THE ONLY ONE IN THE GROUP WHO COULD DANCE, AND I DIDN'T MIND SPENDING THE MONEY TO HAVE A GOOD TIME. I WAS BY FAR THE OLDEST MAN IN THE GROUP. I CALLED ALL THE MEN "DAD" SO THEY WOULDN'T CALL ME THAT.

THE LIVING AND WORKING IN WAYNESBORO AND SOCIALIZING IN "C'VILLE," WEDNESDAYS AND WEEKENDS GOT TO BE "KINDA ROUGH" ON THE OLD GUY.

LEAH

JANUARY 1988 SUPERBOWL SUNDAY OPENED THE DOOR TO "THE GOLDEN YEARS."

THE SINGLES GROUP WAS INVITED TO THE HOME OF ONE OF ITS MEMBERS FOR THE PARTY. I HAD A DATE WITH DEANNA BOWMAN, WHOM G.A. AND GUS WILL REMEMBER FROM OUR DINNER AT HER HOUSE.

I NOTICED THIS STUNNING CREATURE, UNATTACHED, "PRISSING AROUND," WITH WHOM I EXCHANGED SMALL TALK INITIALLY AND LARGE TALK ULTIMATELY IN TELLING HER "I WANTED TO BELONG TO SOMEONE!"

I WAS SO STRUCK BY HER (JOKE) I SAID TO HER, "ARS MITATIS LONGA VITA MUTANDIS BREVIS," WHICH MEANS, "AS SURE AS THE VINE TWINES ROUND THE STUMP, YOU ARE MY DARLING SUGAR LUMP."

THIS WAS SUNDAY. I COULDN'T WAIT TILL MONDAY MORNING TO CALL, BUT I DID ANYWAY. WE MET THAT WEEK FOR DINNER; BUT THE FOLLOWING WEEKEND I HAD ALREADY MADE A DATE WITH DEANNA, WHICH I HAD TO KEEP AS PART OF "PHASING HER OUT TO GET LEAH IN."

IT TOOK A LITTLE FIBBING TO GET ALL THIS DONE, WHICH LEAH NEVER LET ME FORGET. MY EXPLANATION, "SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO LIE TO PROTECT THE TRUTH." THE TRUTH WAS; I THOUGHT LEAH WAS SOMETHING SPECIAL, WORTHY OF MY INTENSE PURSUIT.

FOR MY SWAN SONG TO THE SINGLES I HAD DATED, I HELD A "VALENTINE'S DINNER" AT THE FOX AND HOUNDS RESTAURANT IN WAYNESBORO. WHEN THEY WERE ALL SEATED, I HAD RESTAURANT MANAGEMENT PLAY A TAPE OF WILLIE NELSON AND JULIO IGLESIAS SINGING, "OF ALL THE GIRLS I LOVED BEFORE."

I SOFT-SHOED MY WAY OUT OF THE OTHER GIRLS' LIVES AND CONCENTRATED ON THE FULL PURSUIT OF LEAH, CALLING, DATING, BACK AND FORTH OVER AFTON MOUNTAIN UNTIL I FINALLY MOVED TO CHARLOTTESVILLE'S HESSIAN HILLS APARTMENTS.

AS TIME WENT ON, I KEPT PUSHING LEAH TOWARD MARRIAGE, BUT SHE WASN'T TO BE PUSHED. I GIGGED HER WITH COMMENTS LIKE, "WHAT'S WRONG, HASN'T THE FBI REPORT COME BACK YET? THIS IS THE LATE SHOW! OH, HOW LONG.....?" ET CETERA

AFTER SOME 18 MONTHS OF DATING, MEETING HER 93 YEAR OLD MOTHER, HER BROTHER, AND HER TWO DAUGHTERS, SHERRY AND ELAINE, PLUS VISITING HER ROOTS AT DANTE, VIRGINIA AND ELIZABETHTON, TENNESSEE, AND MINE AT SALEM AND BUCHANAN, WE WERE MARRIED IN RICHMOND JUNE 10, 1989 AT EPIPHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH. MY "UP AT THE HOME" FRIEND CHARLEY BROWN AND HIS WIFE, FLORENCE, "STOOD UP FOR US."

AS AN "ADJUNCT VOW" TO THE CEREMONY, LEAH PROMISED IF SHE EVER LEFT ME, I COULD GO WITH HER!

I MOVED TO 326 KEY WEST DRIVE AND CONTINUED TO WORK UNTIL AFTER MY 75TH BIRTHDAY, YEAR-END 1993. WE HAVE MADE A COUPLE CRUISES, ON TO THE CARIBBEAN AND ANOTHER TO ALASKA, WITH OTHER TRIPS PLANNED. STILL TRYING TO GET TO NEWPORT NEWS TO "DIG UP OLD BONES" AND WILL DEFINITELY GO TO BRANSON, MISSOURI SOON AND YOSEMITE.

LEAH'S DAUGHTERS, SHERRY AND ELAINE, ARE BOTH MARRIED. SHERRY HAS TWO CHILDREN, LEAH AND T.R., BUT ELAINE DOES NOT HAVE CHILDREN AS OF YET. SHERRY AND HER HUSBAND, JACK DOUGLAS, LIVE HER IN CHARLOTTESVILLE. ELAINE AND HER HUSBAND, PAUL JABER, LIVE IN ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA.

LEAH AND I LOOK FORWARD TO OUR GET-TOGETHERS, ESPECIALLY WHEN ELAINE "COMES HOME" AND WE CAN ALL GET TOGETHER. THE GIRLS ARE BEAUTIFUL AND TALENTED, A JOY TO BE WITH! I TOLD LEAH, AFTER FIRST MEETING THEM, "THESE GIRLS HAVE HAD SOME GOOD BRINGING UP!"

MY DAUGHTER, SUE, MET SHERRY AND ELAINE AT MY 75TH BIRTHDAY PARTY IN NOVEMBER 1993. I TOLD SUE THEN, "I HAVE TWO MORE DAUGHTERS NOW, SO I'LL HAVE TO SPREAD MY LOVE THINNER. YOU CAN'T HAVE IT ALL." WE ALL LAUGHED.

GLIMPSES

G.A. AND GUS VISITED LEAH AND ME ONE WEEKEND AND WE, G.A., GUS, AND I, DECIDED TO GO OVER TO ALBEMARLE HIGH SCHOOL TRACK AND RACE. GUS AND I RACED, AND I WON! EVEN AT 70 I COULD STILL WIN. GUS GOT MAD AND "MULEY." I SUFFERED WITH MY "WRECKED KNEE" FOR DAYS AFTERWARD. THIS WAS MY LAST RACE.

I SPEND A LOT OF TIME READING THE BIBLE, STUDYING FOR "FINALS" AND LOOKING FOR LOOPHOLES.

I SAW MY NAME RECENTLY IN THE OBITUARY COLUMN OF THE LOCAL PAPER. I CALLED MY FRIEND CLAUDE ASKING, "DID YOU SEE MY NAME IN THE OBITUARY COLUMN?"

"YES!" CLAUDE SAID, "WHERE ARE YOU CALLING FROM?"

RETIREMENT, SHOWTIME AND THE SENIOR CENTER WORLD

WE GO TO THE ORPHANAGE HOMECOMING EACH JULY AT SALEM AND, FOR THE LAST FOUR YEARS, A REUNION OF SOME OF MY WORLD WAR II BUDDIES; WE ARE HOSTS THIS YEAR IN OCTOBER, ALSO, A BAKER FAMILY REUNION EVERY TWO YEARS.

IN 1988, THROUGH LEAH, I MET LOU DIPIRO, PRODUCER OF THE ANNUAL SENIOR CENTER SHOWS. HE SAW ME "CLOWNING," SINGING AND DANCING ONE EVENING AT THE ABERDEEN BARN AND LATER SAID TO ME, "YOU ARE A 'NATURAL.' I WANT YOU TO BE IN THE SENIOR SHOW."

LOU GAVE ME A PART TAKEN FROM THE SHOW, "I DO, I DO," CALLED "A WELL-KNOWN FACT," WHEREIN I SANG AND DANCED, AND IT WAS WELL RECEIVED. LOU REALLY INSPIRED ME AND LEAH, AND WE BECAME REGULARS IN THE ANNUAL SENIOR SHOW.

OUR LIFE IS TOTALLY DOMINATED BY "ACTION AT THE SENIOR CENTER," LINE DANCING, TAP DANCING, BALLROOM DANCING, "SHOWTIME," SING-A-LONGS AND OTHER.

IN THE LATTER PART OF 1993, JUST BEFORE RETIRING, I READ AN ARTICLE IN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL TELLING OF AN OLD RETIRED ENTERTAINERS IN CALIFORNIA GETTING TOGETHER MONTHLY TO DO THEIR SPECIALTY JUST FOR EACH OTHER; SOME OF THEM ARE IN THEIR EIGHTIES.

SO I STARTED "SHOWTIME" ON WEDNESDAY EVERY OTHER WEEK BEGINNING MARCH 1994. WE HAVE 15 PARTICIPANTS AND HAVE DONE A FEW SHOWS FOR RETIREMENT HOMES, GROUPS, ET CETERA.

MY HOPE WAS TO ATTRACT ENOUGH PEOPLE TO HOLD AN ANNUAL SENIOR CENTER (MEMBERS ONLY) SHOW TO RAISE MONEY FOR THE CENTER. SO FAR THIS HAS NOT HAPPENED AND I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY NOT. WE HAVE OVER 3,000 MEMBERS; THE TALENT HAS TO BE THERE; IT JUST HAS NOT COME FORTH.

LEAH IS A NATIVE VIRGINIAN BORN IN DANTE, VIRGINIA, RUSSELL COUNTY, A TOWN SO SMALL THEY DON'T EVEN HAVE A TOWN DRUNK, THEY HAVE TO TAKE TURNS!

SHE MOVED AT A YOUNG AGE TO NEARBY ELIZABETHTON, TN NEAR JOHNSON CITY. I CALL HER "COUNTRY." SHE CALLS ME RIGHT BACK, "SALEM!"

NICE PART ABOUT OUR LIFE IS THAT I AM THE BOSS. I CALLED HER THE OTHER EVENING FROM TOWN SAYING, "I WANT PLENTY OF HOT WATER WHEN I GET HOME, WITHOUT FAIL!"

SHE SAID, "WHAT DO YOU MEAN, PLENTY OF HOT WATER?"

I SAID, "YOU DON'T THINK I'M GONNA WASH THOSE DISHES IN COLD WATER, DO YOU?"

ONE WORD FROM ME, AND SHE DOES AS SHE PLEASES!

SHE'S A GREAT DANCER, HAS TAUGHT ME "REFINED BALLROOM." JUST WISH I COULD GET HER TO SING MORE; SHE HAS A GREAT VOICE, BUT A PERFECTIONIST! I HAVE A GREAT VOICE TOO, BUT IT'S IN TONY BENNET'S THROAT!

I RUN AND SHE WALKS. I'M THE IMPETUOUS, WANT TO DO IT TODAY TYPE GUY; SHE IS THE MANANA GIRL. THIS REPRESENTS OUR BIGGEST BONE OF CONTENTION.

RECENTLY THE DOCTOR TOLD ME I'D HAVE TO COMPLETELY GIVE UP SEX, I MEAN COMPLETELY! "ONE MORE TIM AND IT WILL BE CURTAINS FOR YOU!" HE SAID.

WE TOOK SEPARATE ROOMS! AFTER TWO WEEKS OF THIS, ONE NIGHT ABOUT 1:00 A.M., I STARTED OVER TO HER ROOM. I MET HER COMING OUT.

SHE SAID, "WHERE ARE YOU GOING?"

I SAID, "OVER TO YOUR ROOM TO DIE! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?"

SHE SAID, "I WAS COMING TO YOUR ROOM TO KILL YOU."

DON'T MIND THE JOKES, FOLKS. THEY ONLY GET WORSE AND OLDER! I'M THE ONLY GUY IN THE JOKE-TELLING BUSINESS OVER 76 YEARS OLD WITH JOKES TO MATCH!

EARLY IN OUR MARRIAGE, LEAH PUT ME ON A COCONUT/BANANA DIET. I DIDN'T LOSE ANY WEIGHT BUT MAN I CAN CLIMB A TREE!

LEAH AND I HAVE A GOOD LIFE "LIVING HIGH ON LOW FAT." SHE'S STRICT. I CALL HER MRS. WHEELER LIKE "UP AT THE HOME." I'M SURE I WOULDN'T HAVE COME THIS FAR WITHOUT HER REGIMEN. BUT GOSH, "I'D LOVE SOME SAUSAGE GRAVY."

LEAH IS DEATH ON FAT. SHE WILL WRING IT OUT IF IT IS THERE. THIS POEM TELLS IT.

I THINK I SHALL NEVER SEE
A SIRLOIN COMING HOME WITH ME
TO GIVE OUR HUNGRY MOUTHS A REST
FROM EATING CHICKEN LEGS AND BREAST
A STEAK SO THICK AND JUICY RED
BUT WHEN LEAH GETS THROUGH WITH IT—
IT TASTES LIKE BREAD!

I ATTEND CARDIAC REHAB CLASSES AT MARTHA JEFFERSON HOSPITAL THREE TO FOUR TIMES A WEEKLY. I MAY NOT LIVE TO BE 100, BUT IT WILL SEEM LIKE IT. EAT RIGHT, EXERCISE, AND DIE ANYWAY!

I HAVE MEMORIZED MOST OF ANDY GRIFFITH'S MONOLOGUES, I.E, "WHAT IT WAS FOOTBALL," "CARMEN," ET CETERA, AND HAVE BEEN DOING THESE AT "SHOWTIME," SENIOR CENTER LUNCHEONS, AND OTHER EVENTS. THIS KEEPS MY BRAIN HALF WORKING. AND WHO KNOWS? THIS, PLUS MY LOW FAT REGIMEN, MAY MAKE MY LAST YEARS MORE "VOLUMEFUL" THAN THOSE BEFORE.

WE FORMED SEVERAL CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS WITH CLAUDE AND CAROL MARSILIA, RALPH AND FLORENCE STEGER, AND OTHERS. WE KEEP EACH OTHER INFORMED OF THE DANCE EVENTS AND DANCE AND SOCIALIZE AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY. WE RUE THE DAY, "THE TOMMY MILLER QUARTET" IS TERMINATED FROM PLAYING AT THE BOARS HEAD INN TAVERN.

WHO KNOWS, WE MAY HAVE "A BRAND NEW LIFE" TO FINISH OUT. WITH LEAH AS PARTNER, IT WILL BE EXCITING, INTERESTING, AND FULFILLING!

TO BE CONTINUED!

