

YANKEE-NEVADAN

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

OF A

YANKEE-NEVADAN

George Alfred Phelps

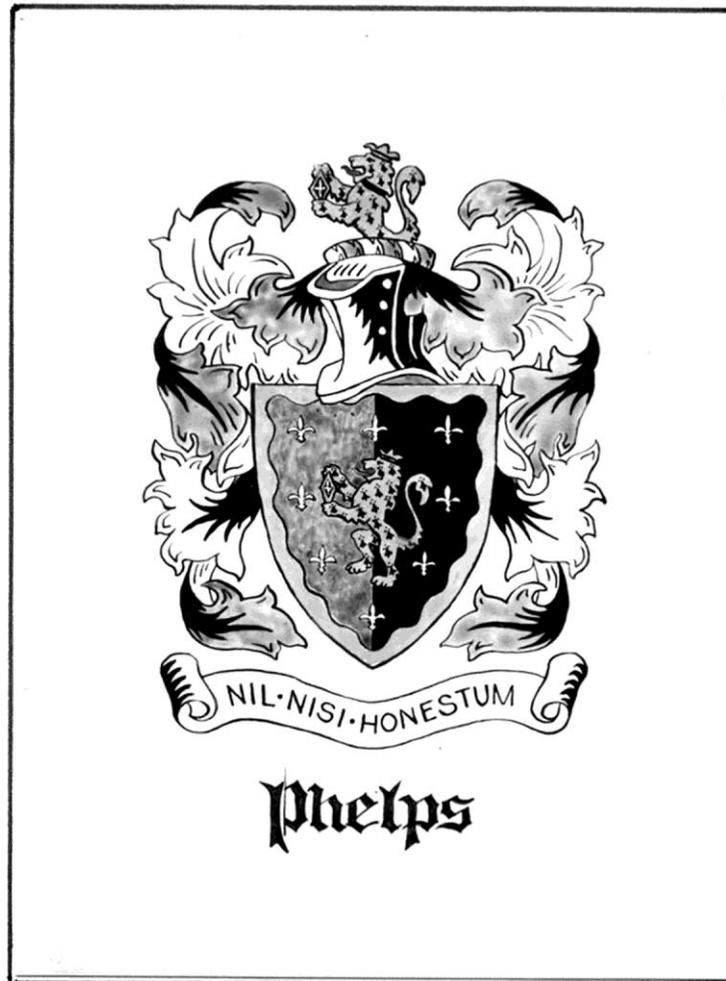
VOLUME I

YANKEE-NEVADAN

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
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George Alfred Phelps

VOLUME I - PART 1



YANKEE-NEVADAN

**Autobiography of a
YANKEE-NEVADAN
George Alfred Phelps**

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VOLUME I

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The moving finger writes,
And having writ
Moves on; nor all your
Piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel
Half a line,
Nor all your tears wash
Out a word of it.

[Stanza 71. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.]

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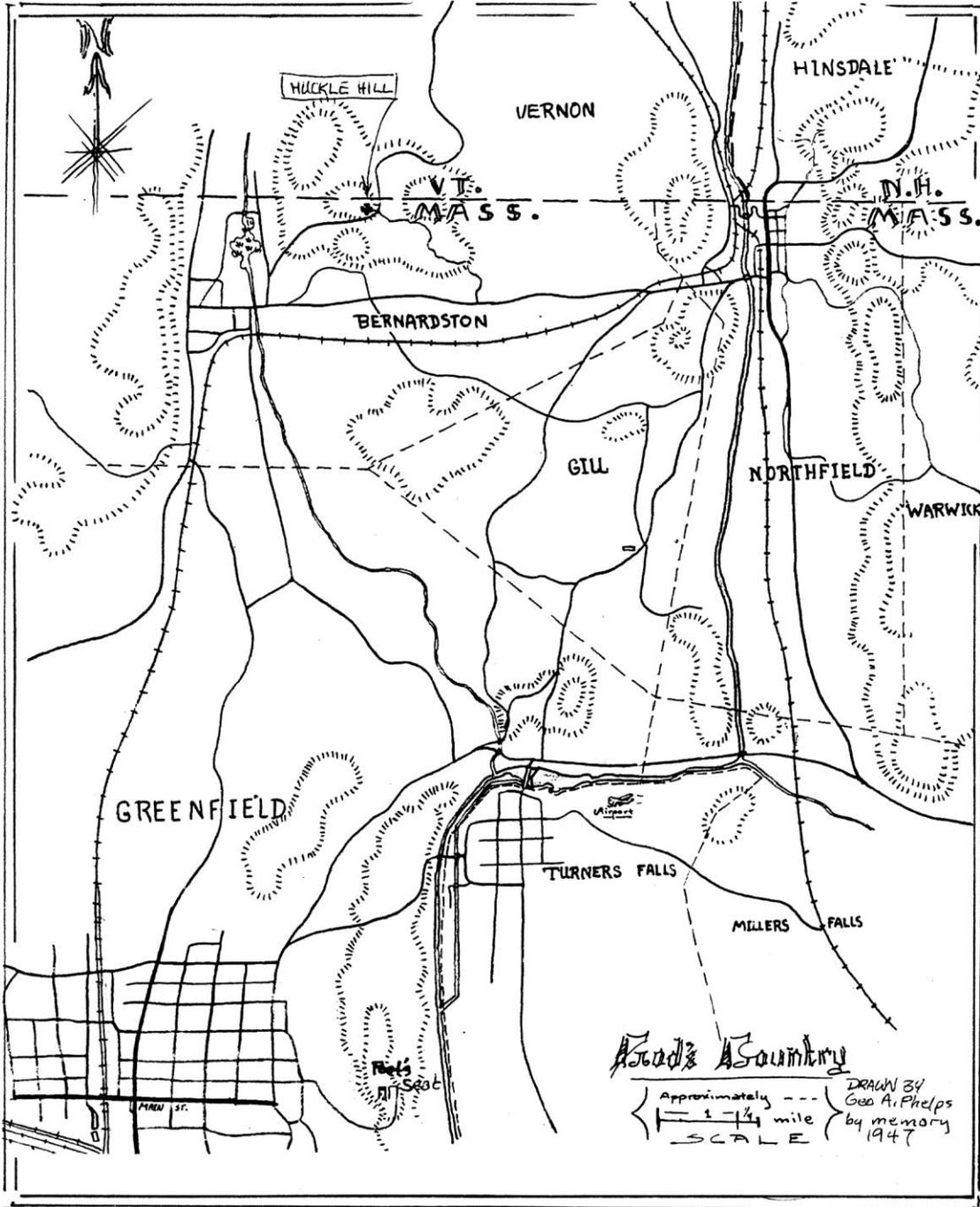
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INTRODUCTION

Mankind proceeds inevitably from one generation to the next, as do all of God's creatures. A noticeable difference between man's progression and that of the others, however, is his penchant for constructing and leaving behind artifacts, "monuments," if you prefer, to his achievements. He long ago learned to scribble and put his story (history) in writing, first on the walls of caves, then on clay tablets and papyrus, eventually in nicely-bound books.

So why does man record his story? Possibly for purely selfish reasons, possibly with the intent to inform and educate succeeding generations. If for the latter reason, history might be deemed of questionable value, for each generation seems to prefer to learn by experience, often by repeating the mistakes of its predecessors.

Whatever prompted our forefathers to establish records, we find it fascinating to read about their lives, their occupations, their activities and habits, their health, their philosophies, their fortunes and misfortunes. Every famous and infamous person on Earth has been biographically immortalized. And that is as it should be. But the lives of average people are also important to the history of our world. Their stories often provide insights not found in the documentaries of the well known.

Many of us (I like to believe most of us) harbor a pride-of-ancestry that, though it may lie dormant in our early years, yearns for knowledge of parents, grandparents and other relatives. How and where did they live? How did they spend their youths? Whom did they marry? What of their jobs, their relationships with others, their hardships, their successes?

Many of those and other questions relating to my ancestors will likely never be answered. Except for the recording of dates of birth, marriage and death, they seldom "wrote it down." (An important exception is the Civil War letters of my great-grandparents, Timothy and Susan Messer.)

By now you should know why I wanted to write this autobiography. But wanting to write it was not enough. It was available time that made it possible, time afforded by early retirement from a career with the Bell System.

When I began, I pondered some common terms to describe my work: "Memoirs" had recently taken on the connotation for spicy romance or exposes, and was therefore inappropriate. "Life History" appeared too pompous and not my style. So I have settled for the traditional and most accurate descriptive: "Autobiography."

To the best of my ability, it is a true account of my life and accompanying events "as I remember them." I have made a strong attempt at accuracy, especially with respect to names, dates and places, to the point of omission when unsure of the facts. Even so, some of the individuals involved in certain occurrences might have remembered them differently. (I have learned, in this exercise, that individual perceptions vary greatly.) If I have seriously erred, then I apologize in advance for the sin.

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My narrative is generally in chronological order. However, to maintain continuity similar stories and accounts are sometimes grouped together; for example, stories about deer hunting trips. Contemporary "news events" have not been included, unless such information impressed me or directly affected my life.

My story is directed primarily to my children, Georgina Kaye, James Anthony and Glen Alexander. But it is my hope that others – relatives, acquaintances, even strangers – may derive some knowledge and pleasure from reading about this YANKEE-NEVADAN.

In any event, the writing of this autobiography has been a truly enjoyable occupation.

ADDENDUM

This edition is as close to the original as practical. Minor changes in format, punctuation and content were made, in the interest of clarity, which resulted in a slight increase in the overall number of pages.

The Author (May, 2010)

ADDENDUM II

The front pages of each part of this version have been modified for application to my Web Site.

The Author (March, 2013)

VOLUME I - PART 1

CHAPTER ONE
BERNARDSTON BEGINNINGS

The year is 1927. The season is autumn. We are on a narrow, winding, graveled roadway that clings to the contour of a hillside as it climbs in a northeasterly direction from town. Only in recent years has this road been shared by both horse-drawn and horse-less vehicles. We wind through a typical New England forest of mostly scrub woods and hardwoods of a dozen varieties but with a few dark conifers mixed in for contrast. Occasionally an opening occurs, revealing a side road or a drive way leading to a field or a house. Then our road begins to level off. To the left is a cow pasture, with a sparse stand of "pig nut" trees inside the near corner of a rusty barb-wire fence. This fence marks the southwest corner of the Huckle Hill Farm. Behind the nut trees lies a scattering of granite boulders, abandoned by an ancient retreating glacier, and a swamp thick with reeds and willows surrounding a small shallow pond.

Lingering, our eyes are drawn to the sidehill beyond. There, on the slope, are stands of more significant trees including the sugar maple, for which the area is famous, and the skeletal remains of once-majestic chestnuts, only recently having succumbed to an incurable disease.

(A half-century later, many of those hardwood skeletons would still be standing despite the ravages of a harsh northern climate.)

Moving ahead now, on this journey of yesteryear, we come to a fork in the road. To the right, toward the east, one branch leads to a farm about a half-mile away. A red barn, adjacent silo, white farmhouse and surrounding acres comprise the Almon Flagg Farm. The left fork, which continues along the aforementioned fence line, is the main "town road." Still on fairly level ground it leads us past a healthy fruit orchard on the right, cow pens and a big white barn on the left. Just beyond the barn, again on the left, stands a dull white clapboard farmhouse, unpretentious yet comfortable in appearance.

Near the southeast corner of the house, our road makes a rather sharp turn to the north and virtually disappears in the shadow of a row of tall sugar maples. But we stop at the farm, for this is our destination.

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Northwest of the house, at about the same elevation, we see a chicken coop, an ice house and a sugarhouse. From there the land is clear of trees for several acres where it rises to the hilltop and more woods beyond the farm boundary.

This land was cleared of trees and brush many years before, but it is still an annual event to remove the brush that continually creeps in from the field's perimeter. It is also an annual event, right after the spring plowing, to haul away great "stone boat" loads of rocks. It was not for esthetic reasons that early New England farmers surrounded their fields and properties with stone fences; it was simply a practical way of disposing of those pesky plow-breakers. And I expect that as long as man tills that hillside, stones will continue to turn up.

Now let us turn our attentions to the house. It is quite typical of the era and the area, though perhaps smaller than most. Of course it is white, with dark, almost black blinds. The usefulness of blinds has long since passed, but tradition requires their attachment and the attendant labor necessary for upkeep. The eaves are conservative, extending just far enough to carry rainwater past the outside walls of the house. A rose trellis adorns the front doorway, an entrance now seldom used. Only a family gathering in the summertime warrants opening that door.

The el-shape of the building is conducive to a porch, and one will be constructed in the angle in the near future. Both front and kitchen entrances face south. A rather large shed is attached to the west side, where firewood and other things can be stored "temporarily forever."

The month of October is nearly spent. Heavy rains have knocked most of the autumn leaves to the ground where they lie in thick, soggy layers. Just a few miles away to the east the Connecticut River, swollen by the storm's excesses, has flooded its banks and spilled onto the fields to a record height. An autumn flood is uncommon, but it does happen from time to time and the year 1927 is one of those times.

With this picture in mind, of an average-sized farm nestled on a glaciated hillside in a decidedly rural part of Massachusetts, permit me go on with my story.

On the 29th day of October, during the time of that tremendous flood, in the Township of Bernardston, County of Franklin, State of Massachusetts, in the very farmhouse just described I entered the world of sight and sound.

I was the tenth child of the family. My mother wrote of the occasion: "Before you were born the rainwater was dripping from the ceiling onto my bed and they had to move it.... Right afterward you had troubles...stopped breathing several times, 'due to bad heart valves,' the doctor said."

I obviously survived that precarious beginning.

My father, Austin Clayton Phelps, was born on June 28, 1887 in the small town of Chesham, New Hampshire. My mother, Florence Helen (Messer) Phelps, was born on March 7, 1889 in the slightly larger town of Ludlow, Vermont. Their paths came together in Keene, New Hampshire,

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and it was there that they were wed on the 23rd day of May, 1907. Over the years prior to the acquisition of the Huckle Hill Farm, in 1922, they moved many times and bore eight children.

Not long after settling in at Huckle Hill, Father, with the help of my elder brothers, built the big barn. It boasted a hip roof, which allowed ample space for a hayloft, and stanchions on the first floor for tying-up cows. A tall wooden silo stood at either end of the structure, for storing ensilage (pronounced "in-sledge" by a Yankee) which consisted of chopped-up field corn, stalks, cobs and all. Ensilage retained its "green" characteristic and was meted out to the cows during the long winter months.

The large bays of the hayloft contained dry hay for a season, with little in reserve. From midsummer till early autumn, haying consumed a large part of the workday, sandwiched between the morning and evening milking chores. Of course there were always plenty of other jobs to do on the farm; plowing and seeding in the spring, pruning and spraying of trees, cultivating and weeding of corn fields. And with a large family, a sizeable vegetable garden was in order. In the fall there was plenty of harvesting to do, of field corn, grains, fruits and vegetables. And there was lots of farm machinery to be maintained. My father had to be an all-around carpenter and mechanic to keep everything in shape. The animals required another degree of expertise, that of breeding, feeding, care and butchering. The services of a veterinarian were costly, and used only in real emergencies. The main product of the Huckle Hill Farm was milk. Everything was done with that in mind. That, and the subsistence of the family.

It is unfortunate that I cannot recall more about the farm. But I do remember a few incidents, vignettes, as it were, of my early childhood there.

Probably the earliest episode of note occurred on a washday. Mother had a fairly modern washing machine then, a Maytag, powered by a small gasoline engine. That engine, once it was persuaded to run, operated an agitator in the "tub" and a set of wringers. Of course there was no timer; Mother determined how long the clothes should remain in each cycle. When they had washed she put them through the wringer to a rinsing tub, then to a second one, and last to a basket. The tubs were set up on a wooden bench in such a way that the wringer could be rotated to work between them.

Mama experienced some terrible times with the little engine. First it didn't want to start. Then it would become flooded with gasoline in the carburetor. She'd wait for the gas to evaporate then start over again. Sometimes, in exasperation, she'd summon Father or one of my brothers for help.

Since the machine was used in an enclosed area, especially in the wintertime, it was necessary to connect a long, flexible metal hose from the engine exhaust to the out-of-doors. One day I became intrigued by the output end of that hose. The "putt-putt" of the motor provided a fascinating blast that I tried to stop with my little hand. But it was far too strong and much too hot. Next I tried stuffing leaves and twigs into the end of it, and managed to make them stick. I was disappointed when the engine stopped running, however, and was

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chagrined when Mama, searching for the cause, discovered what I had done. Needless to say I received a good paddling. As a result, my backside smarted and I was much smarter.

My sister Betty (Elizabeth Louise) was first of the three of us born on Huckle Hill, having arrived on June 23, 1926. More than a year my elder, she was the "senior partner" in our childhood escapades. Fortunately for me she was also the wiser. Across the road from our house my father had built a garage. Situated on the outside of the curve, it extended out over the banking and was supported at the rear by stanchions. The space beneath was not sufficient to contain a car, but it was dry and suitable for the storage of small implements and junk; that is, things no longer in use. Further, it was a nice place to play, although I suspect that we were not supposed to cross the road to get there.

Behind the garage, in a small clearing beneath the trees, sat an old automobile carcass, probably a twenties-vintage Chevrolet. It was deteriorating fast in the wet northeastern climate. But the main body-and-frame was mostly intact, along with fenders, wheels (with raggedy tires) and headlights whose reflectors still shone in the sunlight and provided distorted images of our faces when we peered into them. The steering wheel rim was made of wood, dovetailed together to form a circle around four radiating metal spokes. Part of this wood had disappeared, but there was enough of the wheel extant to allow an illusion of grown-up driving when we sat propped up on the old seat-cushion.

That seat was something else again. Its coil springs had long since forced their way through its once fine leather covers, and bits of cotton stuffing exuded from the holes. There were pieces of metal and wood scattered about and the whole car was a mess, yet it was extraordinarily inviting to us youngsters. I might add that it was also an invitation to accidents, in the form of cuts, bruises and mashed fingers.

Inevitably, the old car seat was home to a family of mice, and we uncovered a nest of tiny, purple, and quite nude babies. While contemplating what to do with our find, a contingent of wasps zoomed out from under the engine cowling and began planting their stingers in our tender skins. Betty grabbed me by the hand and quickly towed me, bawling at high pitch all the way, to the house, where each of us received a ration of admonition and very little sympathy from Mother.

"What were you doing down there anyway? You know you're not supposed to cross the road!"

Not long after the wasp incident I was introduced to an animal of another sort. On the north side of the house was a pantry, through a door opening off the kitchen. The little room was probably five feet wide and seven feet long, and was lined on three sides with shelves and bins for the storage of food and utensils. It was the scene of a great deal of excitement one day, when my mother and sisters attempted to either corner or evict a large brown rat. My curiosity drew me into the fray, but it wasn't satisfaction that I received when the beast ran across my bare feet on his way out, it was fright. Naturally I cried, until my sisters' laughter shamed me into silence.

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An ice house is a unique kind of building, one that was rather mystifying to me in my youth. It seemed incredible to me, what with summer temperatures in the nineties, that nice cold ice could be had from that storehouse. But it was true. The inside of the ice house was only about fifteen feet square, but it seemed much larger. And perhaps it was. The walls were a couple of feet thick. The space between the inner and outer surface boards were filled with sawdust.

Along about February, when the ice on the pond got to be 18 to 24 inches thick, Papa and the older boys set about to harvest it. They used an ice saw, a metal saw some four feet long with coarse teeth and a wooden handle fitted at a right-angle at the big end. One man would straddle a line marked on the surface of the ice and work the saw up and down, moving backward along the line as it sliced through to the water below.

Big picks were used to cut the resultant slab into square blocks, and ice tongs to lift them out of the water and move them around. The blocks were loaded onto a low heavy sled and hauled by Ben and Jerry (Father's draft-horse team) to the ice house. There they were positioned in neat layers, with ample quantities of fresh sawdust between them and an extra amount on top. In good years, that is, cold winters, the pond provided sufficient ice to meet the family's needs all summer. In lean years, ice might be obtained from a neighbor.

My first taste of ice cream was made possible by that storage process. The occasion was a July 4th celebration, a date with a double meaning for our family. We celebrated not only the birth of our nation but also that of my grandfather, Alfred Clayton Phelps, who was born in 1855.

In those days only essential chores were done on holidays, the rest of the time being spent in walking, visiting, or attending town functions and parades. But it was all right to make ice cream.

A metal canister was filled with the necessary ingredients (preferably vanilla flavored), suspended in the center of the maker's wooden tub, and surrounded by ice and water to which rock salt was added to lower the freezing temperature. Everyone took a turn at the crank, his energies magnified by the prospect of the final product, until the cream was chilled to a proper consistency. Making ice cream was not something we did very often; infrequently enough, in fact, that it was always a treat.

During the late winter months, when the days were still short and the snow well-packed, it was time for logging, or wood hauling, for next year's fuel needs. On those days, after the morning chores were done, the team was hitched to the sled and Father and the boys would head for the woods. I went along with them at least once that I remember, a trip that took us a half-mile or so from the house. Riding on the horse-drawn sled was difficult when empty, it being a mere skeleton built to hold logs, and I clung anxiously to a corner stake the whole way. The sounds and smells that day made a lasting impression on me, as well as the extreme cold. The term "crisp" would not describe the cold with accuracy.

That morning, when the horses were brought from their stalls, steam emanating from their flanks made them seem unreal. However, the smell of horseflesh soon brought them back to reality. Every footstep

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on the frozen snow, made by man or beast, sounded like celery being eaten. I pulled the woolen scarf tight around my ears and throat.

Stiff leather harnesses were hitched to the whiffletrees at the front of the sled, and, on command, a strain was taken by the team. Only after a considerable amount of stomping and stretching by Ben and Jerry did the frozen runners break loose, the sled moving forward with a lunge. Father, who had been coaxing them with loud terms of endearment, let them proceed. And with reins in hand he leaped onto the forward cross-timber. Each of my brothers took ahold of an upright stake and swung aboard at the rear, one of them pulling me up too.

I was soon intrigued by the speedy imprinting of the sled's tracks. Heat, caused by friction of the moving runners, melted the snow underneath and zero temperatures quickly turned the liquid to ice as we passed on. Whenever the sled was stopped, it would freeze in place and have to be jolted loose by the team when it was time to move again. Sometimes the boys had to pry it free with a stake.

We were not long in the woods that day, the logs having been previously cut to length and stacked in piles. Now they were dug out of the snow, rolled to the sled and, by the use of skid-logs and cant hooks, loaded. The men made quick work of the operation, and as a consequence probably didn't even notice the cold. Standing around, trying to keep out from under foot, I shivered and suffered, and was extremely happy when the last log chain was cinched tight with a come-along and we all climbed up on the logs. The ride home was more comfortable than the one out in the morning, and now the smell of fresh cut wood was added to that of horseflesh.

Not long after my first wood-hauling experience, I learned a little about the making of maple syrup. Huckle Hill had a good share of sugar maples, many of them near the house and along the town road where they were easy to get at. Others were up in the woodlot, where the gathering of sap required the use of the big horse-drawn sled. For that purpose it was equipped with a couple of large wooden barrels for hauling the sweet water to the sugar-house.

Most of the sap buckets then in use were of the oaken-stave type, bound with metal bands and painted red, with a metal hook attached to the rim at one side for support, and a cover fastened on top to keep

out rain. Father also had a few modern buckets, of galvanized steel with compatible lids.

"Tree tapping" was accomplished by boring a hole at waist level through the bark with a brace-and-bit, to the sap bearing layer of wood beneath. A galvanized metal spigot was then driven into the hole, through which the sap seeped into the suspended bucket. Depending on the diameter of the tree trunk, from one to four or five buckets could be hung on a single tree.

I was fascinated, then as now, by the magic of sweet tasting fluid flowing from a tree. And when I thought no one was looking I enjoyed taking a drink of that wonderful elixir. Placing my mouth over the end of the spigot was one way to get a taste, but dipping from the bucket with a tin cup or tin can was easier, and far more rewarding. Sometimes, after a cold night, I'd have to break through a layer of ice to get at the sap, but that was only a slight inconvenience.

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The day finally arrived when there was enough accumulated sap to start the process of "boiling off." A pile of seasoned firewood was ready, handy to the doorway of the sugarhouse, a house that had been constructed in accordance with its purpose; that is, to convert sap into steam and syrup. Since about thirty-five gallons of sap were required to make one of syrup, there was a need to get rid of a lot of water vapor. So, during the evaporation process, louvers, located under a raised portion of the building's ridge, were opened to allow the steam to escape. The evaporator, the main tool for the job, consisted of a large pan about three feet wide and eight feet long, its top rim belt-high to an adult. One end was slightly lower than the other, to allow the liquid to flow, and there were baffles at intervals to force it from side to side along the way. This arrangement resulted in the miraculous transformation of sap, poured in at the upper end, to syrup at the other. The pan was heated by burning wood in a cavernous firebox underneath. And once the job was begun, it had to be continued till the whole batch was done.

In spite of the danger of a hot fire and boiling sap, I was allowed to join the others in the sugarhouse. I even helped tote chunks of wood for the fire, which consumed them like a hungry dragon. Almost constant attention was required in sugar making, to maintain the proper temperature for boiling and to avoid burning the syrup. But the most critical part of the job was "drawing off" the syrup when it reached the correct stage. That stage was scientifically determined by measuring the specific gravity with a hydrometer. To be sure, an experienced Yankee could tell "by eye" when it was done, without resorting to a newfangled instrument.

So you see, the manufacture of maple syrup is simple. You pour several gallons of sap into one end of a pan and draw off a few gallons of delicious syrup at the other.

There were two intermediate stages in the process which I enjoyed as well. One, which most people have never experienced, was when the sap was about three-fourths of the way to becoming syrup. It was then the color of weak tea, sweet and with a hint of maple flavor. It was indeed a treat to dip and drink that brew while munching on a fresh-made doughnut. No doubt the atmosphere in the sugarhouse - a roaring fire, clouds of steam and fanciful aromas - contributed to my pleasure.

If the evaporation process was continued beyond the syrup stage, maple sugar was produced. I liked that too. Again a hydrometer was used to measure the proper weight. The liquid was then drawn off and cooled to a granular state. Creamery butter was then added to give the sugar cakes a soft, smooth texture.

In the springtime of the year, coincidental with the sugaring season, it was common to experience a wet, heavy snowfall or two. This fresh snow was gathered and used as a base for one of the world's least-known gourmet dishes; a dish without a fancy French name, simply "sugar on snow."

New snow is packed into a pie tin or a wide bowl, one for each hungry participant. When it is ready, hot maple sugar is dropped onto the snow. The sugar quickly cools to a soft-ball consistency, is

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picked up on the tines of a fork, placed in the mouth and savored. Wow! What a treat.

It was customary to serve hot, fresh doughnuts with this dish, and some folks (not me) ate pickles to counter the sweetness.

One summer day, my brother Frank took Betty and me by the hand and walked to the pond. On the way we came upon a snapping turtle, about the size of a dinner plate. Frank would impress us, intentionally or otherwise, by demonstrating what a potential danger such a reptile could be, especially to a small barefooted kid. He took off his leather belt, and with it teased the turtle until he snapped and grabbed it in his beak. Such was the tenacity of that fellow that he held on even while being whirled in orbit at the end of the belt. Frank grew tired first, and then it was some time before the turtle let go, leaving a deep imprint in the leather.

At the pond we found some six-inch bullheads and scooped them out of the shallow water. I learned that they, too, with their spiny fins and whiskers, were best left alone. Another time we found a big black snake about four feet long, in the area. In retrospect, I can appreciate the fact that our pond was a wonderful wildlife habitat. But as a kid I seldom ventured near the place, filled, as it was, with so many weird and fearsome creatures.

The chicken coop and a horse stall shared the same roof west of our house. I was intrigued by the chickens but stayed out of their sticky, stinking yard. The corn crib just beyond, normally empty in the summertime, was a more inviting place to play. At the west end of the main barn was the barnyard, or cow pen, through which the cows passed when going to and from the pasture, and where they waited patiently to be let in at milking time. In line with the barn door, but some feet away, stood the manure shed; a large structure with a slanting roof and three enclosed sides, the fourth being open to the south. An elevated track ran from the barn to the shed. This "monorail" carried a dump cart, the principle means of conveying the accumulation of manure from the gutter behind the cows to the storage shed. It was a daily chore, a very necessary one, to shovel manure into the cart, run the cart to the shed, dump it (by means of a lanyard and trip mechanism), and repeat the process for the whole length of the barn. Wouldn't you know, I wasn't old enough for that kind of duty.

In a corner of the barnyard, next to the manure shed and almost beneath the monorail, Father had built a makeshift pen for pigs. He raised a few of the beasts each year "for the larder." One day, Betty and I made our way around the north side of the barn to visit the porkers. I could hear them all right, but I just couldn't see them. So I climbed the side of the pen to look over. Betty tried to dissuade me but I managed to make it to the top in spite of her pulling at my shirttail.

But alas, shocked at the sight of the big, ugly monsters I lost my balance and fell headlong into the muddy pen, right amongst them. I screamed and hollered, and Betty ran for help. Fortunately, one of my brothers came to my rescue, scooping me out of the muck and (perhaps) from the jaws of death. At least, away from a mauling by the hogs. I

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was a filthy mess and scared nearly out of my wits. And on top of that, Mama gave me a terrible scolding.

Though I never found it to be uncomfortable, life on Huckle Hill was, by today's standards, primitive. We had no electricity. The farm had been plumbed and fitted for gas lighting, an acetylene system with a "generator" in the cellar of the house; even the barn, which seemed a hazardous place for open flames. But it was never in use that I can remember. The fixtures were covered with cobwebs and the pipes were full of leaks. The folks used kerosene lamps and lanterns. I especially remember the large hanging lamp with its ornate milk-glass shade that hung over the dining table.

The house was heated by wood-fueled stoves. A big kitchen range, probably the most important item in the house, served as the primary heat source in addition to its main function, cooking and baking. It also provided a reservoir of hot (or warm) water on the side. There was an upright "potbellied" stove in the sitting room. Beyond that the rooms were unheated, except for whatever hot air spilled into them. Oh yes, a small, portable, kerosene heater was sometimes used for added warmth.

Except for the hottest days of summer, a fire was always maintained in the kitchen range. And even then it had to be lit if someone wanted a hot meal or a bath on Saturday night.

Until I was four years old, I slept in a crib in one of the bedrooms on the main floor. After that I shared a bed in the attic with my brother Raymond. The attic was rustic. Its decor was "early weathered board." It had lots of fresh air vents, more often referred to as cracks, randomly located throughout. Not only was there no such thing as insulation, there were no interior wall boards at all. Still it was cozy. In the wintertime we slept on a featherbed, an extra sort of mattress filled with chicken feathers. With that and lots of heavy quilts we were warm even when ice formed in the pot on the floor.

The water supply on Huckle Hill was good, clean and sweet, of ample supply and available in the kitchen by means of a hand pump, the kind with a long handle and a snout. It was not uncommon, however, for the pump's packing to deteriorate and it wouldn't hold a "head" in the pipe. The pump then had to be primed, by pouring water into the top. My folks wisely maintained a pitcher or kettle of water for that purpose.

The well was located about twenty feet from the porch. It was two to three feet in diameter, probably fifteen feet deep, lined with rock and capped with a board cover on its above-ground rim. We kids loved to play on that cover, the grownups sat on it to visit, and it often served as a "stage" for picture taking.

I am reminded of the first time, that I remember of, having my picture taken. It was a summer day. I was about three-and-a-half years old. One of my brothers, probably John, photographed Betty and me in our best clothes. He used our favorite rocking horse as a prop; I suppose to put us at ease. The whole idea was fine with me until I learned that Betty, not I, would get to sit on the horse. I'd have to stand alongside. I fussed and fumed, kicked and cried, and still lost the argument. A frowning face in the photo is everlasting proof of my disappointment.

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As alluded to above, there was a sizable woodshed attached to the west end of our house, off the kitchen. In the fall of the year, most of its interior was filled with chunks of firewood, out of the weather and ready for use. The wood had been sawed to proper length (for the stoves) and had only to be split to be ready to burn. A big chunk of maple served as a chopping block, and showed signs of many years of use as Papa and my brothers took their turns at splitting. Even Mother occasionally handled the axe, if the supply of split-wood dwindled faster than it was renewed.

Woodsheds all seemed to smell alike: pungent odors of various kinds of wood and sawdust along with dust and dirt and dampness. Our woodshed had an additional, distinctive odor. In the far corner was an outhouse; or, more precisely, an indoor-privy. Perhaps this particular commodity was utilized only in the wintertime, since a real outhouse stood just north of the house. At any rate, it was quite a luxury not having to traipse through the snow or rain or cold of night to get to the toilet. Come to think of it, we never used the term outhouse, but referred to it by that genteel name, "toilet."

Winters were pretty severe in New England in the first half of the twentieth century, and that severity was perhaps magnified by the lack of modern inventions with which to cope with snow and cold. The predominant use of wool in clothing, however, insured a degree of comfort even on the most blustery days. Mama endlessly knitted sweaters, socks, scarves and mittens for us all.

When the snow on the road got too deep for automobiles to get through, horse-drawn sleds or sleighs were used for transportation. In fact, the first snowplow I ever saw was a big wooden vee-plow pulled by a team of horses. With a great deal of effort, and a lot of cussing on the part of the teamster, a formidable snowdrift could be penetrated and moved with that primitive device. More than once I pressed close to the front room window to watch the men attack the big drift on the curve by our house. Sometimes it was my father, under contract with the town of Bernardston, who did the plowing,

I got a real scare in that snowdrift one winter, when I was but a wee toddler. You see, the yard sloped rapidly toward the road right there and the wind was fond of piling snow from the corner of the house out over the banking, drifting sometimes four or five feet deep.

Bundled up from head to toes, I waded into the soft stuff and wound up, literally, over my head. Naturally I panicked, flailed about with my arms and legs and cried out in fear. It was my sister Ruth, then about ten years old, who came to my rescue.

(I'd be long dead if it weren't for my brothers and sisters.)

New England is also amazingly capable of producing great ice storms, when super-cooled rain freezes immediately on contact with the ground and everything above it. If there is already a blanket of snow, from a previous storm, then a very hard crust is formed, often thick enough to support a man's weight. When there is little or no snow on the ground or roadways, so-called "black ice" forms, ice on which it is virtually impossible to stand.

When such a storm occurred on Huckle Hill, the road became an Olympic-sized bobsled run; too slick for automobiles, just right for a ripper. (Some of my friends called it a "travois.") I'm not aware of

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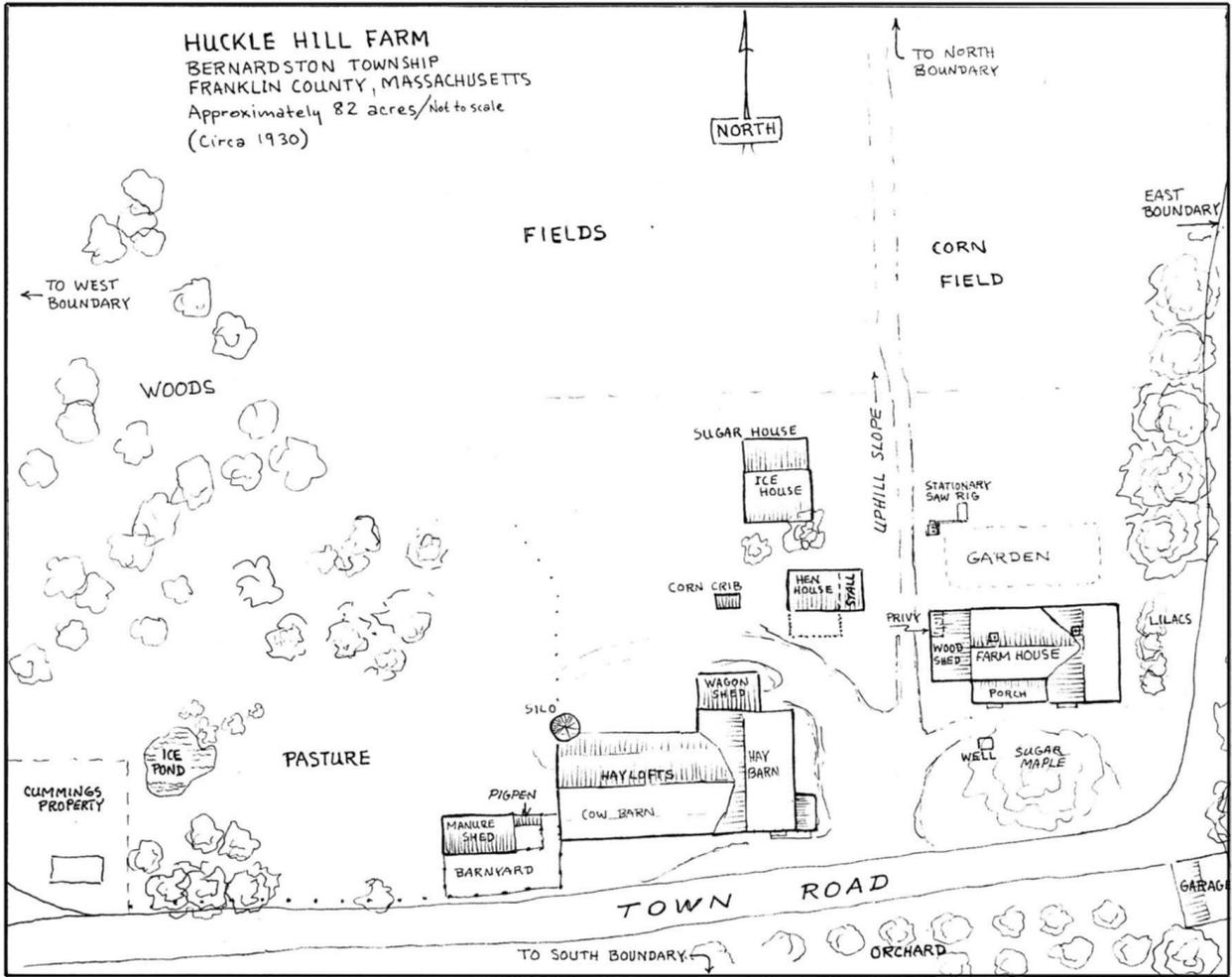
the derivation of the term "ripper," but no matter what you called it, it certainly lived up to its name. Especially on hard, downhill ice.

A ripper was very similar to a bobsled, and to operate one required a high degree of skill on the parts of both driver and passengers.

Our ripper consisted of a stout board about a foot wide and six or seven feet long mounted over two, metal-runnered wooden sleds, the front one capable of being swiveled or turned completely around. Both the front and rear sleds could articulate vertically, allowing them to follow the contour of the terrain. Each sled was about a foot wide, much narrower than those of a bobsled. Foot rests protruded from either side of the main board, for the driver and three or four "passengers." The driver steered by means of a small rope attached to the forward ends of the front sled runners. This rope formed a loop that passed along the outside of his boots behind the front foot rest. To turn to the right he would pull the right-side rope, and vice-versa to go to the left. It was the job of the riders to strictly follow the driver's movements, leaning to right or to left in unison with his body. Otherwise the ripper was sure to tip over and spill everyone onto the ice or into a snow bank, or occasionally into the brush.

When conditions were just right, the old ripper would tear down a hilly road at thirty or forty miles-per-hour. Too fast for the timid or faint of heart. As I recall, most of our ripper rides ended in a spill. And most spills resulted in someone's receiving a few cuts or bruises. I got to ride the ripper only a few times on Huckle Hill, but in later years I would not only learn to ride it well but also to steer it successfully down some pretty fast hills.

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CHAPTER TWO
UNFOLDING WONDERS

One very memorable event of my childhood, one to which I can attach a definite date, took place on Huckle Hill in 1933.

"Just stay in the kitchen and keep out of the way," my sister Dorothy advised, and went off to help my mother who was somehow incapacitated.

It was the 17th of March. Doctor Barnard and a nurse had come to our house from Greenfield.

I had no idea what was going on, only that Mother was sick in bed. After awhile I was told that the doctor had come to bring us a new baby brother or sister. I went back to entertaining myself with a toy truck on the table. Several hours transpired, and then Dottie came to the top of the step leading from the sitting room.

"Look here," she said, moving a corner of a blanket from a bundle she carried in her arms.

There I saw a very wrinkled, very red faced little baby.

When the doctor and nurse left, and continuing on through the next day, there was a lot of discussion among my elders. They were trying to agree on a name for the newcomer. I suppose it was not an easy task, it being the eighth boy and the list of suitable names having been previously shortened. I was not involved in the debate, and really didn't care what he was to be called. My only desire was to transfer to him that awful title I had carried for over five years, that of "Baby of the Family." In the end, along with the title, he was awarded the name "Robert Seaver." He was the last of the children born to Austin and Florence Phelps.

Two other important, datable, occurrences took place in that period when I held the "Baby" title. They were the marriages of two of my elder brothers: Richard to Audrey Burrows on September 30, 1931, and Stanley to Elsie Waite on September 17, 1932. I have no recollection of Stanley's wedding. He and Elsie went away to Bishop Falls, New York, and were married in a Baptist parsonage.

I do remember parts of Dick and Audrey's wedding affair. A reception was held at their new home, a cottage on the hillside above the Newton Farm on Bald Mountain. It was quite a party, I guess, with

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lots of grownups and kids in attendance and cake and ice cream for refreshments. What impressed me most, however, was a unique feature of the house. It had "running water." Right inside the kitchen. Cool clear water was piped from a spring above to the sink where it ran continuously, draining from there through another pipe to the outside. For some time after that whenever I heard that a house had running water I thought that that was what was meant; continuously running water.

I received another lasting impression that day when a large white goose, almost as big as I was, chased me around the yard, all the while honking and nipping at my rear, elbows and other parts of my anatomy. I was completely unnerved by the noisy brute. "Scared," is what I was, and I learned the true meaning of the word "goosed."

Across the road to the south of our house, bordering the Flagg Farm, Father had a fruit orchard. Early in the spring he filled a big tank with some kind of liquid, started a motor-driven pump and with a hose sprayed each and every tree with the foul-smelling stuff. From a safe distance I watched as he directed the nozzle, shooting a stream high in the air. Whatever kind of bug killer he used must have done the job for his apples were seldom buggy.

Father was skilled in the art of tree-grafting, an operation that always amazed me, and raised several kinds of sweet delectable apples. By the end of autumn, the storage bins in our cool cellar virtually overflowed with crisp Baldwins, Northern Spys, Sheep-noses and other old New England varieties.

The early varieties, like the McIntosh, when ripe heralded the start of the school season. In September of 1933, it also heralded the beginning of my formal education. I went to first grade at Bald Mountain School, on the road by the same name west of Huckle Hill. Betty and I walked to school, usually with our brother Raymond. It seemed a long way to me but was in reality about a half-mile.

The school was typical of the times for a small town; six classes taught in one room, the only room. On the walls of the entry way were hooks for hanging coats and hats, and space on the floor for storing wet boots. The main room was filled with desks made of cast-iron and wood, in rows graduated from the least size, where I sat, to the largest. Heat was provided when needed by a huge, round, wood burning stove.

I suppose I learned my ABC's at Bald Mountain School, but remember very little about the process. At recess I watched as the bigger kids played marbles or catch-ball in the yard under the trees. Not only was I the smallest kid in school, but I was by far the most shy. I hardly spoke to anyone, including my teacher, a very pleasant young lady by the name of "Miss Denison." (It was many years before I learned that her first name was Alta.)

Sunday was the day reserved for church services, which were unalterably followed by dinner (that being the midday meal in those days). Sunday Dinner was always the same: Boston baked beans and brown bread. Preparation of the meal began on Saturday, when we kids scooped dried pea-beans from a burlap bag in the pantry and sorted them on the kitchen table. The job consisted of picking out the good beans and discarding the bad ones, if any, along with the inevitable small

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pebbles and sticks. The resultant pot-full was then put aside to soak all night in water, and on Sunday morning, before leaving for church, Mama put the beans, salt pork, brown sugar and molasses (sometimes maple syrup) in a big, brown-and-black bean pot (or crock) and shoved it into the oven. The beans were left to bake while we were gone, and were expected to be properly done when we returned sometime after noon.

Due to the vagaries of a wood-burning range, the weather, the length of the sermon and subsequent "visiting" time, the beans never tasted the same twice in a row. More often than not they were "overdone," a fact that could be detected long before the kitchen door was opened. Mother would mumble a complaint, scrape off the top half-inch or so and serve the rest. I got so I liked the flavor of slightly burned beans.

Grandfather Phelps was a staunch Baptist. He was a deacon of his church in Keene, New Hampshire, a factor that may have accounted for our attending the Baptist church in Bernardston. Anyway, that was my first introduction to religion. The building was quite conventional, white with a steep roof and a tall spire and a wind vane above all. (The place looks the same today as it did some sixty years ago.)

I once had a "speaking" role in a Christmas pageant there. Mother later told me that she had to cue my every word, so stricken with stage-fright was I. She added that my performance drew a lot of applause because I was "so cute." I must have put the experience out of my mind for I remember it not.

The Baptist church in Bernardston marked the beginning of a way of life for me. It was there that I learned the value of faith and the difference between right and wrong. Like all too many members of my generation, in future years I would veer away from formalized religion and church attendance, but I have no doubts regarding the importance of those early teachings.

On Sunday afternoons, in good weather, a walk to the top of the hill behind the house was in order. Along the wagon tracks through timothy, blue grass and daisies we'd climb to the stone fence at the upper edge of the field. There, just beyond the fence in the woods, stood a particularly impressive skeletal chestnut tree. It had been a grand old tree, as evidenced by its remains, nearly a hundred feet tall and over three feet in diameter at the base. Before going on into the woods we'd pause beneath its barren branches to rest, and to gaze out over the rolling hilltops on the Connecticut River Valley.

There were many kinds of trees there on Huckle Hill and Papa would look them over carefully, as we walked, to see how they were getting along. He told us the name of each variety, though I would never be able to identify them. When he came upon a certain species of spruce, he'd take out his pocket knife and cut away some of its soft pitch. It was the first gum I ever chewed and the only gum I would know for several years.

Sometimes we'd spot a red squirrel among the trees. They were quite common. Less frequently we'd see a big gray squirrel with a bushy tail. The grays were hunted for food and were therefore more wary of man than the reds. Once, and only once, I was lucky enough to

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see a flying squirrel. I watched it soar from a high oak limb to a lower one on an adjacent tree. It was a fascinating performance.

I learned a lot about nature on those walks, from Father and from other members of the family.

When Brother Bobby came along we were a family of eleven; eight boys and three girls. My older brothers John, Dick and Stanley (born October 12, 1907, February 2, 1909, February 14, 1911) and my eldest sister Dorothy (born December 30, 1912) had already moved away from home when I was old enough to remember. They were more like uncles and aunt than brothers and sister. John was studying at the Massachusetts School of Art in Boston; Dick and Audrey lived on the Newton Farm; Stan and Elsie occupied an apartment behind Myron Barber's store in downtown Bernardston; I think Dorothy was living and working in Greenfield at the time. So, in effect, those of us at home were a family of seven children: Frank, Charles, Raymond, Ruth, Betty and Bobby (born May 26, 1915, November 28, 1917, December 14, 1920, May 31, 1919 and June 23, 1926, respectively) and me.

We lived on Huckle Hill during the deepest part of the depression. At the time, though, I didn't even know the meaning of the word. As far as I was concerned we had plenty of everything. In spite of the hard times, our folks managed to keep us well clothed and fed. There were no luxuries in our lives, but when you're a youngster who has never been exposed to extravagance how can you miss it? Our toys were mostly homemade, and because we had so few they were individually treasured. There was never a problem finding ways to occupy ourselves, what with all that room on the farm and a variety of animals, plants and machines to grab our attention.

It came as quite a shock to me when, in the late spring of 1934, Father announced that we were going to move. I wouldn't have understood why even if I were told. As I said, I didn't know what a depression was, nor did I understand about bills or expenses, or that you had to pay to live on a farm. I didn't know much about money, never having had more than a few pennies in hand at any time and no way to use them. I did know that Papa got paid for the milk he produced, and that money was used to buy groceries, shoes and, once in awhile, clothes. (All of my clothes were handed-down.)

On rare occasions, when I went to town with Father, I saw him buy grain or a piece of hardware, or observed him handing money to the blacksmith. But I didn't know about the mortgage, nor that he could "lose the farm" if payments were not made. I guess it was that, or the possibility of it, that led to our making the move.

I remember well the first time I accompanied Father to the grist mill and the blacksmith shop. It was a very rough ride in a light wagon behind the team. But it was like a world tour to me, who had seen little outside the farm, church and grocery store at that time.

It was immediately after breakfast on a hazy summer morning that we headed down the road past the barnyard, past the hickory grove in the corner of the pasture and into the woods beyond. It was there, just west of our farm, that a tall skinny man lived in a ramshackle house surrounded by piles of "junk" under the trees. Because he looked

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the part - dirty, ragged, bent over and with a big ornery hound at his side - we kids thought he was a mean old man.

From there our journey took us through a tunnel of arching tree limbs. In summer it was always dark and foreboding, and I was glad to be with Papa. The smell of damp woods welled up around us, mingling with those of horseflesh and leather. The horses' hooves beat a steady rhythm, the iron wagon-tires cracked on the gravel. I glanced from side-to-side peering into the woods to see, who knew what? In the underbrush.

At the "Y" in the road, where the right fork took off toward the Bald Mountain School, I looked for the round hole in the road where, Raymond had told me, a weasel lived. He'd also told me that a weasel was a wily, slithering animal with big teeth, an egg sucking thief and a varmint with a habit of sucking the breath right out of a little kid's mouth. On my way to school I had dutifully made a wide detour around that hole. I never saw the weasel.

Toward the bottom of the hill, out of the woods, was the Blodgett farm. The Blodgetts were friends of the family and good neighbors, and sometimes we went there to pick some of their fine strawberries. They were fresh, juicy and sweet (unlike the large, pithy berries raised nowadays in California).

There were but three or four houses between Blodgett's place and the highway, which ran east and west to connect Bernardston with Northfield seven miles away. Father turned the team west onto the tarmac, crossed a relatively new concrete bridge spanning Mill Brook [Fall River] and made a sharp left at Streeter's store to head south on the Lampblack Road. That road, which was not paved, followed the course of the brook [river] past a couple of houses, past the back side of the cemetery and under one of the symmetrical arches of the B&M Railroad trestle.

(That trestle is still in service today, standing strong and beautiful, its granite vaults reflected in the mirror surface of the mill pond below.)

As we came out from under the trestle I saw a huge building on the right. It was the grain mill, or granary. To our left was a dam and raceway, the latter directing water to a wheel to generate energy to run the mill. Cables across the road transmitted that energy through a series of wheels and pulleys to the millstones.

Papa drove the wagon to the dock by the mill door, got down, hitched the horses to a convenient post and went inside to find the miller. Like a puppy, I was right on his heels.

What an enormous place this was, with mountains of grain, whirring belts and machinery, stacks of "bran sacks" filled with freshly ground grist, and everywhere copious amounts of dust. And what an aroma. I loved the smell of grain. As I stood there waiting for Papa, a nearby pile of the stuff grew steadily taller under my gaze, the result of an outpouring from a square metal chute above.

Father chatted a while with the miller, who seemed an amiable chap indeed. He wore a big leather apron and a long sleeved, once white shirt. And he was covered, like everything else in the place,

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with dust. He had large hands and a strong back, both very much in evidence when he tossed Papa's sacks of grain onto the dock.

They loaded the sacks onto the wagon. Papa handed the miller some money, scooped me up to the seat with him, waved farewell and drove away.

It was but a short distance from the mill to the blacksmith's shop, across and down the road a ways. This was really a place of interest to a young lad. My eyes were opened wide at the sight of so many interesting things. Strewn about the yard and buildings were wagons, parts of wagons, wheels, rods, bars, hoops and other strange-appearing iron objects. Some might have termed it junk but it was obviously valuable to a smith.

The board-and-bat shop was rectangular in shape with a tar-paper, almost flat, roof. Patches of tar-paper and flattened oil cans adorned the outside walls, to help keep the rain out. A small entry door was closed, but beside it a pair of high, wide doors was swung open to the south revealing the wonders within.

After hitching the team to a post Papa approached the blacksmith, who was busy at a giant anvil just inside. With a ball-peen hammer he was forming a red-hot horseshoe over the tapered end of the anvil. He continued to work, without looking up, till the iron had lost its glow. Greetings were then exchanged, accompanied by a handshake, and Papa made known his business.

One of the horses needed new shoes, and so he was unhitched from the wagon and brought around for the "fitting." With his back to the horse's front, the blacksmith lifted and straddled each leg in turn, held the hoof between his knees, deftly removed the nails and the old shoe, scraped the hoof and nailed a new shoe in place.

I watched for awhile, and then amused myself by looking around the shop. I saw forges, anvils, vises, chisels, tongs and hammers of various sizes and shapes, straps and bars and sheets of iron and other unimaginable things, all in disorganized array. No doubt the owner knew of every item and exactly where it was located. A large iron hoop lay in the coals of a forge, and between the shoeing of each of the horse's hooves the blacksmith went over and turned it slightly.

"So's it'll heat up even," my father responded to my quizzical look."

The shoeing done, the horse was hitched to the wagon once more. But Papa stayed around to help the blacksmith with his next job, that of placing a new tire on a wagon wheel. It was an educational thing to watch.

Papa cranked the blower on the forge and a blast of air turned the coals white hot. I backed away. The blacksmith rotated the hoop, actually the new iron tire, through the coals until it was uniformly hot all the way around. At just the right time, a judgment learned from years of experience, with a pair of tongs in each hand the smith quickly removed the tire from the coals, slipped it over the wooden wheel-rim, and, with a few taps along the sides, made sure it was accurately centered. Next he poured the contents of a water bucket over the tire, producing a volcanic eruption of hot, hissing steam. Then, with my father's help, he lifted and placed the wheel into a big tank-full of water and left it to soak.

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Both the mill and the smithy had piqued my curiosity and my young mind was busy all the way home, evaluating and marking the events of that exciting day with Papa. It would be many years before I could understand what I saw at the blacksmith's shop, that the expansion and contraction of metal with heat and cold made possible a tight-fitting iron tire on a wooden wheel. At the time I thought it some kind of magic.

I was just getting to an age when the workings of a farm started to make sense, even though I was still too young to be a productive member of the family. Of course I had chores to do, almost from the time I could walk. (One of them was emptying the slops, from the pots under the beds, every morning.)

I was naturally disappointed when Father "lost the farm," as the saying went, and plans were made to move away from my world at Huckle Hill. It was my first move, my first real experience with change and it was hard to cope with.

The new place was called the Holton Farm. It was located right on the paved highway in West Northfield, just a bit east of the Northfield-Gill town line, on a hill three-fourths of a mile west of the Connecticut River. But on April 1, 1934, the house was not yet ready for our occupancy so Father and the older boys, Frank, Charlie and Raymond, moved into a recently closed gas station (part of the property) across the road. They would stay there and begin farming while Mother, Ruth and the three of us youngsters were in Keene, New Hampshire, living temporarily with Father's parents at 80 North Lincoln Street

On our way to Grandpa's house, I was reminded of an earlier time when, in 1930, we travelled that same road to Keene to have a family portrait made. It was then that I experienced my first, worst fright, on witnessing the results of a bad accident that occurred just ahead of us. I was already nervous, from the fact that the highway lay right alongside the Ashuelot River between Hinsdale and Winchester. I had visions of our car careening off the road into the deep, dark, slow-moving waters and we'd all drown. I must admit that I had an unusual fear of water, ever since I was little and Mother poured icy cold water over my head to rinse my hair after washing.

But about the accident: As we were approaching the town of Winchester that day, Papa abruptly stopped the car behind a line of already stopped traffic just over the brow of a low hill. From there we could see the wreck, which had occurred a minute or two before a short distance away. A gasoline-powered train had hit an automobile on the railroad crossing.

There was lots of noise. Men rushed to and fro shouting and motioning to one another. Women sat in cars or stood by the road and sobbed. People with long faces, one of them an injured woman with blood streaming down her face, walked to the rear past the very window where I sat. I can still see her unforgettable image. The wreckage was soon cleared away and we proceeded to Keene, a more somber family for the experience.

Now we were on that same stretch of road again paralleling that same foreboding river, approaching that same railroad crossing. Only this time all was well. I breathed easier when we had crossed the

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tracks and left the river behind. A few minutes later we were at Grandpa's house, unloading our few belongings and anxious about the future.

We were to stay there until June 15, until we could move into the house on the Holton Farm and be reunited as a family.

Grandpa and Grandma owned a very nice home. By my standards at the time it was luxurious. It was a two story house with clapboard siding painted a very dark red and with black, or nearly black, blinds and trim. A front porch, screened against flies and mosquitoes, extended across the width of the house. A smaller porch, off the kitchen toward the rear, was also screened. Two strips of concrete formed a driveway that ran parallel to the side of the house and back to a garage or shed; though as far as I know Grandpa had neither a carriage nor a buggy at that time. Attached to the garage was a chicken coop that opened into a yard enclosed by chicken wire and covered with vines of some kind, probably ivy.

Grandpa kept his yard immaculately groomed and maintained. It truly reflected his precise and organized character. The northwest corner of his lot bordered the top of a sandy embankment at the edge of the city. There I would dig tunnels and build roads in the sand for my little toy truck. Between the banking and the house, Grandpa always had a vegetable garden. In fact, we arrived in time to help with the planting, though he might not have appreciated us kids underfoot.

Living in Keene was a rather traumatic experience for me. (A lot of things seem traumatic to a kid at that stage in life.) For one thing, my grandparents were not used to having children around. They had raised only two of their own, my father and his sister Zoella (who died when but a young lady). Secondly, my being naturally shy made uphill work of adjusting to the new school, especially as it was near the end of the term.

The grammar school was an imposing, two-story brick structure; a far cry from the little one-room affair on Bald Mountain Road in Bernardston. I owe my survival there to Betty, my ever attentive sister. Judging from the results noted on my report card, with her help I made the grade.

The good part of my Keene schooling was the going and coming, the walk along Lincoln Street lined with trees, flowers, lilacs, and beautiful green lawns. Our Great-aunt Mertie lived just around the corner from the school, and we sometimes went to have "tea" and cookies with her. Aunt Mertie was our "rich relative." At least by our standards. She was the widow of a man of modest means (I presume) by the name of Ponds. I never knew anything about him.

Grandpa's home contained a number of modern conveniences, all entirely new to me. For example, the whole house was comfortable even on the coldest of days, warmed by a central-heating furnace in the cellar. Not a forced air furnace, that is, with a fan, the heat rose by convection through round ducts and cast-iron grates to the first floor, and up the stair well to the bedrooms. It was fueled by anthracite coal. I believe the kitchen range used coal as well, but it may have been a gas-burning stove.

A device that really fascinated me, an electric toaster with shiny, chrome-plated doors that opened on each side, occupied a space

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on the kitchen table. There were electric lights throughout the house, some of them operated by wall switches, either rotary or push-push button type, still others were turned on and off by means of pull-chains.

A pull-chain of another sort was the source of great concern to me. It was the chain in the closet, or toilet, which when pulled released a deluge of water into the bowl (from a tank high on the wall) with a very loud roar. It was a noise that could be heard by everyone in the house. It was a marvelous thing, an indoor toilet, clean and free of odors, but what an embarrassment to pull its chain and telegraph to one and all what you've just accomplished. I was a very long time adjusting to that amenity.

Grandma's kitchen was quite large, I thought, and included a good sized pantry. A door opened into a proper, formal dining room, another led to the sitting room (now called a living room) where everyone gathered on a daily basis to read or to visit. The parlor, in the front of the house, was an extremely formal room. It was furnished in style: with a small hardwood table (its top protected by an ornate scarf), cushioned side chairs and a wide davenport (no doubt stuffed with horsehair), and of course an upright piano.

A stereopticon rested on the table, along with a set of photographs depicting the wonders of the world in quasi-three-dimensions. The family album lay on a shelf below. A heavy, gilt-edged, leather bound bible lay on its own stand. I seem to recall a tall brass floor lamp and a delicate porcelain table lamp, both with fancy silk shades. Gilt-framed oil paintings graced the patterned walls, but I don't remember many if any knick-knacks. Alas, with respect to children, virtually everything in the parlor was untouchable; with the exception, when an adult was present, of the stereopticon.

A highly polished mahogany banister (not a slide) rose with the staircase to the second floor bedrooms. All were clean and neat but simply furnished, each with a bed, a chair, an armoire, and a marble-topped dresser with its water pitcher and wash bowl.

For our amusement when indoors was a box of blocks. Not the traditional kind, with "A" "B" "C" etc. on the sides, but wooden blocks of many shapes, remnants from the days when Grandpa worked in a mill as a cabinet maker. There were spools and knobs, dowels and rectangular pieces, enough to build all kinds of imaginative things. If I made too much noise when playing with them, back to the closet they went. Once, when I was careless and didn't put the blocks away when through with them, I did without for two days.

Sometimes Grandpa played checkers with me, on a board that he'd made which cleverly doubled as a box in which to store the pieces. But my favorite game was one that required great patience and dexterity. It was a quiet game. Two or more could play. It must have been the forerunner of the game of jackstraws. Our props consisted of a small-mouthed bottle (not a beer or liquor bottle, of course) and a box of wooden matches. Play was begun by placing four matches in the form of a square on the mouth of the upright bottle. Each player then, in turn, added a match to the form, in any position he chose so long as none of them fell. As the game progressed the "cribbing" took the shape of a smokestack scaffold.

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Grandpa, then in his seventies, had a pretty steady hand and almost always won; the loser being he who caused the cribbing to collapse. It was an educational game in more ways than one.

Verbal communication with my grandfather was very difficult. Almost impossible for me. He was stone deaf, or nearly so, from the time I first knew him. He would not wear a hearing aid nor would he use an "ear horn," as many hard of hearing people did in those days. When I'd say something to him he'd cup his hand behind his ear and admonish, "Speak up, boy." If I was shy before, now I was downright reticent.

What a dilemma. I wanted to talk to him but not if everybody else within a block could hear what I had to say. I wanted our conversations to be at least relatively private. As a consequence, I seldom spoke loudly enough for Grandpa to hear what I had to say.

(To this day I find it embarrassing to raise my voice to a deaf person.)

Grandpa was a "brisk" walker. When we lived in Keene he often led us to Sunset Rock, a large outcropping of granite on a hill not far from North Lincoln Street. From there we could look over the treetops and across the city to the west. Sometimes he and I went there alone. I really favored those times. He did the talking, pointing out various features, trees and flowers along the way, while I was an attentive listener.

Another favorite place was "the reservoir." It, too, was on a hill east of the city, and not so far from Grandpa's house that we couldn't walk to it. There were tables and benches on the banking under the trees, as I recall, and we sometimes took a hamper of food along for a picnic.

Just north of the city, just beyond Grandpa's place, was the cemetery. Acres and acres of grass and monuments. (One look at an Eastern cemetery and it's easy to understand how the term "Marble Orchard" originated.) On a slight rise overlooking the cemetery stood a small chapel. Constructed of native granite, with ornate stained-glass windows and arched casings, surrounded by manicured shrubs and lawns, it was the most beautiful chapel I'd ever seen.

Grandpa was the caretaker, and I sometimes played under the tall elms while he pushed a reel-type lawnmower cutting the grass.

Born in Chesham, New Hampshire, my grandfather was about as much a Yankee as one could be: sober, hardworking, conservative and morally astute. I think he was about five-feet, eight-inches tall. Whether standing, seated or walking he had good posture; backbone erect, chest out, chin high. Because he was not a big man, he was of necessity clever in the way he worked; that is, he used his head to save his back. I never saw him use a cane, although he generally picked up a sturdy walking stick to be used mostly for pointing or poking at things when in the woods.

Dressed in his Sunday suit of charcoal-black wool (always with a vest), white shirt, celluloid collar and dark tie, Grandpa was a "fine figgur of a man" (as they would say in those days), a solid citizen, the kind of man that every successful community must have a number of if it is to survive.

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Grandmother was also a typical Yankee. Born Anginette (Nettie) Seaver, she was brought up on a farm just a couple of lots removed from the Phelps Farm in Chesham. It was doubtless a natural course of events that led to their acquaintance and eventual marriage.

When I knew her, Grandma was a rather large woman who, like Grandpa, strove always to be proper in dress and manner. The house was her domain, especially the kitchen, where she turned out the best doughnuts imaginable. On Thanksgiving Day she produced a meal that even I liked. Except for the cranberry sauce. She was so proud of her cranberry sauce that it pained me to shove it aside, but it was far too lumpy and bitter to suit me. Besides, there were plenty of other things to eat.

Because there were no out-of-doors toys at his place, Grandpa rigged up a simple, but novel, device for me to play with; an old baby-buggy wheel with a steel dowel through the hub for an axle. To "make it go," all I had to do was grasp each end of the axle, which was about eighteen inches long, lean forward over the upright wheel and push off with my feet. It was a sort of human wheelbarrow, now that I think about it. My one-wheeler was easy to steer, made a nice track in the sandy loam, and I was soon able to go fast enough to occasionally lose control of it and crash. But never seriously.

Grandpa's workshop was seldom in use any more but was filled with a variety of fascinating tools, those of a turn-of-the-century cabinetmaker. All were neatly stored in chests of his own design and manufacture. There were no power tools, of course, but hand saws, chisels, planes, braces, bits and clamps, some made entirely of hardwood, others employing a combination of wood and fine steel. The blades of his wood-shavers were narrowed; testimonial to the myriad times he'd whetted their cutting edges. He showed me how his sharp tools cut cleanly and were therefore safer to use than dull or improperly sharpened ones. Neat curls of wood rose from the plane, or wound upward from the brace-and-bit in his hands.

(Many years later I received, from my father, an all-wooden screw clamp that Grandpa had made.)

My most cherished Phelps heirloom is a mantel clock, the one I so often admired when in their Keene home. It is a pendulum clock in a black "ebony" case, with black hands and Roman numerals on a white face embellished with brass filigree. It was called a WIZARD by the Ingraham Company of Bristol, Connecticut. Judging by a penciled inscription on the back (A.C. to N.M.P. Aug 3, 1907), the clock was given to my grandmother by my grandfather, possibly as an anniversary present.

(I have owned the mantel clock since the mid-forties, during which time I have repaired the case and fashioned a new gear-tooth, both broken in a fall from a shelf, once repaired and once replaced the striker-spring, cleaned and oiled the works on a routine basis. As of this writing, the old clock still marks time, tolls the hour with a mellow gong and strikes a bell at the half-hour.)

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CHAPTER THREE THE HOLTON FARM

June, 1934: School was out. Summer fell upon the land and we moved at last into the big house on the old Holton Farm.

Roughly a hundred acres in size, the Holton Farm was part of once-larger holdings that had been "a Holton possession since the day of Indian deeds...land that was granted under King George I." [A *PURITAN OUTPOST*, Parsons, 1937.]

The house was a golden yellow with dark blinds, with a roof, naturally, of slate. The main part of the building consisted of two stories, its broadside aligned with, but well back from, the highway. An el extended to the rear, to the north, with a long set of sheds under one roof going off at a right angle to the east. In front a healthy lawn was enclosed by a sturdy, yellow picket fence. Around the yard and house, aged sugar maples stood guard against the weather. Stark, naked giants etched against gray skies in the wintertime, now they were verdant with foliage and provided welcome shade.

The front of the house and a garden on the west side were out-of-bounds to us kids. It was the domain of the landlady, Minnie Holton Callender, who was, I believe, a sister of then-deceased Henry Holton. It was from her that Father had leased the farm. We seldom saw the old lady, who appeared to be quite reclusive.

We occupied the rear of the house, the big el, which was a mansion compared to the place on Huckle Hill. I slept in a bedroom over the kitchen, sharing it with Ray and Bobby, as I recall. When no one was looking I could climb through a window onto the roof of the back porch, and thus satisfy my inclination for high places.

I well remember the storage shed, for it contained the artifacts of several generations of Holtons. It was a treasure trove of antiques. A grape arbor ran parallel to the front of the shed, to provide both shade and concord grapes in the summertime.

We had a large garden in the back across the driveway and beyond some outbuildings, and the weeding of it fell to us kids. Folks who have been raised in the West just cannot perceive how fast the weeds grow in the East. By the time we'd weeded from one end of the garden to the other, it was time to start over. It made for steady work all summer. Weeding was not my favorite pastime, but I otherwise enjoyed working in the garden. It was then that I developed a taste for raw vegetables.

Tending to chickens was always something that a six-year-old could do. Relatively stupid birds, except when it came to finding a loop-hole in a fence, the chickens were always in need of more; more water, more feed, more cleaning up after. It was while tidying up the coop one day, sweeping, that I inadvertently disturbed a colony of paper wasps, the kind that build honey-combs in protected places overhead. In this case the nest was tucked away in a round vent in the low ceiling.

I was minding my own business, feeling good about the fine job I was doing, when the broom, without my implicit knowledge, stuck its handle into the middle of the wasps' nest. Without warning a whole squadron of angry devils swooped down, mercilessly attacking the broom

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handle and me. Broom didn't complain much, but I gasped and hollered as I took a dozen stings on my face, ears and hands, at the same time putting considerable distance between me and the chicken coop. It didn't help matters that Raymond, having been a witness to my ignoble exodus, was doubled over with laughter. I wouldn't go back into the coop until the next day, when the little beasts had calmed down some.

Those wasps never bothered me again, and you can bet that I never bothered them, either. Another of life's lessons learned.

My favorite space on the Holton Farm was just west of the big barn, which was set back some distance from the house, beneath the wide-spreading branches of two big trees. It was an ideal place to play; shady, sandy and devoid of grass. We had a toy dump-truck by then (it was really Raymond's), designed after a MAC truck of the period. Made of durable steel, it was about five inches tall and eighteen inches long. We had another, smaller truck as well, made of cast iron. But the rest of our "vehicles" were made of wood and imagination. I spent many a pleasant hour under that canopy of leaves, building miniature roads and houses, tunnels and bridges, towns and farms, my own versions of "dream castles."

Our toy wagon, or "cart," was of a grander scale, capable of transporting a child. Betty and I took turns, one riding while the other pushed it or pulled. In the front yard, a long concrete walk connected our door to the gateway out by the highway. We quickly learned that our wagon traveled easier on its hard surface than on the graveled driveway. I also learned that, when in the driver's seat, I could reach over the side, grab the rear wheel and not only brake the cart but also leave a nice skid-mark of rubber on the walk. However, one time I overestimated my abilities and the inertia of the moving wheel pulled my fingers underneath. (To this day I carry a scar on the middle finger of my right hand, in place of the skin that I left on the sidewalk.)

For an indoor toy I had (I should say we had) a small tricycle called a "scooter." Made entirely of wood, there were no pedals so you had to scoot it along with your feet. Because it was slow and steerable it was not too hard on the furniture.

We also had building blocks, dominoes, tin soldiers and toy animals. So you see, I was not deprived of things to play with. I never wanted some toy that I didn't have - unless it was Raymond's MACK truck after he hid it away from me.

West of the house and north of the highway was a hayfield. There was also a copse of pines surrounding an old dilapidated barn. For one reason or another I was afraid to play around or in that barn. North of the field (near the present site of Pioneer Valley Regional School) lay a swampy area. Betty and I once discovered a clutch of turtle eggs there, buried in the sand. So we gathered them up in a tin can along with some sand, took them back to the house and tried to "incubate" them. It was another attempt to fool Mother Nature that didn't work.

Farther away, beyond the boundary of our farm and across the West Northfield road, Streeter's Pond beckoned. One could find all kinds of creatures there, particularly frogs which were numerous and easy to capture. Then my knowing brother Raymond dampened my enthusiasm for

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the pond by describing the dangers of meeting up with a water moccasin. Though I never saw one of those reptilian rascals, from then on I harbored a dislike for swamps.

In the wintertime, when everything had frozen over, we trekked to the pond to play on the ice. It was a great place then, for, despite the likelihood of frozen toes and fingers, there were no reptiles about. Raymond built an ice-sled, complete with sail and tiller. Together we hauled it to the pond and sailed before the wind at dizzying speeds.

Father raised field corn, buckwheat and rye on the fields behind the big barn. Walking through the cornfield in late August was tantamount to passing through a jungle, for it was at least as high as an elephant's eye. On the other side of the tilled fields a barb-wire fence enclosed a pasture, which was composed of trees, underbrush and rocks with clearings of wild grasses on which the cows could feed. Every morning, after the milking, the cows were turned into a narrow, fenced lane leading to the pasture. They always found their way out with no problem, lured by the smell of sweet grass. Before the evening milking time, in the late afternoon, some of us kids would walk out the lane and "direct" them back to the barn, often with the help of a stout switch. I learned to keep a sharp eye on the trail, for in the summer season, except on Sunday, I wore no shoes.

If one walked away toward the east from the barn, he found that the land dropped off sharply from the "second bench," as it was called, to Bennett Brook and ultimately to the flood plain of the Connecticut River. But because of impenetrable underbrush and steep banks, there was another place that I avoided.

A couple of farms held the ground on the plain at the north end of Bennett's Meadow, where farmers had the advantage of rich bottom land laid down by periodic floods - along with the disadvantage of high waters. They did enjoy a measure of protection from direct currents, because the farms were situated at the base of a hill that tended to divert the raging flows. So while they were often inundated, at least the soil didn't get washed away.

The hill just mentioned was important for another reason. One hundred years before the Declaration of Independence was signed, 262 years before I set foot there, that prominent elevation was the "sometime headquarters" of the Wampanoag chief (or Sachem) known as "King Philip." The son of a Massasoit (those who had "greeted" the pilgrims at Plymouth), Philip was bent on annihilating the whites in the valley. The hill afforded a commanding view of the great meadow across the river, and of the tiny English settlement on the bench above.

Enclosed by a stockade, that village was then the westernmost outpost in Massachusetts. Called Squakheag (the English spelling for the Indians' guttural name for the area), it was then barely two years old. Philip's marauders were successful in killing some and driving the other settlers away. It was the first of two abandonments before the town of Northfield took hold for good.

This tree-covered hill, with evidence of his fortifications under a thick carpet of leaves, was called "King Philip's Hill."

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Lest I've given the wrong impression, King Philip's Hill was not a part of the Holton Farm. It was about a half-mile away, above and behind the Cembalisty Farm.

The remainder of Father's leased domain, consisting of a good south-sloping hayfield, more woods, and part of a brook along with a pump-house, lay on the south side of the highway. The property beyond that belonged to the Mount Herman School for Boys. (In those days, girls were girls and boys were boys.)

And that completes our word-tour of the Holton Farm.

Let us return to the barn: a big, clapboard sided, slate roofed, yellow barn on a sloping piece of ground. On the lowest level were stanchions for "tying-up" the cows, who came and went through doors at the east end. The main floor, where the hay was stored, was almost level with the upper ground, and was entered through a big door on the west side. The haylofts themselves extended along both sides of the barn. Those on the south side began about eight feet above the floor, leaving a generous area underneath for storage.

A truckload or a wagonload of hay could be driven into the barn; the hay pitched up to the lofts or off-loaded using a grappling fork suspended from a block-and-tackle powered by a horse. When the lofts were partly filled, and when there were no men around, it was great fun to climb the beams and jump onto the loose hay. Fun, but extremely dusty.

Most hay barns had a cupola, though I was never quite sure of its original purpose. If I were to speculate I'd say that it was for ventilation, as an aid to preventing spontaneous combustion of the hay. It was not uncommon for a barn to catch fire in that way. Lacking a cupola, our barn had a hatch, about three feet square, that could be opened for ventilation or used to gain access to the roof for repairs.

Raymond found a novel use for that hatch. He was at an age when building model airplanes - the kind made of balsa wood and tissue paper with a rubber band for a motor - was common. They were difficult to fly at ground level, what with all the trees and other hazards around, so up to the top of the barn he went to release the flimsy craft onto the roof. As a launching platform it worked fine. The plane would run down the slates and glide a ways and land in the grass below. I'd retrieve it and haul it back up the vertical ladder to Raymond. (It never dawned on me that I might have been taken advantage of.)

As with all of aviation, there were some successful flights and some not so successful. The latter led to a bit of patchwork. When one of Ray's flying machines reached the stage of virtual disrepair, he got a brilliant idea. He patched it up enough to allow another flight, hauled it to the rooftop, touched a match to the fuselage and "let-er-go" down in flames.

That was pretty exciting, and I didn't even think about the fire hazard presented. But I guess Raymond did. He scrambled down the ladder and around to the back of the barn and stomped out the burning remains of the ill-fated airplane.

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I doubt if Papa would have condoned that kind of a game had he found out about it, and Raymond swore me to secrecy, an oath that I honored for at least a decade or two.

I should make mention of the barn storage alluded to above. Like the sheds, it was a repository of treasures: farm machinery, barrels, boxes and buckets full of miscellanea, buggies, coaches and carriages - at least one of them of the horseless variety - all from an earlier time and superimposed with dust. The automobile, an olive-colored touring car, was of early twenties vintage.

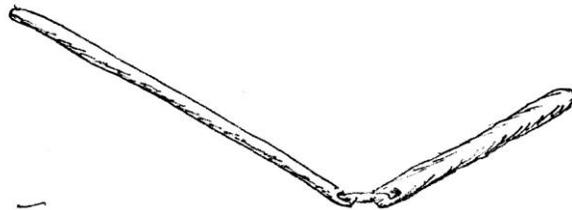
I took many an imaginary trip there in the barn, cracking a whip over the rump of a fast horse from the high-seated carriage, pressing the pedal to the hardwood floor of the leather upholstered car, always without the landlady's permission.

I am reminded of a fascinating activity that took place on the clean boards of the barn floor. The threshing of grain with a flail was common in early America, but it was already passé in the 1930s. Papa had only a small harvest of grain, so, I guess for the novelty of it, he decided to do it at home. That day Frank, Charlie and Raymond got in on the job. I would watch.

The grain had been harvested, stalks and all, when the heads were ripe, and brought to the barn to be worked. Now Papa tossed some of the stalks out on the smooth floor, and demonstrated the art of separating grain from chaff with a flail.

This particular flail was an old one, and may have belonged to my grandfather. It was a simple device, made of two round-shaven pieces of hardwood connected by a rawhide thong. One piece, the handle, was about four feet long and as thick as a shovel handle. The other piece, the working end, was short and stubby, perhaps thirty inches long and two-and-a-half inches thick.

The flail was operated somewhat as follows: You grasped the handle with both hands, the stubby end lying on the grain on the floor in front of you. You drew the flail backward, behind and up over your right shoulder then down in front, hitting the grain-heads with the side of the stubby end. Right after impact, you drew it back and up over your left shoulder and down onto the grain again. You repeated the cycle, flailing from the right, then the left, then the right and so on with a rhythmic motion until the kernels were all dislodged and loose from the stalks. At that point the flailing was interrupted, the old stalks removed and fresh ones laid down. The flailing continued, working on a batch at a time, until the job was done.



THE FLAIL

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My father was pretty good with the flail, obviously having done his share of threshing in the past. The boys, husky guys in their late teens (I think Frank was a student at Mt. Hermon then), showed both enthusiasm and ability for the task and were passable threshers. Ray grew tired after a short stint. I took a stab at the job, with almost disastrous results before yielding the flail to my elders. (I almost lost an ear to the unwieldy thing.)

The final stage of the process, winnowing, separated the grain from the chaff. First the straw was cast aside, then the remaining bulk was taken outside and tossed into the wind over a canvas tarp. The breeze carried away the light chaff and the heavier grain fell onto the tarp. It was a method as old as Methuselah. Slow but very effective.

One crisp, fall morning (September 15, 1934) we were disturbed by a ruckus out front. From the window I observed a lot of shouting men, all strangers to me, and a pack of barking dogs moving slowly through the tall grass beside the highway and in the nearby field. They were apparently looking for something or someone. Presently one of the men came and knocked on our door. When Mama cautiously opened it he displayed a constable's badge and quickly explained his business.

"There's been a shooting." the officer said. "Did any of you hear or see anything unusual last night...or early this morning?"

Mother replied that we hadn't.

"No strange cars or people around?"

Again the answer was "No." The constable wrote something in a little notebook, stuffed it into his pocket, turned and left.

Later, as the news unfolded, we learned that the headmaster of Mount Hermon School, Dr. Elliott Speer, had been killed by a shotgun blast fired through the window of his campus study. The shocking incident had occurred the previous evening and the small army of men (police and volunteers) was scouring the countryside in search of the murder weapon. It was thought that the killer might have discarded it in the grass or underbrush. There were no metal detectors around in those days (except in the army) so it was well nigh impossible, even with bloodhounds, to find anything the size of a gun in the brush.

The search went on for several days, often over the same old ground. The Connecticut River was also considered a likely choice for disposing of a murder weapon, so a team of experts dragged the bottom near the Bennett's Meadow Bridge in hopes of snagging it.

All of their efforts went un-rewarded. The gun was never found (though I believe it was thrown into the river); the murderer was never identified; the motive was never deduced. It was apparently "the perfect crime" and rather a ghastly one at that, especially so since it took place on a church school campus.

I must admit that I was more than a little scared, and was visited by some pretty vivid nightmares in the next few nights.

The summer was gone. It had been a season of hard work and long hours for my father, mother, and the older kids, but fairly easy for Betty, Bobby and me. We were old enough to help out with lesser chores but we really didn't produce very much. For us, for me at least, the farm represented a universe of things to see and do and learn about. Life's beginnings, both animal and vegetable, were there to be

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observed, as well as growth, maturity and death. A person lucky enough to have been born and raised on a farm is, in my opinion, one of the fortunate inhabitants of our planet.

September, then as now, marked the time of back-to-school. The time to change from bare feet and comfortable clothes to new shoes and fancy pants. A school bus stopped in front of our house, picked us up and took us to the West Northfield School, a mile or so from the farm. I was a second grader, Betty a third grader.

My attendance at West Northfield school was of short duration and uneventful. Though the school was small and located in a rural area, it was considerably bigger than the Bald Mountain School in Bernardston. The curriculum consisted of the "Three Rs." Recesses were short. There was a set of swings in the side yard and ample space for playing ball or tag in the back. I learned how to shoot marbles into a "pot," a shallow depression about four inches across scooped out of the packed ground, but I quit that sport when I lost to the big boys the few precious marbles I owned.

We were barely a month into the school year when a disaster of sorts fell upon our family. Betty suddenly became ill with a high fever and redness of skin. A doctor was summoned, and her malady was diagnosed as "scarlet fever." One rarely hears about that highly contagious disease any more, but then it was common. Several cases broke out in West Northfield. Betty probably contracted it at school. Mother was really concerned, for it was well known that if the fever reached a dangerous level it could cause damage to one's brain, serious after effects, even death.

The fact that we lived on a milk-producing farm complicated matters. Our household was immediately placed under quarantine. Big, bright red signs were nailed to the front and rear doors, to warn visitors of the potential danger and prohibit their entering the house.

To avoid having to destroy the cows' milk, my father and the boys, Frank, Charlie and Raymond, moved into the old service station across the highway, where they had lived in the spring, and once more set up housekeeping. Mother, Ruth, Bobby and I were under quarantine with Betty. It was like being under house arrest.

Our only communication with outsiders was through an open window, and then at a distance. Papa would leave milk, eggs and groceries on the back porch and we'd gather them in after he left. Other members of the family and some brave friends came to visit. Dottie came quite regularly from Greenfield, always with groceries, goodies or gifts. At Thanksgiving time she brought the makings of a holiday dinner. Her attentiveness as much as anything helped Mama survive the lengthy ordeal.

Betty suffered patiently, and with Mother's diligent care, following the doctor's advice, she came through with no residual effects.

Five weeks from the time Betty took ill, Bobby came down with the disease. This meant another three weeks of isolation, and worry about who might be the next to suffer. Bobby's case was a little less severe than Betty's had been, but the little guy had a tough time all the same.

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Two months and more is a very long time to be isolated, but in those days there was no alternative. It was the law. We were just fortunate that no one else contracted the fever. By Christmas time our family was back to normal.

No doubt we had had decorated Christmas trees while living on Huckle Hill, but I confess that the first one in my memory was at the Holton Farm. Perhaps it was made memorable by the fact that I helped to cut it down and haul it home.

There had been snow on the ground since Thanksgiving Day, the day when one could expect the first snow of the season at that latitude, and by the week before Christmas additional storms had produced a snow-pack of six to eight inches, enough that a sled or a toboggan was necessary for the tree hauling task. We chose to take the toboggan and the three of us, Ray, Betty and me, trudged eagerly up the narrow lane to the pasture to find and cut the most beautiful tree in the woods. Even the going was fun, taking turns pulling and riding on the toboggan.

At the end of the lane, Raymond opened a gate and we hurried through to the north slope where several kinds of conifers grew, including pine, spruce, hemlock and balsam. We paused from time to time to size up a likely looking candidate, guided, I suppose, by the desire to find that which most closely resembled the traditionally shaped Christmas tree. A pine was considered unsuitable. Its needles were too long and sparse. But any other kind would do.

The sun's orb, filtered through a leaden sky, was lying low in the southwest when we found a tree on which we all agreed. It was a fragrant balsam, properly shaped and with a suitable tip to hang the Star of Bethlehem on. With a bucksaw Raymond made short work of felling the tree. We then rolled it onto the toboggan, stump forward, and tied it securely with a rope. By now the sun's outline was no longer visible; the temperature had dropped to a "nippy" degree. I was wet and cold, both from the melting snow on my pants and the wind on my cheeks. My woolen mittens, that Mother had only recently knitted, were wet and icy, my fingers numb. Yet, with all of that, I was exhilarated by the adventure, happy to be pulling my weight going home.

When at last we traipsed into the house, Mama scolded us for being so late then plied us with steaming hot cocoa. It was supper time so we'd have to wait till the next day to build a stand, set up and decorate the tree.

Our ornaments consisted mostly of painted glass balls - blue, red and green - and twisted-glass icicles. The latter were realistic in appearance but awfully heavy for the limber tree branches. To augment the few "store bought" tinsel garlands, we threaded popcorn onto strings and glued together paper chains. In the end, our tree was one of the prettiest ever decorated.

Because it was sinful to lie or tell a falsehood, I was never told that there really was a Santa Claus. But there was plenty of talk about the old fellow, and if one were gullible enough he might "believe." I didn't know what to believe. So I determined to prove, to my own satisfaction, whether or not such an overwhelmingly benevolent

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Saint existed. I would get out of bed before sunup on Christmas day and wait for the fat-bellied gentleman to appear.

I was up before sunup all right, it was two-thirty in the dark of night when I prepared to sneak downstairs to the sitting room and begin my vigil. Betty saw me, guessed what I was up to, and tried to dissuade me. Ignoring her advice I went ahead and curled up on the floor in a corner near the tree. It was shivering cold but I persisted, and by daylight I could report with certainty that "there is no Santa Claus." I felt better about the whole thing after that, and went along with the farce in good conscience.

It's okay, I believe, to tell children about Santa Claus and Peter Rabbit and Mother Goose, so long as you make it plain that they're just make-believe.

When the morning chores were done and breakfast over with, we all gathered around the tree and opened our gifts. They were few but much appreciated. Of course there was plenty of old-fashioned fudge, ribbon candy, popcorn and salt water taffy to go around.

In those days Christmas was more attuned to the religious than the commercial aspect. There was no concerted "Christmas shopping" beforehand. Homemade gifts, such as knitted articles of apparel and wooden toys, were pretty much the rule.

As the holiday progressed, those members of the family who lived away from home came by to visit and share in the celebration. After dinner there were games to be played, such as checkers or caroms. Dottie and Ruth, and sometimes Mama, played the piano; Frank played the violin; Charlie played a big, shiny accordion. Everyone got in on the singing. Mother had a fine soprano voice, Papa sang a deep bass, John a resonant tenor. (I forget what the others sang.) In the evening after the cows had been milked, Mama served a light supper and the day wound down to bedtime. I, for one, having slept so little the night before, was grateful that the day had finally come to an end.

The winter season wore on, each day getting perceptibly longer than the last. Still the ritualistic storm-cold-storm cycle belied any evidence of coming spring, the snow pack increased in depth.

Then, in typical fashion, a freezing rain put a hard crust on the snow, so hard you could walk on it without breaking through, much. Or you could slide on it, as we did with our small one-man sleds and the ripper. Raymond, or Charlie, perhaps together, built a real bobsled, similar to our ripper only much more sophisticated. Guided by means of a steering wheel on a shaft, the shaft coupled to the front sled by ropes, it was easier to drive than a ripper. A tin cowling over the front gave it a bona-fide bobsled identity.

We were all eager to try out the new machine and the hard crust was just what was needed. We hauled it and the ripper over the highway, across the south field and through a fence to the rim of the ravine where Bailey Brook flowed - in the summertime. From the fence line the hill dropped away unevenly and rapidly to the snow-filled stream bed. A sufficient number of small trees along the course made it a "sporty run."

They tried out the ripper first, but that steep, undulating course proved too much for the long narrow rig and it overturned. But the bob-sled was just right for those conditions and my elder brothers

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made several successful runs, skidding around the turns on the glazed surface, ending with the nose buried in the snow in the bottom. Betty and I each took a turn, as a passenger, before the setting sun warned that darkness and cold were forthcoming.

"One more ride," I insisted. It would be a ride that I could have done without.

By now, as a result of our activities and the effect of the afternoon sun, the course had gotten really rough. I climbed aboard behind Raymond and when he hollered, "Ready," Betty gave the sled a shove. Halfway down the hill, on a particularly sharp turn, the left (outside) runners suddenly cut through the crust, and from then on my whole world was in a terrifying spin. I was thrown from my seat; or, more precisely, I continued in a straight line from it as the sled turned and rolled over on top of Ray. Fortunately for me, I went between two big trees and escaped with only minor cuts and bruises. Raymond, on the other hand, had the wind knocked out of him and suffered a damaged ego.

The following day our weather turned really cold. Ray decided to take advantage of it to improve the bobsled run, and conned both Betty and me into helping.

"If we pour water on the crust and let it freeze," he assured us, "we'll have a stronger, slicker surface."

At the bottom of the ravine we dug around in the snow till we found the brook, knocked a hole in the ice and hauled water by the buckets-full up the slope. As one might guess, we would spend more time icing the course than sledding on it. By the time the ice was right, a couple of days later, a sudden thaw melted the crust and half the snow effectively ending our bob-sledding season.

Inevitably the snow disappeared altogether, giving way to tender shoots of skunk cabbage and jack-in-the-pulpit. The maple buds grew fat as the elixir of sap surged up from the warming earth. Plush white pussies showed up on the willows down by the swamp.

The official flower of the Commonwealth, the trailing arbutus, bloomed and released its sweet scent to remind us of our forefathers who braved the storm-tossed Atlantic in the good ship "Mayflower." Many, many generations of Yankees had witnessed the unfolding of the New England spring since then, were thankful to have made it through another long harsh winter, and were motivated to new ambitions by these same wonderful signs of rejuvenation.

Now it was my generation's turn. I had come to the age when I could feel the excitement of the season.

In the days that followed I traced my father's footsteps behind the plow as the shiny steel blade turned the rich brown earth, trading last year's sod for new soil, worms and all. Papa had no easy task guiding the plow, as old Ben (or was it Jerry) pulled with all his horsepower. To maintain a straight line required my father's total attention and physical ability: a tilt to the left or to the right, an arm jolting "crack" as the tip of the plowshare collided with a subterranean boulder, a "Gee" or a "Haw" signaling the horse to turn right or left, a "Gee-up there you," when the beast tended to slacken his pace. The plowing continued until the field of brown stubble was

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transformed to a rich, dark pattern of concentric furrows, and the robins were fairly stuffed with grubs and angleworms.

When the going was easy Papa would break out in song. I remember one, in particular, that he sang in the field or in the barn whenever he felt happy. He'd raise his big voice in the refrain that went like this:

"Ole Bill Ridley was an engine drivah. He drove so hahd he broke his b'ilah."

Papa had a real Yankee accent. A single "r" within a word - that is, not at the beginning - was pronounced like an "h" or not sounded at all. "Car" was "cah," "Harvard" was "Hahvahd" and so on.

I have no idea where that song, obviously a railroader's song, came from, or why it struck his fancy. I don't even know what the rest of the tune was like. But it always made me smile to hear him sing it. With all of Papa's hard labor, long hours and few material rewards, it was good to know that he still had a sense of humor.

In fact, Father was a great story teller. Not a teller of dirty jokes, but of anecdotes and true stories and slightly exaggerated tales. His New Hampshire "twang" (which he'd retain all of his life) added to the telling. We children sometimes queued up outside the circle of adults (children could be seen but not heard) to listen to stories on a variety of subjects. Father's tales about horses, farming, and early automobiles were among my favorites.

One such story depicted my Grandpa Phelps as the scapegoat. (He would probably have preferred it forgotten.) My brother Richard re-told it (in a letter to me) many years later, so I'll use his words to repeat it now:

"Grandpa never owned a car and was a very poor horseman. In Ludlow [Massachusetts] he went with father, John and me to help with haying.

Father took [the] big black horse with the hay-wagon while Grandpa drove the other with us 2 boys out to help. On the way back along the canal to the Ludlow reservoir it was necessary to cross over to the south side on the way home. Horses go faster on the way home and Gramp was slow in reacting to the horses ideas. We turned onto the bridge with the light buggy making it alright but heading toward the barn, the horse cut the corner off the bridge to short, cramped the wheel under on the left front breaking several spokes. Father came along and was awful mad. A small tree was cut and tied under the back axel to support one sid[e] and that wheel put up on the front axel so we could get home without further damage."

I seem to have gone pretty far afield from my description of springtime on the Holton Farm. I'll haul in the reins and get back to it now.

The plowing done, Father hitched the harrow - a machine consisting of multiple steel discs on a long axle - behind the horses and pulled it over the ground to "erase" the furrows made by the plow, making the whole field smooth and ready for planting. The seed corn was soaked in an appetizing poison sauce for the crows, and then loaded into a horse-drawn planter. As the planter moved along the kernels were directed through tubes to hollow-pointed "drills" and deposited just under the surface of the soil.

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Farm machinery fascinated me, and still does for that matter. But by today's standards, that which my father had was primitive. All of his implements were of the horse-drawn variety, except for a hay-loader towed behind the old Ford truck. The loader picked up hay as the truck moved along astraddle a windrow. One or two men, or strong boys, would ride on the load and, using pitchforks, grab the hay as it came off the loader and spread it around evenly.

That modern machine made the job of haying a whole lot quicker and easier for my father and brothers. Come to think of it, I seem to remember Ruth's being up on the hay load at times, helping to "tromp" it down.

The manure spreader, while horse-drawn, was a mechanical device of some sophistication. The rear wheels drove gears and links to move wooden rakes to sweep the manure to the rear of the load-bed where it dropped onto a rotating spiked drum and was flung to the ground behind. (Charlie called it "flung dung.")

That beautiful machine - if a manure spreader could be thus classified - replaced an old, high-wheeled dump cart, the likes of which had been in use on the farm for centuries. It worked thusly: The short bed of the cart was overbalanced behind its rear axle, which was supported by big, iron-tired wheels. The bed was fastened down while loading and hauling. The front wheels, attached to a turning truck, were relatively small, perhaps only thirty-inches in diameter. The driver sat on a very high seat above that truck. To dump the cart he merely released the securing latch and the weight of the load tipped the bed to the rear and its contents slid out onto the ground. The dump cart was still being used on the Holton Farm, mostly in the wintertime if the snow was not too deep, to haul manure away from the barn area.

The men still used an old-style scythe, the kind depicted in caricatures of "The Grim Reaper." A man with a scythe was relegated the job of trimming around trees and borders where the horse-drawn machine couldn't reach. (I eventually learned to use a scythe with a degree of competency.)

The old mowing machine was a two-wheeled, all metal implement. A five-foot cutter bar, with a sturdy reciprocating rod to which were attached dozens of sharp, triangular steel blades, extended out to the right at a right-angle to the direction of travel. This bar could be raised or lowered by means of a linkage controlled by the driver, whose form-fitting iron seat was located right over the axle. The cutter bar was driven by the iron wheel through a series of gears and cams.

I loved to follow the mower, to watch the tall grass shiver and fall neatly behind the bar and to watch for the mice, snakes and young birds inevitably disturbed by the operation. Being barefooted, I was particularly careful to stay back and away from the rattling cutter, figuring it could probably sever a little kid's foot as easily as it cut a black snake in two. I also made sure to step only on the fallen grass, not on the stubble whose sharp tops were like tiny knives and apt to draw blood from a tenderfoot. The many rewards in the field, however, always seemed to outweigh the hazards and there I went whenever the opportunity presented itself.

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Both Stanley and Frank briefly attended the Mt. Hermon School. Stan attended when we still lived on Huckle Hill, but gave it up when snow prevented his riding the five miles each way on his old bicycle.

In 1936, at Father's urging, Frank quit school and took over the Streeter Grocery Store in Bernardston. Stanley had operated the business for about a year, but decided that running a store when you couldn't collect the bills (it was depression times) was not a profitable venture.

Frank was now a businessman but we still saw a lot of him. I especially remember the time when he drove Charlie, Raymond and me to Greenfield on the day before the Fourth-of-July. It was very early in the morning, and cool in spite of the season. Frank climbed into the big, Model-A Ford flatbed truck, started the engine and let it warm up while the rest of us got aboard. Since I was thought to be too young to hang onto the flat bed with no side rails, I rode in the cab.

Off with a roar we went. A roar because the truck's muffler, having long since rusted through, allowed a great deal of noise to escape with the exhaust. We went through the townships of Gill and Bernardston. Along the way, for amusement, whenever they saw someone beside the road Charlie and Ray lit and threw firecrackers off the back. Then Frank would turn the ignition switch off-and-on, causing the engine to backfire loudly. Louder than any firecracker I ever heard. We'd all laugh and wave, sometimes receiving reaction in kind from the startled people.

We arrived in Greenfield in a short time, crossed the Main Street, proceeded down Federal Street hill and under the Boston and Main (B&M)

Railroad overpass, then up a small drive to a siding. Frank pulled the Ford in beside some other vehicles, set the brake, turned off the ignition and got out. I, too, got out, and climbed up onto the bed for a better view of the goings-on.

There before us was the brightly painted Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey circus train. It was just now being unloaded, for the circus was to begin on the morrow. I watched in fascination as the circus handlers coaxed elephants down inclined ramps, and rolled red-and-yellow wagons containing lions, tigers, horses and exotic beasts and birds, and others loaded with canvas, rope, poles and hardware, onto the roadbed. They all formed up in line - it must have been a quarter-mile long - and commenced to parade from there to the Franklin County Fairgrounds. Now that was a parade.

When the last wagon had passed by we followed, along with the other sightseers, in the truck. It was a good way to get acquainted with the smell of a circus. Observing the operations at the fairgrounds was even more enlightening. What at first appeared a motley group of bums was in fact a much regimented team of workers. No matter what their talent in the show, now they were haulers, movers and hammerers all in a concerted effort to set three rings under a gigantic canvas tent, and all sorts of side-show paraphernalia under several smaller tents.

I was more than a little surprised to learn that elephants were used for the heavy work. Slow and lumbering, they were amazingly strong and efficient in the hands of their trainers. Equipped with a

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special harness of thick wide leather, each elephant did a share of moving wagons, poles and other equipment as needed.

And then it was time for the grand finale of this pre-circus show. The great tent had been staked out and connected to all the proper poles, but was lying like a deflated blimp on the ground. Now the elephants were brought to their respective positions and their harnesses secured to ropes previously attached to the tops of the main tent-poles. On command, they moved in unison away from the limp canvas and, voila! The big-top rose as if by magic, until it was taut and perfect in shape with the company's heraldic streamers whipping from each peak in the breeze. I could see that those behemoths were indispensable to the circus, doing the work of a dozen tractors, winches and derricks.

No doubt about it, this was truly the "greatest show on earth." And it hadn't cost a penny for admission.

The next morning, at four-thirty, I forced myself out of bed in order not to miss the cannon firing, the traditional start of the Phelps family's Independence Day celebration. One had to be up early if he wanted to be among the first Fourth-of-July noisemakers in those days. Firecrackers and fireworks of all kinds were commonplace, and the firing of them was a matter of local discretion.

But not everyone had a cannon. Ours was a small replica of a Civil War piece, about a foot long overall, cast in iron (I think) with spoked wheels in support of the carriage. The barrel had a bore about a half-inch in diameter (.50-caliber) and was loaded through the muzzle and fired through a touch-hole at the breech.

Charlie and Raymond were the gunners that morning. I was an interested observer, still too young to work with the black powder used to charge the cannon. The boys planned to set up at the southeast corner of the front yard, on the banking above the highway. The first salute would be directed to the south, toward the Mount Hermon School.

We hauled the cannon, powder and old newspapers (for wadding) to the would-be parapet, along with firecrackers, matches, ramrod and hammer. Ray elevated the cannon muzzle and held it steady while Charlie measured out the powder and poured it in. This was followed by wads of newspaper, which I prepared, hammered home with the ramrod until there was room for no more. The piece was then lowered to the firing position and fine powder, from a firecracker, poured into the touch-hole to serve as an igniter. (An alternate, safer method was to insert a firecracker fuse in the touch-hole before pouring the black powder in.)

"Stand aside," Charlie ordered. All was in readiness.

A heavy summer mist hung in the pre-dawn air. The grass under our feet was wet with dew. The black, paved highway resembled a quiet, flowing stream. Tree tops beyond were barely visible. There was no traffic, the last car having passed by hours before. The only sound came from the barnyard, where a rooster heralded the shrouded sunrise.

"Ready?" Charlie whispered. I heard the scratch of his match, the sizzling of burning powder. I saw it flash as it made its way into the breech, and then:

BOOM!

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My hands flew instinctively to my ears. The report was much louder than I had expected. The little cannon, smoke curling from its muzzle, rolled swiftly backward coming to rest against the picket fence. A muffled report echoed back through the fog. Like Cheshire cats we grinned with satisfaction.

"Hooray for the U.S.A." Raymond voiced. And then in unison we shouted, "Three cheers for the U.S.A."

Independence Day was officially begun on the Holton Farm.

Twice more the cannon was charged and fired, each time with the same resounding results. Then everything was put away until later for it was time to start the morning chores.

By noontime, most of my brothers and sisters had gathered for a picnic in the shade on our big front lawn. There were cakes and ice cream, watermelon and lemonade, to mention the more important comestibles. There was croquet, horseshoes, catch and hide-and-see to be played. John and Frank, and perhaps others, brought out their Kodaks and took candid shots of nearly everyone. It was a holiday that I thoroughly enjoyed and would remember always.

We were two summers and two winters on the Holton Farm, a time when I observed and learned a lot about "being a farmer." Enough that, while I didn't give much thought to the subject at the time, I was pretty sure that I would never become one. I didn't like being so close to animals and I was far too slight-of-build for strenuous labor. Besides, my eldest brothers had quit the farm. They must have done so with good reason. Charlie was the only boy still at home big enough to do a man's work. And, as so often happens with father and son, he and Papa had different ideas about how things should be done, differences that were unproductive to say the least.

Ruth, Ray, Betty, Bob and I were the only other ones living at home, and except for Ruth, who was busy with school activities and friends, we were too young to be useful farmhands. As for Mama, I suspect that she'd had enough of farm tedium by that time in her life.

So, in the spring of 1936, Father decided to give up farming. He was over fifty, had worked honestly and hard all his life yet had no tangible assets to show for it. Ever since the presidency was occupied by Franklin D. Roosevelt (in 1933), Papa's fortunes had seemed to worsen. Quite naturally, probably honestly, he believed that FDR's "New Deal" policies - increased taxes and spending on socialist programs - were more than a little to blame for his and other struggling farmers' plight. So it was the politics of the times as much as anything that influenced his decision. He'd move to the "city" and take up a new trade.

With March came the rains. They came in great quantities (six inches in one 24-hour period) accompanied by warm Chinook winds from the southwest. The river ice, two feet thick on the broad Connecticut, forced by runoff water from the north began to crack, surge and break into huge floes. These great blocks moved slowly at first, then picked up speed with the rushing current and piled up against the riverbanks and other obstacles. The granite piers of Bennett's Meadow Bridge were impressive obstacles, and there the ice formed a veritable dam. The river backed up and spilled over and around both ends of the bridge, covering the highway and the flood plains. Warm rains continued to

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fall and the river continued to rise. Some ice-blocks broke away and floated on downstream to the next obstacle, but more came from upstream to take their place.

In the daytime, drawn by the sound of incessant pounding on the bridge, my siblings and I walked down the highway to see the flood. I was first impressed by how high the water had risen, then by how filthy it was. Suspended in the flow were literally tons of silt, eroded soil and the effluent from dozens of upstream cities and towns.

We hiked around the water's edge to the north and through the woods to King Philip's Hill, where we could look right down on the main river course and the big cantilever bridge. Both ends were under water and its superstructure stuck up, like an island, with no visible ties to land except for some telephone lines. The roar of rushing water and the booming of ice against its steel girders were deafening.

Sometime later I heard the following story: A young man, from a nearby flooded farm, had someone row him out to the near end of the bridge, where he hoisted himself up and walked on its narrow, vibrating top girder to the east end (a distance of 200-yards) to an accomplice in a second boat.

It was a daring but foolhardy venture, considering the fact that there was no assurance that the bridge itself would remain in place till the end of the act.

Joseph and Rosalia Cembalisty, an immigrant couple with eight children, owned the farm below King Philip's Hill. When the flood waters lapped at their doorstep, Papa and some of my brothers went down and offered to help. Together they moved everything possible from the cellar and first floor to the upper floors. Because it was deemed too heavy and too cumbersome, and because time was running out, they lifted an upright piano and blocked-it-up on saw horses and planks, its top against the ceiling. (It would barely escape the high water.)

As for us, we were supposed to make the move across the river to Northfield, to a house on Meadow Street, when the flood came. Obviously our move was postponed. We couldn't cross the river on the Bennett's Meadow Bridge and the Schell Memorial Bridge, two miles upriver, was also inundated. Only the French King Bridge, downstream near Turners Falls, stood above it all, and it was a long way around.

Officials feared for the safety of the Vernon Dam, on the river just north of the Massachusetts state line in Vermont. The flood gates were in danger of being washed away, we heard, and indeed some had already gone over. To shore up the dam, sandbags were hauled by the truckload around the clock to the site. The driver of one of those trucks experienced a serious mishap on the West Northfield road a mile above our farm.

It happened at Bennett Brook, where the road crossed a small earthen dam that contained the waters of what was known as Sawyer's Pond. Unknown to the lone driver, in the midst of a torrential rainstorm in the dark of night, the dam and roadway were gone. It had washed away just moments before he arrived.

When his headlight beams revealed a great gulf of boiling waters where the road should have been it was too late to do anything about it. Into the flood he went, truck and all, to land amid the branches of a providentially placed, partially submerged tree. Cut and

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bleeding, the man was able to haul himself out of what almost became his coffin, and crawled over the load of sandbags to solid ground. Then, limping and sore, he managed to find his way to our house, where he beat upon the door at about three in the morning. The folks got him inside, dried him off and tended his injuries as best they could, and made a place for him to sleep until other help could be summoned. Fate was obviously the man's passenger that night; first getting him into a dangerous situation, and then helping him out in a miraculous way.

The Vernon Dam held after all. So, too, did the Schell and Bennett's Meadow bridges. Not so the Central Vermont Railroad's trestle, located between the two. Except for a span at the west end, it was swept from its granite piers into the river. Although no one saw what happened, there was credible conjecture that a floating tobacco barn may have abetted the ice and other debris stacked up against the trestle, causing its eventual demise.

Two highway bridges upstream, at Brattleboro and Hinsdale, succumbed to the flood; the long, wooden covered bridge to Montague City, below the Turners Falls Dam, was swept away; the suspension bridge at Sugarloaf, between Deerfield and Sunderland, fell as well.

Most of the lowland farms like the Cembalisty's were inundated. Many lost their livestock. The Tenney Farm lost all but one of its highly-bred dairy cows. That one somehow found her way to a loft, where she calmly (presumably) gave birth to a calf.

The natural disaster ran its course in due time. Snow melt in Vermont and New Hampshire diminished, ice dams broke up and the river crept back into its appointed course. In its wake was left an awful lot of debris, a few new ravines, empty spaces where once stood barns and silos, and roads that no longer bridged the streams. And great volumes of mud and layers of stinking, slimy silt.

I'll never forget the Cembalisty's kitchen when, with shovels and buckets, my brothers helped remove six or eight inches of the filthy stuff. You could hardly keep from gagging at the smell. When they'd gotten out as much as they could with shovels, we carried clean water and flushed out the corners and cracks. When dry, the whole house had to be fumigated, repainted, re-papered and put back in order. It would be a long time before the musty smell would dissipate to a tolerable level. But that was the price you paid, in those days, for living on a fertile flood plain.

The Connecticut River had flooded many times before and would do so again. But never (in my lifetime) with waters so high and as destructive as those of the "Great Flood of '36."

CHAPTER FOUR
INTRODUCTION TO TOWN LIFE

It was the month of May in the year 1936. The Phelps had finally moved to town, to a house on Meadow Street in Northfield. According to H.C. Parsons' *A PURITAN OUTPOST*, the 1672 surveyors, when they laid out the first village's main street, "... plotted as well a grand intersecting avenue of the same amplitude, running 'to the meadow fence west and so (it runs) into the woods eastward'." This avenue, which became known as Meadow Street, ran downhill from Northfield's beautiful Main Street. The latter would double as State Routes 10 and 63.

Our house, along with a couple of others, was situated on an old river bench. Farther down the street it crossed the tracks of the Central Vermont Railroad, and continued to the aforementioned meadow on the flood plain. Meadow Street had been narrowed considerably in subsequent surveys, but its alignment was relatively unchanged.

Lawrence (Larry) Quinlan, a gruff old Irishman who had been appointed Northfield's postmaster by the Roosevelt administration, lived in the house just uphill from ours. He owned a few cows, some chickens, guinea hens, pigs and a horse. Except for his house the place was pretty rundown. He was too busy as a postmaster to worry about farming.

Dressed in an ill-fitting and mis-matched suit and a soiled slouch hat, he was a colorful character. He used "coarse" language, always had a stinking cigar between his teeth, and was known to imbibe on occasion. Although she tried not to show it, being the Christian that she was, Mother didn't much like him.

The Luciers, our closest neighbors to the west, had emigrated from Lithuania. They disliked being mistaken for Poles, who were the largest group of "foreigners" in town. Like the Poles they were honest, hardworking folks. They had an only child, a son, who had run away from home at the age of sixteen, not long before we moved next door. The Luciers were obviously lonely in his absence and kept pretty much to themselves, tending their chickens, pigs and a couple of milk cows in their spare time. Both were employed by the Northfield Seminary; he on the farm, she in one of the dormitories.

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Astraddle the top of our street, where it intersected with Main Street in a "Y", were two large New England style homes. The one on the north originally belonged to the Quinlans, but had recently been purchased by the Podlenski family and used as their headquarters farm. In keeping with the plan of the original town of Squakheag, in which every Main Street lot-holder had a parcel of meadow land as well, their tobacco, cucumber and potato fields were located on the Great Meadow. The Podlenskis, whose comings and goings we often observed, like the Luciers kept to themselves.

The large house on the south side was the old Pomeroy Mansion, built around 1800 by General John Nevers. [H.C. Parsons, *A PURITAN OUTPOST*] It was now the property of the Northfield Schools, and had been the residence of Elliot Speer before his untimely death. The Polhemus family lived there in 1936. Lester Polhemus held a position at Mount Hermon. The home, with white clapboards and slate roof and with a long connecting breezeway and sheds to a garage at the rear, boasted of modern appointments and appliances and was very well maintained.

There were two Polhemus boys, Douglas and Roger, the latter being about my age. Roger and I palled around together, and I was occasionally invited into their home, which was always spotlessly clean and neat. They had an extraordinary number of wonderful toys, such as an Erector set, Lionel trains, a microscope and so on. One time Roger showed me an attic room where a "secret panel" in the wall gave access to a crawl space above the sheds. It was said to have been a hiding place, built by the original occupants, for escape in the event of an Indian attack. It was a story that really impressed me then but which I now find hard to believe. Anyway, Roger's mother, Jessamine, put a stop to our playing up there.

Across Main Street, on the southeast corner of its intersection with School Street, stood the Center School. It housed grades one through eight. I first attended Center School when we quit the West Northfield School, entering Miss June Wright's second grade. Miss Wright, daughter of one of two town doctors, was a fine teacher who made me feel at ease in class.

Center School was an imposing structure. Built in 1880, it had a basement, two floors of classrooms, an attic under a steep, gable roof, and a bell-tower complete with bronze bell. It was painted a yellow color.

Northfield's Main Street was considered one of the most beautiful in New England; or anywhere in the World, for that matter. Lush, green lawns swept back from native granite curbs to large homes set far back from the street. It was a unique plan, atypical of early eastern towns. Two rows of magnificent trees, one of American elms the other of rock maples, planted by one of the town's visionaries a hundred years before, paralleled each side of the street, between it and the homes. In 1936 they were giants of their kinds, with trunks three and four feet through and crowns towering 140-feet above the ground. During the summer months the elms, in the rows closest to the street, formed an overhead arch of welcome shade for overheated travelers.

The center of town, the business center if one considers a half-dozen businesses a center, was a quarter-mile south of Meadow Street,

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at the intersection of Parker and Warwick Avenues with Main Street. On the east side, at the head of Warwick Avenue, stood the Belcher Memorial monument; a granite bowl under a highly-polished granite shaft. It was in fact a drinking fountain for horses. H.C. Parsons was quite right to conclude, in 1936, that the 1909 trough was "destined to be somewhat memorial to the disappearing horse."

(More recently, when widening the streets and squaring-up the intersection, the monument was relocated to a relatively obscure site beside the Town Hall. At least it still exists.)

The Proctor Block, a square, two stories, wood framed, flat roofed building on the northeast corner, housed Avery's variety store, Irish's "grocery and other goods" store, and the Post Office. Eugene Hutchinson, who would become a close friend of mine, lived for a time in the apartment over Avery's.

Across Warwick Avenue, in another two story block building, lived Harry and Mrs. Haskell. Harry was a constable, a fire chief and a cobbler, sometimes all at once. His wife served as the town clerk.

The First Parish Unitarian Church, dedicated in 1871, graced the southwest corner of the intersection. At the base of its grand spire, a gilded clock showed and tolled the time to all four points of the compass.

On the fourth corner, directly across Main Street from the Proctor Block, stood the Webster Block. Similar to the Proctor Block it was the property, not surprisingly, of the well known Webster family. Two businesses, Gingras's Drug Store and the A & P Grocery Store, occupied the front part of the building. In the back were offices, and on the second floor, apartments. Miss Webster (who married a Mr. Goodspeed) lived in the old family home next door. For a time she taught music at our school.

If we drove or walked northward on Main Street from Meadow Street, we'd soon come to the Northfield High School. An architecturally pleasing structure, it was built of red brick in 1911. Ruth and Raymond already numbered among its students, Betty, Bob and I would wind up there in the future.

Farther on, on our right, we'd see the gray-granite Dickenson Memorial Library, probably the most beautiful building in downtown Northfield. Mother would work there from 1938 until 1959, to retire from the position of head librarian.

Just past the library our street dips to cross the bridge over Mill Brook, near the site of the first Squakheag mills, then curves slightly uphill to our right. Everywhere north of Mill Brook to the New Hampshire boundary was called East Northfield.

At the time of its naming, Northfield was the northernmost of the "field" settlements in the Pioneer Valley: Springfield, Hatfield, Deerfield, Greenfield then Northfield. But no one really knows why the qualifier "East" was attached to the northern part of town. Perhaps because it was opposite West Northfield, across the river. A further inconsistency appeared with the calling of the southern part of the township Northfield Farms instead of South Northfield. Fortunately there were only two post offices, one in Northfield center and the other in East Northfield.

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The first significant edifice north of Mill Brook was the Trinitarian Congregational Church. This was a very large church with the capacity to seat over 1200 churchgoers, a requirement necessitated by the magnetic appeal of one Dwight L. Moody, the famous evangelist who often held services there at the turn-of-the-century.

Now that we'd moved, this would be our church.

(Sadly, that fine architectural example of a New England house of worship, erected the year my mother was born (1889), would burn to the ground in the 1970s.)

About a quarter-mile north of the church we'd come to the IGA Store. It occupied the north half of the main floor of a large, two story frame structure. Another business, Miller's Hardware, where I would come to buy bicycle parts, occupied the south half. There were a couple of apartments on the second floor.

Farther up the street, where the road turned off toward Schell Bridge, Gordon Buffum owned a two story building which housed a variety store, a cafe, a gas-station and some apartments. Beyond that, all the property this side of New Hampshire belonged to Mr. Moody's Northfield Seminary for Girls.

Northfield's claim to fame was that of being the birthplace of Dwight L. Moody, renowned Christian Evangelist in the latter half of the nineteenth century. After making his way in Chicago, where he founded the Moody Bible Institute, he acquired sufficient property in Northfield to found the Northfield Seminary for Girls (in about 1880). It was followed by the founding of the Mount Hermon School for Boys, across the river and south of the Holton Farm. They were attended by girls and boys of religious families, sometimes as an alternative to public high school. While the majority of students came from out of town, a number of local residents attended on a non-live-in basis. Some of my grammar school chums would go there, and as a consequence I would lose contact with them.

A great many townspeople worked for the school system, making it the largest single employer in the immediate area. The properties were well managed, the campuses rivaling those of some eastern colleges in size and opulence. Each school had its own farm, to provide fresh products for the resident students.

There were some among Northfield's natives who thought the Moody students snobbish. I never found that to be the case. In the forties I would work with many of them at The Northfield Inn, which was, by the way, owned and operated by the Moody Schools.

The house on Meadow Street was quite a change for us kids. It was relatively new and the builder had incorporated quite a few modern conveniences in its design. The rooms were large, clean and light, in spite of the lavish use of varnished woodwork. A large living room or parlor area, split in the middle by square columns and arches of varnished wood, extended the full length of the east side of the house. In the front was a big picture window (unusual in those days) through which could be seen the street and a hayfield beyond.

The kitchen was quite unique, for in its walls were so many doors and windows there was little space left for appliances. The openings led to the front porch, the bathroom, the cellar, the back porch, the

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pantry, the dining room, the second floor stairway, the living room and a sewing room. Oh yes, between the back porch and pantry doors was one concealing an ironing-board. And two or three windows took space from the south wall. Mama groaned when she first saw that kitchen.

The big sink with its spacious drain boards on either side she liked. She had the boys move her work table and kitchen cabinet (the one that she'd won in a "jingle" contest in Keene) into the middle of the room. The range just fit into an el-shaped area by the stair well, on the side of the room opposite both the pantry and the sink. Mother would get a lot of exercise in that kitchen, washing, ironing, canning, baking and turning out depression meals for the seven of us.

There were three real bedrooms upstairs, plus a long narrow room with sloping ceilings under the west gable. At first Raymond and I slept there, and later Bobby and I. As for the rest, I think Betty had the bedroom under the north gable, Papa occupied the one under the east gable, Mama and Bobby used the south gable room. I believe that Ruth, as long as she lived at home, had the dining-room-turned-bedroom on the first floor.

Father took up the occupation of painter and paperhanger; or, in modern parlance, "interior decorator." He bought a second-hand Ford Model "B" Coupe with a V-8 engine (the first Ford with a V-8), removed, or had removed, the rumble seat and in its place built a small pickup bed. It was not a very wide bed, but it easily accommodated his ladders, boards and materials, the tools of his new trade. The bed also provided space for us kids to ride on those rare occasions when we got to go on a trip. Summer or winter, hot or cold, rain or shine, that's where we rode. With lots of blankets and a canvas tarp over us, it was not a bad place to be even in the worst kind of weather.

I remember a trip up the Mohawk Trail one Sunday in autumn, to visit our Aunt Minnie Cromack, one of Mother's sisters. We piled into the Ford right after church, travelled through Bernardston, Greenfield and on up the trail in the Berkshire Hills. Partway up the grade was a lookout, where we stopped and climbed a tower for a panoramic view of the sprawling town of Greenfield. The leaves had already turned color and the valley was a veritable artist's pallet of pastel shades of red, crimson, orange, yellow, light and dark greens and browns. I was oblivious to the fact, but at that time 15,000 people resided in Greenfield, mostly concealed by the many deciduous trees.

It was unseasonably warm that day and the car's engine overheated as we climbed slowly toward the summit. Papa was obliged to stop numerous times at "watering holes" beside the road.

Mother Nature's generously provided springs of cool water had originally been tapped for the relief of thirsty draft horses, straining to pull wagonloads of goods and people over the mountain. Now they satiated the demands of automobiles whose horsepower, contained in iron cylinders, strained to make it up the same steep hills.

We welcomed the pure, cold water ourselves, and Papa filled a jug that he always carried for that purpose. I suppose that, before the white man's arrival, thousands of Mohawk Indians had slaked their thirst at those same sweet-water springs.

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My father had an apparent fetish for drinking water. He was especially careful of our well at home, but he also seemed to know the location of every good spring for miles around and would fill his jug at every opportunity. He advocated drinking lots of water and forever espoused its healthful value.

(While I certainly agree with his theory, it is not always easy to get good, pure water to drink. So I resorted to drinking it in the form of coffee, which is boiled of course, and soft drinks, which I trust has been purified. More recently I've taken to buying artesian well water. At 35-cents a gallon it is cheaper than either coffee or soft drinks and probably more healthful.)

When we reached the little town of Colrain, Papa turned off the highway, found the Cromacks at home and we enjoyed an afternoon's visit. Uncle Ted and Aunt Minnie had several children, one of whom, also named Ted, was about my age. We immediately headed for the barn, where we entertained ourselves by jumping into the haymows. After a while Aunt Minnie called us out for homemade ice cream. And was it good! Later still she served a light supper. When the cool of evening fell, we said our goodbyes and headed for home.

As with virtually all of my first cousins, Ted would go his way and I would go mine. We've not seen each other since the early forties.

There was a great deal of work to be done in and around our new home on Meadow Street, to give the place a "lived in" look after its having been unoccupied for a while. The grass needed mowing, the house trim needed paint, the chimney needed cleaning, and the weeds in the back yard had to be knocked down and so on. Mama put us to work almost immediately, assigning a share of the load to each of us.

One of our first projects was to build a suitable shelter for the dozen or more chickens Mother had insisted on bringing from the Holton Farm. In other words, we needed a chicken coop. Out of a pile of old boards and two-by-fours behind the shed we made a lean-to on the north side of the garage. It even had a hinged shutter that could be dropped over the glass-less window in cold weather. We put a low, narrow door in one end, so low that even I had to stoop to enter. When the nesting boxes and roosts were nailed in place it was done.

Well, almost. Before long I discovered that it was terribly hazardous, if you were barefooted, to enter the coop after dark. So, using the bulb and reflector from an old broken flashlight, some wire and a "Blue Bell" telephone battery, I rigged an interior light. It was not much of a light, not very efficient, but I was inwardly proud of the accomplishment. It was my introduction to electricity.

Our front lawn was fairly level and relatively smooth, and I could just manage the mowing job with an old reel-type machine. But not without a great deal of effort. I was too short to operate it in the normal manner, and had to push it by placing my left hand on the handle-bar and my right one halfway down the handle. The job got easier after a few cuttings.

There was nothing that could be called a lawn in the back yard, but Mama insisted on our having one. Grass grows quite naturally in the East (unlike in the West) so all we had to do was cut short the wild stuff. First we mowed it with a scythe, and dried the hay for the

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chickens' nests, then cut it even with the lawnmower. Within a few weeks it filled in and, though kind of rough, looked like a lawn.

A rather unique feature of the Meadow Street house was a concrete strip, perhaps two feet wide, that entirely encircled the foundation. I suppose it was designed to catch the rainfall from the short eaves above. In fact there was a lot of concrete on the property: two wide walkways in front, a set of wide steps to each of the front doors, another set in the back. Even the well in the front yard had a four-foot-square concrete lid. It was great to play on, all that concrete, especially in the muddy season.

Betty and I were both impressed by several big-leafed clover plants that grew between the concrete and the dirt driveway at the northeast corner of the house. One of those plants seemed to consistently produce "four leafs." Whenever I felt the need for some extra good fortune I'd go out and search for a lucky leaf. More often than not I found one. I never could tell if it helped, but as the old timer would say, "It didn't hurt none."

Of course we had a garden, for, as I may have stated before, a vegetable garden was a necessity not a hobby. There was ample room for it on the back of our lot, actually over the leach-field of the septic tank. I may be exaggerating (an adult is apt to remember childhood features as being larger than they actually were), but I think the tilled area would have measured 50-feet wide by 70-feet long. It was all worked by hand; that is, we had no powered implements or even a horse. We raised the usual variety of vegetables, and in addition, two or three long rows of gladiolas. The crops grew with vigor. So, too, did the weeds.

I'd like to report that I really enjoyed laboring in the yard and garden as a youth. In truth, after a period of mild excitement for learning something new, it became a drudgery. Mama had to nag at me to keep me going. I was more interested in finding an easier way to do it than in accomplishing the mundane job itself.

My pal Roger and I did find time to play, however, and discovered that the back corner of our lot, under a tall elm tree, was a great place to dig and operate our toy trucks and cars. Or we'd climb the elm to see who could go the highest on its ever-dwindling branches. I always won that competition, often climbing to within six feet of the top of the sixty-foot tree.

But it often rained in Northfield. My how it could rain. Roger and I decided to build some sort of a shelter by our tree so we wouldn't have to go inside the house to play. Old boards, flattened tin cans, parts of old cars, we put them all to good use. Not all at once, it was a continuing project with almost daily modification and improvement. The resultant shack was never quite dry inside but we enjoyed a feeling of security when the raindrops hammered the tin roof over our heads.

Our shack was big enough for only two kids, specifically, Roger and me, so we were more than a little annoyed when my brother Bobby intruded. He was too young, we agreed, to join our mature club.

"Go away, little baby," we'd holler at him. He'd cry and run to Mama, who would then make me weed the garden or do some other chore as punishment for picking on the little guy.

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It was a tough proposition trying to keep Bobby out of our house, and sometimes when we were away he got in and wrecked some of our things. Up to then I had pretty much ignored him but now he was of an age that he could no longer be brushed aside, a force that had to be reckoned with, even reasoned with, and I had to relinquish some of my independence. He was not a bad kid, understand, just younger and therefore less sophisticated than we in his playtime activities. So we invented ever more ingenious locks and bars for our house.

In our backyard, between the lawn and the garden, stood the skeleton of a long ago unfinished garage. It had a concrete foundation but just a dirt floor. Three of the sides were roughed in, the fourth, where the doors would be, was open. Ceiling beams and roof rafters were in place, but that was all. It was open to the weather above.

The weather-beaten structure was an obvious attraction to us kids, a sort of private "jungle gym." Like Superman or Tarzan we climbed the rafters or swung from ropes tied to the ridgepole. No child ever had a finer playground than that.

On Mondays, though, when Mother hung the clothes to dry on lines strung between the interior wall studs, it was off-limits. It was a great place for clotheslines, big enough for all the clothes she had to hang and protected from the wind.

Betty was a great organizer. (She still is.) She decided to have her own circus, using the skeletal garage for a big-top. She invited a bunch of her school chums and some of mine to the show, which turned out to be a huge success.

I guess there were about eighteen of us in attendance; mostly girls, including Karlene Tyler, Carolyn Miller and Janet Janes. Billy Shattuck, Roger Polhemus, Bobby and I were the only boys. Each of us had to wear some kind of a costume, mine was a sailor suit. Others came dressed as gypsies, clowns or Indians. Our pets doubled as "wild animals" and performed such tricks as rolling over and jumping through a hoop. We rigged a trapeze, a high swing suspended from an overhead beam, and a tightrope strung between the walls two feet above the ground. I thought the best part of the whole affair was the free lemonade.

Someone thoughtfully posed and captured our group on film for posterity.

One Fourth-of-July in the late thirties, Grandpa and Grandma came to visit us on Meadow Street. The family rallied around for the occasion. We spent the day firing the cannon and firecrackers, playing croquet, tossing a ball over the roof (Ally-I-Over) and ingesting lots of sandwiches, watermelon and lemonade.

Grandpa had his Civil War vintage fife and drum with him. He'd been too young to fight in that war, a fact that always seemed to bother him because he was very patriotic. He beat the snare-drum exceedingly well, and participated in parades and band concerts with the Keene Band. Now he proudly entertained us by drumming a variety of tattoos and rhythms of popular marching songs.

At dusk we went to the Northfield Seminary grounds to watch a fireworks display. At the northeast edge of the campus, on a sloping field that formed a natural amphitheater, we sat on the grass in the

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warm, still, night air amongst a horde of fireflies who put on a pretty good show of their own.

The celebration was all that it should have been: Roman candles, rockets, flares and aerial bombs, and appropriate "Oohs" and "Ahhs" from the crowd. It was my first observance of an organized pyrotechnic display. I was duly impressed.

I remember our having only one pet dog, though we always had a cat or two around. Wayne was a medium-sized dog of mixed breed, probably part collie but with shorter, yellowish-brown hair. He was really Raymond's dog, in that it was Ray who took him hunting and cared for him. Wayne was a pretty good dog even by my standard, which is admittedly prejudiced. He was well behaved, minded us kids in a protective way, and was not allowed in the house. He'd not go out of his way to pick a fight with another dog, but if he were challenged he would do battle till he won. When injured he had to nurse himself back to health, which is something most dogs do quite well despite what many people think. If he tangled with and got the worst of it with a skunk, as he often did, then we shunned him for several days.

Wayne was a good hunter, possibly by nature, possibly because whatever animals he killed constituted the major part of his diet. We bought no food for him, and most of our meal leftovers went to feed the chickens. Occasionally Mr. Irish, the grocery store owner, would give us a bagful of bones for Wayne, but the rest of the time he was on his own.

He'd go after a woodchuck, digging down three or four feet if necessary to root it out of a den. Squirrels were more elusive, still he managed to catch a careless one once in a while when it strayed too far from a tree. He killed snakes with a seeming vengeance but I don't recall his eating them.

Wayne's one bad habit was chasing cats, and killing them if they were slow or dim-witted. Perhaps he thought of them as skunks and therefore fair game.

A good skunk pelt was worth a few bucks in those days, so Raymond decided to go into the fur business - with Wayne's help. He fashioned a "scoop" by cutting a two-gallon, rectangular oil can in half on the diagonal and mounting it on the end of a long pole. With this device in one hand, a flashlight in the other, a bran-sack stuck in his belt, Ray took Wayne hunting after dark. When the dog cornered a black-and-white he'd hold it at bay while Raymond flashed the light on and clapped the inverted scoop over their quarry.

The next step was a bit tricky. He'd maneuver the scoop so's to uncover the skunk's tail, grab the tail and jerk the surprised animal out and up off the ground in such a manner that it could touch nothing with its feet, thus rendering its "odor-emitting machinery" inoperable. He'd then drop it carefully into the sack. True, the sack and surrounding air got a bit smelly, but in this way he avoided being directly sprayed with a pungent oil-de-cologne.

Ray dispatched the skunk with a "twenty-two" but he had to be careful to shoot it only in the head, lest the pelt be scarred and reduced in value. He always hunted for a big skunk with a minimum of white stripe down its back. The less white the better the price. However, he was lucky to bag even one skunk in an evening's work.

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The hard parts of the job was done the following day; when he'd skin the animal, stretch and nail the hide to a board, scrape it and set it aside to cure. He then hoped for a fair price for the pelt. Wayne's compensation, for his part of the job, was the meat.

Although we were now living in a modern house in town, life that first winter could hardly be considered easy. For one thing, money was scarce. After Father paid the rent (about \$50 a month) and bought fuel, there was little left for Mother to buy groceries with; and virtually nothing for clothes.

We had a furnace in the cellar, but insufficient cash for enough coal to heat the whole house. So it just sat there, idle and gathering dust. Instead of central heat, then, the kitchen was warmed by the cook stove, the sitting room by a free standing coal stove. The rest of the house, except for whatever warmth spread from those two sources, was not heated at all.

The big kitchen range was made of cast iron. Coils around the firebox heated a supply of water. A pseudo oven took advantage of the chimney heat to keep foods warm. Originally designed to burn wood or coal, it had been converted to burn kerosene. Like everything else in our civilized world, kerosene had its advantages and disadvantages. We no longer had to put up with messy coals, ashes and dust in the kitchen, but, according to Mother, the fire was not as hot nor the oven as efficient as before. And there was always the odor of kerosene in the house, especially when the raw fuel got spilled on the floor, a not uncommon occurrence.

A kerosene burner was a rather ingenious device, though, and I was intrigued by the way it worked. Fuel to the burners, two of them, was fed by gravity from a float-controlled carburetor, which in turn was fed by gravity from an inverted, five-gallon glass jug. When Raymond left home I inherited the job of replacing the empty jug with a full one, a once-a-day chore. The jug had to be filled from a horizontal fifty-gallon drum in the back yard, carried to the range, lifted to my chest level, turned over and set on the carburetor. No matter how hard I tried, invariably some of the fuel would drip from the spring-loaded cap when I inverted the jug, and spill onto the floor, my shoes, or my bare feet. And the odor stuck to my hands long after the job was done. Once I dropped and broke a jug, splashing its contents all over the place and onto my pants. But I was twice lucky. It happened outside the house, and I escaped injury from the flying glass.

Each kerosene burner consisted of two, concentric asbestos wicks resting in the bottom of a shallow pan, the pan enclosed by an open-topped canister about six-inches in diameter. The whole system from carburetor to wicks was a source of trouble: leaky fuel lines, dirt in the lines, deteriorated wicks and so on. In spite of its faults, Mama could turn out a really wonderful meal on that range.

During the summer season, to alleviate the problem of too much heat in the kitchen, Mama used a light-weight (full size) wickless kerosene stove. It was quick to heat and to cool, but was a dangerous appliance in the hands of the uninitiated. To get it going you poured a measure of white gas into a tube that led to a pot-burner, then aimed a lighter - a lit kerosene-soaked bit of rag on a six-inch wire

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- at the burner. The gas ignited and warmed the pot. Then you turned a valve and the kerosene took over.

If, however, you unadvisedly poured the white gas in when the pot was still warm from previous use, a violent explosion was inevitable. More than one "cook" wound up with singed eyebrows as a result of such an action.

So we lived in a house with lots of new-fangled devices, including, of course, an indoor bathroom. Alas, by mid-December the sewer system began to fail. At first the toilet would back up and the kitchen sink would hardly drain. Then neither the toilet nor the sink would drain. Papa and Raymond did some digging in the back yard and somehow got the system to work, but it soon failed again. By now the ground had frozen hard and was virtually impossible to dig through. The septic system was abandoned!

Papa diverted the sink drains to an above ground area, built an "outhouse" in a corner of the backyard shed and furnished it with an old Sears catalogue. So it was that we renewed our acquaintance with Chic Sales. However, because of the winter weather our visits were as infrequent and as short as possible.

In the spring, under Papa's direction, the boys would dig up the entire septic system, clean out the tank, replace the broken terracotta pipes and get everything working properly once more.

That winter was not totally frustrating, however. Our street had a good grade to it and was therefore an ideal course for the ripper. On good ice, we could start at the top of the hill by Roger's house and speed all the way to the Great Meadow. Of course, if we should meet a car coming up or see a train on the tracks, we'd have to abort the run by nosing into a convenient snow bank.

Sometimes we'd drag a toboggan up the hill and ride it down the sloping field of snow behind Roger's house. Or we'd take it to a slightly steeper hill below the railroad tracks. All in all, there were more open hills to play on, close by, than there had been on the Holton Farm.

As the year came to an end, after living in our new environment six months, I was getting accustomed to town life. I had a new friend, Roger, school had become less formidable, and I actually enjoyed learning my "Three Rs." But memories of life on the farm were fast clouding over.

While I'd been adjusting to town life, my elder siblings were progressing in their own ways. John was in Springfield, working with a group of artists on a WPA (Works Progress Administration) Federal Arts Project. Richard, who had briefly attended college "out west" in Antioch, Ohio, was now a carpenter in Bernardston. He and Stanley, who had left the grocery store business, tore apart a house in Enfield, Massachusetts (the site of a future reservoir named "Quabbin," for thirsty Bostonians) and rebuilt it in Bernardston. Stanley went to work for Streeter, running the old Huckle Hill Farm. Dorothy, after having spent a year or so at college, was employed as a cook (or domestic) by a family in Greenfield. Frank was running the grocery store in Bernardston. Charlie, too, was now working for Harold Streeter, on a farm by the highway at the east edge of Bernardston.

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Of those of us at home, Ruth was a busy junior at Northfield High School; Ray was in the class right behind her; Betty and I were in grammar school, Center School; and Bobby, not yet old enough for the formal classroom, was under Mama's feet at home. Papa worked long hours, papering and painting homes in Northfield and surrounding towns. Mama held us together, both physically and spiritually.

Without any conscious thought about it, I presumed that my own future would be straightforward and routine. I'd take my place on the town roster like any typical (whatever that was) Northfield boy. Only later would I realize that more of Northfield's youth moved away than stayed to make their homes in that beautiful place. I would be one of the former, albeit with reluctance.

CHAPTER FIVE
SOME LESSONS LEARNED

On New Years' Day, 1937, or possibly an hour into the 1st day of the year, calamity struck our family.

My brother Frank, accompanied by a friend, Hurlbert Denison, had driven to Boston to visit friends. They travelled in Frank's 1930, Model-A Ford panel truck. In those days, Boston was roughly a hundred road-miles from Bernardston, almost three hours driving time away.

Presumably they celebrated the old year out and the new one in. Whatever, when they turned toward Bernardston Frank was at the wheel. And somewhere near the little town of Athol, he either fell asleep or otherwise lost control of the truck. It rolled over. When it came to rest, on the driver's side, Frank was pinned underneath. His partner, who'd been sleeping in the back, was unhurt but unable to extricate my brother, who died within a few minutes.

Though I never heard it mentioned, the question of whether they'd had anything to drink before heading home must have been raised. I have always assumed, considering their backgrounds and church affiliation, that alcohol was not a factor in the accident.

There was another factor to be considered as a possible cause of the accident, that of Frank's permanently impaired vision. He had lost the use of one eye when he was eight or nine years old, when a steel cooking fork he was using, to untie a knot in one of his shoestrings, slipped and struck him in the eye.

At the time of Frank's death I was too immature to realize the gravity of the situation. It was one of those things that I simply couldn't comprehend - as if anyone ever can. It is probably a Godsend if we cannot.

Both Father and Mother took his death especially hard, as one would expect. But Father's sorrowful mood continued for a long time while Mother, at least outwardly, accepted the fact with stoicism.

Frank's truck was towed to our place on Meadow Street and parked out back by the chicken coop. With timid curiosity I looked it over, trying to imagine what the accident had been like.

I remembered the bloody wreck near Winchester that I'd seen some years before. Compared to the vehicle in that wreck, this one didn't look like a "death car." It had suffered remarkably little damage;

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given a new battery and some minor repairs it might have been driven away.

It's hard to describe my reaction to the sight of my brother's blood, now dried but still very much in evidence on the truck's door and frame. I wanted to avert my eyes but could do so only with great effort. Needless to say, I was rather relieved when the black Ford was finally gone, no longer there to remind me of the supreme finality of death.

Frank Henry Phelps, an intelligent and highly motivated young man, was in the 21st year of his life.

He was personable, he liked people (even kids), and he respected others and was in turn respected by all who knew him. It would be difficult for all of us, adjusting to life without his friendly, helpful presence.

After Frank's death Father grew increasingly distant from those of us at home. Or was it just my imagination? He and Mother had not communicated well before, now there was a noticeable gulf between them. Also, to a greater degree than before, he left the raising of the family to her. He was almost always away from home, at work during the daytime and socializing with acquaintances in the evening.

I would eventually come to realize that we, the younger half of the family, missed a lot by reason of Father's absences. But even later I would learn that, while he communicated more with them, my elder siblings experienced some pretty difficult times, especially when discussing what they wanted to do with their lives. So who can say which of us was better off?

During the next few years of weakening family ties, Papa seldom raised his voice in anger to any of us kids. In fact he showed considerable affection for Betty (who well deserved it). He was always the "head of family," and out of respect we tried to not do anything of which he might disapprove.

Well, that's only partly true. From time to time I found myself engaged in an activity that was not only dishonest but one that could have resulted in a whipping were I caught. Thinking back on it, I suspect that Papa knew all along what I was doing but at the time I believed that I was being very clever. It had to do with his personal hand tools.

As were his father's, my father's tools comprised a set of precious and private implements, to be used and maintained in a careful manner and never loaned to anyone. To that end he kept them in a sturdy, iron-bound chest in the shed, a chest so big and heavy that I couldn't even lift it. It was firmly secured by a very big padlock.

Because Father was away so much, it fell to us kids to help Mama make minor repairs around the house.

(I should note that, back in the thirties, the renter did virtually all of the house maintenance or it was not done at all. A landlord merely collected the rent. Period.)

We of course had to have hand tools, saws, pliers, hammers and so on, to fix those things for Mama, and more often than not we had personal projects to work on. We just had to get into that chest.

So I found that by moving it a ways I could get at the back, slip the pins from the hinges, lift the lid and reach the contents. Papa

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was gone so much there was little chance of his discovering my little game, but even so I made it a point to promptly return any items that I borrowed. If he was aware of what I was doing, then he must have decided to condone it as long as I didn't lose or damage anything.

And that's how I learned to take really good care of hand tools. I couldn't afford to dull a chisel or a bit, or allow a plane or a saw to get wet and rusty, for then I would be found out for sure.

Perhaps I'd have been better off if my father had caught and punished me for those acts of indiscretion, for I was later apprehended in connection with a far more serious crime, the result of which taught me one of the most important lessons of my youth.

I had acquired a taste for candy that was almost addictive, but I never had enough money to indulge myself. For the most part I had no money at all. I didn't even know the meaning of the word "allowance." If Mother gave me a nickel or a dime it was supposed to last till she gave me another, not for any specific length of time.

I had begun to pal around with Eugene Hutchinson, a blond kid about my age and size with whom I seemed to have a lot in common. We "hung out" together, rode our bikes together and got into trouble together. As we would now.

Next door to Center School, or rather across School Street to the north of it, was a gas station. Within was a variety of goodies for sale - candy bars, gum and so on - all invitingly displayed on open shelves. Just like the other kids, Eugene and I would go over there during recess and buy a penny's worth of candy. After a while, with no premeditation or conversation about it, we "lifted" a candy bar or two. It wasn't that we had a need, thieves never do, it just seemed an easy way to satiate our appetites.

We believed that our modus operandi was so good that no one ever saw us take the candy, and we rationalized, in typical fashion, that we would never make off with anything of significance. What's a candy bar to a businessman who takes in hundreds of dollars a day?

It wasn't long before the man who owned the place confronted my mother with the facts of the matter. She must have been devastated. Embarrassed. Certainly disappointed. That afternoon, when I got home from school, she sat me down at the kitchen table and repeated the conversation she'd had with the store owner. I could not refute the charges. I was sunk!

"Haven't I taught you stealing is wrong?" she queried.

I shuddered at the sound of that word. I had not even given that word a place in my silent thoughts. "Filching," "lifting" or "pocketing" perhaps, but not "stealing."

"Yes," I mumbled.

"Don't you have any respect for other people's property?"

"Sure."

"How'd you like it if somebody stole something of yours?"

"I wouldn't."

"Well, Land-o-Goshen!" She was mad now, that was her ultimate swear word, reserved for when she was really upset. "Why'd you do it then?"

There was no good answer for that question. Nor could I answer her question about how many candy bars I'd taken during the course of

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my life of crime. I guessed it was less than a dollar's worth, which, of course, was quite a few at a nickel-a-bar.

Mama made me take a dollar from my meager savings, and that very afternoon escorted me to the store (an embarrassment to both of us) to make restitution. I was frightened half to death by the prospect of meeting the proprietor face to face. When we did, my mother explained our mission and asked the value of the stuff I'd stolen. (Luckily, his estimate was close to mine.) And then, after some prodding from Mother, I handed over the money, apologized in a weak and shaky voice, and promised to never do it again.

It was a humiliating experience, but less so than it would have been if my schoolmates, who had all left the playground by then, were watching. At last we turned to go. I breathed a genuine sigh of relief. The ordeal was over.

When I got to thinking about it, I was amazed by the fact that we'd been caught in the act. And forever after I was thankful that we had been, thankful that the proprietor was aware of what was going on in his store, thankful that he didn't just write off the loss as a "part of doing business."

I have never believed the old saying that "Crime doesn't pay," because I've heard and read about so many people who have made it pay. I do believe that crime doesn't pay for someone who's had a proper upbringing, someone who has self respect, someone with a conscience.

In recent years, the "Soap Box Derby" has become a refined sort of sport for kids and their fathers; mostly, I suspect, for the satisfaction of the fathers. When I was a youngster I had something that could have qualified as a soap box car, but the term had not yet been invented and I built it without my father's help. (Albeit with the use of his tools).

I used a wide, flat board for a frame, and parts resurrected from old kiddie-cars, baby buggies, orange crates and so on for the rest. It sort of evolved as I went along. In addition to an orange crate hood and a cheese-box seat, it had a steering wheel (an old cart wheel), a cargo bed (a fruit box), headlamps (old bean cans), and a hood ornament (a pot-metal toy soldier). Eventually I added a roof: a bran-sack stretched over laths.

When I thought it was completed, Betty suggested that I should paint it. Together we gathered a bucketful of elderberries from the woods out back, for pigment, squeezed them through a cheesecloth and, using a rag for an applicator, laid the bloody liquid onto the wood surfaces. Our "paint" soaked in pretty fast, required several coats and was practically all washed away in the first rain shower. For a while, though, we had a purple beauty.

While the car was a fair representation of the real thing, it was not very fast and the single-axle steering system (from an old toy wagon) was extremely unstable. Betty and I sometimes took turns riding and pushing it, as we'd done with our wagon at the Holton Farm, and frequently tipped it over.

At about that time, both Betty and I got a yen to learn to ride a bicycle. Roger Polhemus had a bike, a girl's bike, and he agreed to teach us how to ride it. The fact that it was a girl's model made it easier to learn on than a boy's; when you lost your balance you could

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slide forward and put your feet on the ground, whereas with a boy's bike you'd tip over sideways or hurt yourself on the top bar. We were fortunate in having a road with a gentle grade to practice on. It was a lot easier learning to balance if you didn't have to peddle at the same time.

Betty was first in mastering the art, but before long I got the knack of it. "All of a sudden," as it were. It's amazing how quickly young folks can learn such things, in just a few days I felt as if I'd always known how to ride. And then I wanted a bike of my own.

I think I acquired my first, shabby bicycle from Eugene, for a couple of bucks in cash. I would own two or three "junkers," mostly assembled from and held together with old parts gleaned from local dumps. And after Raymond moved to Milford, New Hampshire, in 1936, (to work for a farmer named Cutts) it was up to me to keep them in repair.

The worst bicycle component, the one that gave us the most trouble, was the tire. It was tubeless. Not like a modern tubeless tire that fits snugly against an airtight rim, but a small-diameter (about 1½ inches in cross section), thick-rubber tube with a tread on the outer circumference. Forcing it over the edge of the wheel rim was a job in itself. And then it was inflated to a fairly high pressure, compared to the newer "balloon" tire, and was extremely susceptible to punctures.

We had a number of fixes, or remedies, for leaks, none of them very satisfactory. Molasses or sour milk, sometimes in combination, introduced through the valve stem were common hole-sealers. Or you could wrap the tire and rim in the area of the leak with several layers of black friction tape. At best these remedies merely slowed the escape of air. The black tape gave you a thump-thump ride. One filling with a hand pump might last for half a day, if you were lucky. I seldom got together enough money to buy a new tire, which cost \$2.00 (and by coincidence was the price of a new leather seat) at Miller's Hardware store, so I usually made do with someone's castoff.

A major problem with our old bikes was the coaster-brake, the "New Departure" brake. It was built into the hub of the rear wheel; an assemblage of ball bearings and races, springs, disks, bushings, all subject to wear. I spent a lot of time disassembling, cleaning, reassembling and readjusting that device. It was the first complex piece of machinery I was to work on, and I enjoyed the experience in spite of those frustrating moments when the pieces just wouldn't go back together. I learned the value of keeping my temper, too, because when I lost it something else would go wrong and I'd have to start all over again.

The front fork was another source of trouble. A fast collision with an immovable object, such as a tree, a building, or a high curb, was generally enough to bend it backward. Sometimes I could "bend it straight." Often I could find a better one at the dump.

When I had to break down and buy new parts for my bicycle, I got them from the only store in town that carried them; Miller's Hardware in East Northfield, a three-quarter-mile hike away. At first Mama furnished the necessary money, reluctantly taking it out of the grocery fund. Later I would use my own money, money earned by peddling

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flowers or delivering newspapers. In any case, I bought parts only as a last resort.

I once got to ride an early high wheeler bike, when an "older" man brought it by the gas station on School Street. It was an antique even then, and a novelty. The front, main wheel was some four or five feet in diameter. It was trailed by a small, coaster wheel perhaps a foot in diameter. Some of us kids crowded around and the man, when we expressed interest, showed us how to get up on and ride the beast. It was scary, sitting on its tiny seat high above the ground, and I never felt like I was in control of the thing. (A feeling that I would one day experience on the back of a horse.)

The pedals of the high wheeler were fixed solid to the main axle. There was no coaster brake. To coast you took your feet off the pedals; to stop you pressed a wooden "flat" against the hard rubber tire. To alight you had three choices: You could have a friend grab the machine and hold it while you climbed down; you could sidle it up to a porch or a bench and step off; or you could just stop and let it tip over. Due to uncontrollable circumstance, I opted for the latter.

It was easy to see why the bicycle as we knew it—a low frame with two wheels of equal size, chain-and-sprockets for mechanical advantage, coaster brake for safety—won out over the high wheeler. It was the coaster-brake, in my opinion, that made the difference. That invention probably had more to do with the increasing popularity of bicycling, in the first half of this century, than any other one thing; except, perhaps, the balloon tire.

Then one day Roger and I found an old buggy in the vacant lot behind our house, below the high school ball field. What a bonanza! The shafts, between which the horse would have been hitched, were missing. But that didn't bother us. We had no horse anyway.

A little new grease in the wheel hubs, some haywire here and there to secure loose parts, a bran sack to cover the coiled springs protruding from the old cracked leather seats and we had a viable machine. A downhill racer. We tied the ends of an eight-foot piece of rope to the front axle, just inboard of the wheels, so that we could steer it from the seat.

It was our plan to head it downhill and let gravity provide the motive force, just as we did the ripper in the wintertime. And so we raced down Meadow Street, Roger or Eugene and me, with a clatter all the way to the Great Meadow. That was when we had a good run. More often we'd lose control of the crude steering system and wind up in a ditch, occasionally to fly ignominiously through the air into the brush. The buggy was amazingly rugged, though, and withstood our worst abuses.

Then, in the fall, it suddenly came up missing. My partners and I searched the neighborhood and surrounding woods without finding a trace of it. We expanded our search to the meadow, discovered buggy tracks in a tobacco field and followed them to the river. There, half submerged in the swirling, muddy waters below the bank, was our vehicle. We stared at it from above.

Recovering it would be a real challenge. First, because we were all scared of the river and its slimy clay banks, not to mention snakes and who-knew-what creatures lurking in the burdock, weeds and

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bushes. Second, the top of the steep riverbank was at least twenty feet higher than the water level, and there was no kind of a path or trail in evidence.

But kids seem to welcome such challenges, and we were no exception to the rule. With ropes and poles, sweat and strain, and a bit of ingenuity, we hauled the buggy from what could have been its final resting place to the dry field above. On examination we found that it was only slightly damaged. A few minor repairs and it would be as good as ever.

The recovery and repair of our buggy proved to be a short lived triumph. Within a week it disappeared again. This time, despite a thorough search, our pride and joy was nowhere to be found.

We never figured out who might have taken the buggy, either time, though we had a number of suspects in mind. Most likely it was one or more of the town's "big boys." For all we knew, whoever took it from us may have had possession of it before we came across it the first time.

But the old black buggy showed up again, in late October, under such circumstances that we would make no claim of ownership whatsoever.

Around midnight of All Hallows' Eve, the bronze bell in the Center School tower broke the silence with a long, loud peal. A short time later (the way I heard the story) the town constable, Harry Haskell, on investigating the disturbance discovered the end of a long, unattended rope lying on the ground under the big elm tree at the north side of the building. Further detective work revealed that the other end of that rope was in the bell tower, some four stories high above the schoolyard. There was no sign of anyone around, so Harry went back home and to bed.

In the morning, when Roger and I went up to see what all the bell ringing had been about, we spied our buggy astraddle the center gable of the schoolhouse entry. What a neat accomplishment!

On the ground below, Harry and a half-dozen "town fathers," all of them scratching their heads, were trying to figure out how they were going to get that buggy off the roof. Harry asked if we knew who did it. (I guess he deduced, correctly, that we were too small to have perpetrated such a crime.) We answered, "No," and inwardly wished that we had.

The men would have liked to apprehend the culprits, if only to get them to take the buggy off the roof. As it was, the town crew spent all day at it, first removing the wheels and bed, then lowering everything down, one piece at a time, by rope.

That was the last we saw of the old buggy. (And as far as I know, that Halloween was the last time the bell in the tower would toll before the schoolhouse burned in 1940.)

Frank's death, in 1937, caused my life to take a significant turn. A few years before, Frank had taken up the violin and learned to play quite well. Mother was very fond of the violin, and his playing pleased her very much. The loss of Frank and his music was a double blow to her.

A short time after his funeral, when emotions had returned to nearly normal, Mother and Dorothy proposed that I should study the

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violin; partly to honor his memory, partly because I seemed a likely candidate (at the time) to fill the void. They had apparently discussed the possibility at some length before broaching the subject to me.

Dorothy was very culturally oriented. She had an appreciation for fine art and good music. Additionally, she was very attentive to and involved in family matters. When we were on the Holton Farm, she taught Betty and me the rudiments of piano playing. After three or four lessons I tired of the exercise and quit. (Betty stuck to her practices, and would go on to become a fine pianist, organist and instructor, a professional musician of merit.)

Now I was being offered the chance to study the violin. I knew that Mother really wanted me to play, but that she was in no position to pay for it. I knew that Dottie was offering to foot the bill, but that somehow didn't seem fair to her. It was a quandary. Unless I planned to work hard and stick with it, I should decline the offer. On the other hand, I liked the sound of the violin (not everyone does, you know) and thought it would be great to be able to play one. I deliberated, duly considering the fact that I was slight of build and not at all clever at sports. Playing the violin might be good for me.

(I've often wondered why the word "play" is used in connection with musical instruments. "Work" might be a better word for it.)

Every kid needs some way to prove his worth, whether at baseball, taxidermy, photography, music, or something else entirely. So I would accept the offer. Not just to please Mother, although that was certainly a factor, but also for the chance to prove that I could do it.

Dorothy, to whom I would be forever indebted, would pay most of the bill, a considerable sum, incurred over the next five to six years. I would receive private, weekly lessons, except for summer breaks, at two dollars a half-hour session; sessions that, due to my instructor's generosity, would invariably last three-quarters of an hour.

That instructor was Harold Alexander Leslie, a promising young virtuoso who resided in nearby Greenfield. Mr. Leslie, as I would always address him, was not just a violin virtuoso, he was also an excellent teacher and a man of great integrity. I cannot adequately express the high esteem in which I held him. It must suffice to say that he was handsome, energetic, personable, intelligent and extremely talented. My respect for him was boundless. I only regret that I would not measure up to his expectations, thereby rewarding him in some measure for his efforts on my behalf.

From Mr. Leslie I learned how to read and interpret the language of music, and how to listen to it. I learned the history and mechanics of the violin, and how to play it. I worked with the exercises and compositions of the masters, until I was intimately familiar with the classical form of music. His traditional method of teaching - where the pupil starts with the basics then masters the classics before developing a personal style - was, in my opinion, the logical way to do it. I played virtually no popular music during my first few years of study, but later, when I would perform with Bill Shattuck's dance band, I'd find it easy to read that or any other form of music.

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In the beginning I practiced on a three-quarter-sized violin, graduating to a full-sized one in a year or so. I'd spend an hour at the grueling chore every day except Sunday. How patient and tolerant my mother and siblings must have been, to listen to so much dissonance. There are few sounds as hard on the ear as that of a kid's, or an adult's for that matter, un-melodic noises when learning to play a musical instrument. (About the only thing worse, I'd say, is the noise made by today's so-called "rock stars.")

I should point out that, in the thirties and forties, very little instrumental music was taught in the public schools. Mrs. Goodspeed came to our classroom at Center School a couple of times a week, played the piano and taught us to sing. And that was great. We learned songs from the Civil War and World War I eras, Stephen Foster songs and so on. But there was no school band. Those of us who played, learned from private tutors. In some ways, in many ways, it was better that way. There is certainly a lot more incentive to practice if your folks are paying the bill than if the school (the taxpayer) is paying.

One of Mr. Leslie's great attributes was patience. And my reticence must have taxed it to the limit. I was a good listener, I easily assimilated his instructions, I just didn't like to talk. If I could get through a whole lesson without having to speak, I was happy. Of course that was illogical and impossible, so he persisted until I eventually loosened up. In the end, he had not only taught me how to play the violin, but also how to carry on a conversation when I didn't particularly feel like doing so.

At first, Mr. Leslie came to our house to give me a lesson. After a couple of years, though, Dorothy or someone would take me to his home in Greenfield. There I met his beautiful wife, Bernice, and their two children: Jeannie, a beautiful little girl with long, golden hair, and John, a cute youngster just learning to walk.

As is true of all really outstanding people in their chosen fields, Mr. Leslie dedicated his life to his vocation; the study, performance and teaching of good music. He worked hard at it, and was apparently fairly compensated.

He had at least one avocation not related to music, that of pistol shooting. A crack shot, he had hopes of competing in the upcoming Olympic Games. But the advent of war and cancellation of the games put an end to that dream.

One time, when my violin lesson was over with, Mr. Leslie asked me to go along with him to an indoor shooting range in Greenfield. As he'd done with the violin at my first lesson, he described the firearm—a heavy barreled, nickel plated, special 22-caliber revolver with a mother-of-pearl grip—from one end to the other. Then he loaded it and fired the rounds at a faraway target. When he retrieved the target I noted, with amazement, that only the center quarter-inch of the bulls-eye had been disturbed.

After practicing fifteen minutes or more, he asked if I'd like to try it.

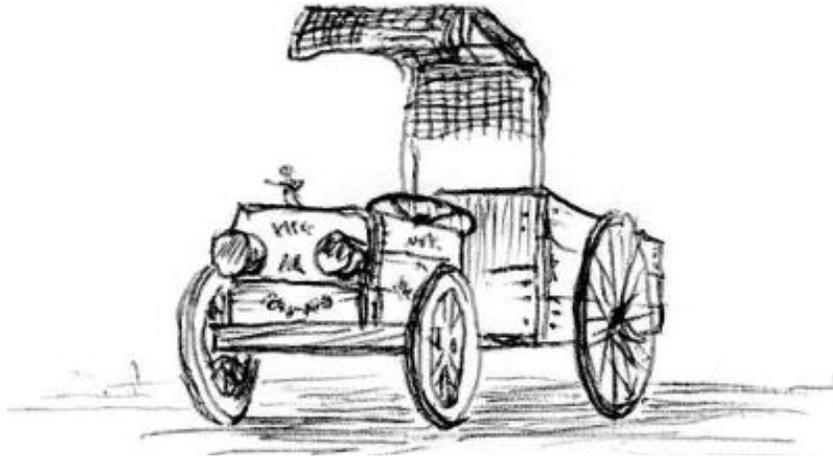
"Yes," I responded, trying not to appear over-eager.

But first he gave me a thorough lecture on the care, handling and safety of a firearm, and the proper position and stance when firing a

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pistol. Only then did I get to take it in my own hand, load it and shoot.

It was my first experience shooting any kind of a firearm, and I'm proud to say that I did pretty well. All of my shots were within the two, innermost, concentric rings of the target. Best of all, Mr. Leslie commended me on my attitude and control.



George's homemade car

CHAPTER SIX
SCHOOL, WORK AND PLAY

My world in the late thirties was filled with things to do. I was involved in so many activities, both mandatory and voluntary, that I cannot now afford the space to describe them all. But I will relate a few of the more significant events of that period, to provide as good a picture as possible of my life as a youth.

On the big scene, wars were rampant in Europe and Asia. Here in the United States, the economy was slowly improving after a very deep depression, technology was surging in sync with the need for new machines for a pending war.

But I was not much interested in any of those items of news. I was secure in tiny Northfield, confident that world affairs would take care of themselves. (Unfortunately, a lot of adults in America felt the same way.) We celebrated the Fourth of July, attended the cemeteries on Decoration Day, saluted the flag every morning in school, and carried on a tradition of patriotism that I thought would never change. It was a good time to live. At least in this country.

I was a pretty good student in the lower grades, too shy to get into much trouble. (I was never in the principal's office, but I think it was occupied by Mr. George Leonard.) We had no homework to forget, and Miss Dalton made sure that we maintained proper decorum in the classroom.

Miss Mary Dalton was the ultimate personification of an old maid schoolteacher. She taught the third and fourth grades, critical steps on the ladder of learning. We were trained to memorize things - not so difficult at that age - like classical poems, the spelling of words and arithmetical times-tables. For the most part, Miss Dalton's stern countenance was sufficient to enforce discipline. But on those rare occasions when that was not enough, she had two really effective methods of getting an individual's cooperation. One of them was the ruler-across-the-back-of-the-hand slap; the other, which she reserved for boys I noted, was the tweak-of-the-short-neck-hairs move. I could take the first like a man, but that thing with the neck hairs would raise me up off my seat and bring tears to my eyes, which was certainly embarrassing.

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I earned those correctional measures for what I considered to be "innocent" acts; such as snickering at something that I thought to be funny, or responding to one of her questions with, "Gee, I don't know."

Miss Dalton was stern, but played no favorites (unless it was toward the girls). She would go on to complete a long and dedicated career, teaching two and three generations of the same Northfield families.

The Center School playground was small by today's standards. There were swings and a teeter-board for the youngest students, we boys could play marbles, the girls hopscotch. Or we'd get together and play tag. There was a weed lot in the back, where the older boys played informal baseball or football depending on the season.

Since I was such a little guy, always the smallest one in my grade, I avoided getting into fights. I always thought fighting and arguing were unproductive anyway. But some boys felt a need to lick someone, just to prove the point if for no other reason. I got involved in one such fight when I was a fourth-grader. By good luck it turned out to be a wrestling match; I don't think I could have survived a fist fight. After a brief period of name-calling, the kid threw me down and we scuffled in the dirt at the south side of the schoolhouse. And then I surprised both of us when, in spite of my smaller size, I got a scissor-hold and a hammer-lock on my opponent and we called it quits; coincidentally when the bell rang to end our recess. Nothing much was proved and I hurt like the devil, but I was never forced into another fight after that.

Thinking back on it, there was very little fighting or unruly behavior at school in those days, in spite of the fact that we had no teacher supervision, per se, on the playground. Apparently there was no need for it. We had no ethnic problems, despite the many first-generation Polish and Irish kids in our midst. We came from families of vastly different backgrounds and means, but in school we were on an equal footing; all trying to learn the same things. Racial terms like "Pollock" and "Mick" were taken in good humor. We respected one another, not because we were told to but because it was a natural thing to do. I was lucky to have been a part of that order.

Mother Nature, in her inimitable way, provided us kids with a welcome springtime diversion from the classroom. Gypsy-moths, or their offspring tent caterpillars, had become a serious threat to the forests of New England. While in the hungry caterpillar stage, they were fought by man with torches and, in a limited way, insecticides. In early spring, before the eggs that were laid in the previous fall hatched, school children were enlisted to find and collect as many as possible of the egg-encrusted tree twigs.

Calling it a nature walk, the teacher marched our class out School Street to the woods, describing the flora and fauna along the way. At the old gravel pit, just east of the intersection of School Street and Birnam Road, we came upon some rare (at that time) Mayflower plants. Without a doubt its flowers are among the most fragrant of all wildflowers, perhaps because it blooms so early in the year it needs the extra power to attract bees.

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Alas, because of Man's innate desire to pick beautiful flowers, and because of the trailing arbutus's refusal to give them up easily, picking them usually uprooted the whole plant, threatening them with extinction. We were encouraged to either cut off the blooms or not pick them at all. But it's hard to get people to follow rules, especially voluntary ones.

(I understand that now, with laws that forbid the picking or removing of Massachusetts' state flower, it is making a healthy comeback.)

Our teacher showed us where and how to find and detect the gypsy-moth eggs. Then we'd cut or break off the twigs, eggs and all, and take them back to school where they were collected and destroyed by the town fathers. Once we knew how, we hunted the eggs on our own after school, the incentive being a modest prize for he who had the largest collection.

It was Mother's love of flowers, coupled with a need to augment Papa's allowance, which led to our growing some of the most beautiful gladioli ever. In addition to long rows in our vegetable garden, she planted them in beds around the house. They were a lot of work to raise, though. The bulbs had to be dug in the fall and the new little bulbs had to be separated from the mother bulbs. Smelly Naptha flakes were sprinkled over them, to ward off "thrips and things," and all were then stored away in the cool, dry cellar for the winter. Come spring and they had to be replanted in the fresh warm earth again.

Mother grew a wide variety of colors and sizes of "glads," and produced none but healthy, long stemmed beauties. The one called "Picardy", an especially large, salmon-pink variety, was without a doubt my favorite.

One chore that I didn't much like, although the rewards were good, was peddling her glads in the summer. Two or three times a week she would cut and place them in a long, shallow basket, their tips hanging over either end, the stems lined up in the center under the tall handle. Betty and I would each hook an arm under the handle, and off we'd go to Main Street to "peddle our wares."

Our steady customers were women of class, women who spent their money on such things of beauty. They always seemed eager to buy, and some would add a tip to the payment "because we were so cute." We had other customers who bought flowers less frequently, and sometimes a stranger would see us and purchase a bouquet. On returning home, our basket was almost always empty and our purse full of dollar bills and coins.

I never much liked being a salesman, a house-to-house salesman at that. But no matter how much I protested, Mother insisted on my being a partner, along with Betty, in her flower business. Since I received a portion of the take, I guess you could say that peddling flowers was my first job. The money certainly came in handy when I needed a part for my bicycle.

When there were no flowers to peddle, no lawns to mow or no weeds to pull - and sometimes even if there were - I played. Behind our garden, beyond the corner where Roger and I had our shack, a weed-filled, brushy slope reached up to the rear of the high school grounds. There, not long before we moved to Meadow Street, an area had

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been cleared and leveled for a ball field. In the process, a steep embankment of sandy loam, perhaps ten to fifteen feet high, was left at the edge of the lot. The underbrush had not yet taken hold there, and it was an ideal place for us kids to play. And it was close to home, being only 150-yards from our back door.

Roger and I took our toy trucks to the site (I had a steel dump-truck then) and built roadways and dug tunnels in the sand. It soon resembled a miniature village perched on a mountain side. We got to making bigger tunnels, extending them ever deeper into the embankment, until one such bore was large enough that a kid should fit into it. Or was it?

One day, for a reason the logic of which escapes me, I wriggled into that hole. Luckily, feet first.

Disaster struck, with a suddenness that took me totally by surprise. A cave-in! The whole banking above my tunnel, six or more feet of it, dropped down on top of me. I can still sense the shock of that cool, heavy sand forming around my body. It was like a cocoon. My legs, torso and left arm were buried and immobilized. The pressure on my legs was excruciating. Only my right forearm was free, and my face. I'd heard of shallow breathing, mine was almost imperceptible. I couldn't expel enough air to make a sound. I was hopelessly helpless.

I was still alive, though, still able to breathe. A few inches more of dirt and my head would have been covered. As it was I was afraid that at any moment more of the banking would give way and finish me off.

By good fortune I was not alone at the time. (Though I have to admit to not remembering who was with me. It is unforgivable not to remember one's lifesaver.) Whoever it was, he quickly sized up the situation, recognized the futility of it and ran to our house for help.

An eternity passed. The pain in my chest increased. Every tiny inhalation was an effort. Help finally arrived, with shovels, and enough dirt was removed that I could be pulled from my temporary tomb.

When I was free again, and once more able to breathe deeply, the seriousness of the situation sunk into my young mind. I had come precariously close to death. What was it that decided my fate by such a narrow margin? Surely not the vagaries of chance. It had to have been a more powerful, protective force. I prayed to God in thanksgiving, with all the sincerity I could muster.

Now I had two quasi-phobias; the fear of drowning and the fear of being buried alive.

We used the weed lot behind our place for all kinds of recreational activities. Sometimes it was to fly our kites, either the traditional diamond-shaped type or a box-kite. Both were homemade of sticks and fragile tissue or newspaper; both were extremely susceptible to breakage.

We held sling-shot contests there, using the kind with which David allegedly slew Goliath. Ours was a patch of shoe leather suspended from two parallel strings, somewhat resembling a kid's swing only two feet long. The end of one string was tied around the middle finger of your dexter hand; you grasped the end of the other string between your thumb and forefinger and let the "swing" dangle while you

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placed the ammunition, a golf-ball sized pebble, in the fold of the patch. Centrifugal force held the pebble in place, if you were lucky, when you whirled the sling around your head. At the appropriate time you released the loose string and the pebble flew on its way, hopefully in the direction you intended. It might go as far as a hundred yards, but accuracy was something I would never achieve.

Another throwing device, one that Papa showed us how to make, could have been called a "shingle-arrow and launcher" (for lack of an official name). A piece of a roofing shingle, two inches wide by eighteen long, was shaped with a jack-knife to resemble an arrow (the symbol used on signs) with the point at the heavy end. A notch was cut in one side, forward of the center of gravity, to accept the knotted end of a two-foot piece of heavy twine. The other end of the twine was attached to the launcher, or throwing stick, which in turn was about two-feet long. This device provided considerable mechanical advantage (similar to that of an Indian atlatl) for launching the arrow, which was accomplished as follows:

"Hold the tail of the arrow in your dexter hand, the handle of the launcher in the other. With the knotted string wedged into the notch of the arrow, the string held taut and in line with the arrow at a slight upward angle from horizontal, thrust the stick forward sharply and let go of the arrow."

Properly executed, the arrow should fly in a smooth trajectory a distance of a hundred feet or more. Like the sling, accuracy was not inherently capable with this device.

Beyond the weed field was a woods; really a tangle of underbrush, brambles and vines, and wild cherry, birch, sumac, alder and scrub trees. Much of it was so dense that one could hardly find a way through it. At the lower end, the west end, running parallel to the railroad right-of-way was a stand of tall, slender birch trees.

It was there that my friends and I mimicked Tarzan the Ape-man (but with our clothes on). I'd climb to the top of a birch and get it to swaying back and forth like an inverted metronome. At the end of a cycle I'd let loose with my feet, reach out with either a foot or a hand, grab onto an adjacent tree and transfer to it. Repeating the process I could travel the length of the patch, fifty yards or more, without ever touching the ground. So, too, could my buddies.

Tree swinging as a sport was not without its hazards, however. Sometimes, if you misjudged the height of a tree or its suppleness, or the distance to the next tree, you could wind up suspended from an inverted treetop; like a spider but with only one alternative, to drop! More than once I dropped a distance of twelve feet, my knees ending up around my ears. Luckily none of us ever broke a bone, or suffered more than a bruised skin or ego.

In autumn, armed with wire-handled lard buckets, we climbed the vines of the wild, purple grape, sometimes thirty feet high in the trees, to harvest the fruit for Mama to use for making jelly or juice. The grapes always looked good enough to eat, but they were not. Take my word for it, they were truly "sour grapes" consisting mostly of seeds and skin. But the juice that Mama made was very sweet and tasty.

We also harvested wild berries in season; blackberries, red- and black-raspberries, currants, blueberries, strawberries (tiny but

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sweet) and elderberries. If there were enough, Mama would use them for jellies or pies; otherwise we ate them out of hand.

Sorry to say, I would never become particularly fond of domesticated animals as house pets. Our world, in my opinion, is overrun with house pets, primarily because of an attitude that some people call "humane." My regard for animals raised for food and clothing, however, might be higher than that of many a consumer, despite my general aversion to meat in my diet. They evolved, over the millennia, for that specific purpose. As for wild animals, I have always held them in great respect.

But no animal, no matter how beautiful or "smart" or useful, should be treated like a human being.

I feel sorry for those who have trouble understanding Mother Nature's ways, those who expend untoward effort and expense to save a sick or injured animal when it would be better left alone; to die or to get well by her own hand. All too many people, in my opinion, interfere with the natural order of things. As has been done with the human species, they would prolong through artificial means the lives of lesser animals, totally ignoring the First Law of Nature: "Survival of the fittest."

I got my first good look at exotic wild animals (I'd had but a glimpse of them at the circus in Greenfield) in New Hampshire, when Papa took us all to Benson's Wild Animal Farm. I felt sorry for the beasts, that they had to be caged, but that's what made it possible for me and others to see them up close.

Benson's was really a training ground for those wild animals, lions, tigers, bears, elephants and so on, and their handlers. Visitors to the farm could, for a small fee, wander around and watch them in training, and at the same time the animals got used to people. I enjoyed the performances at Benson's as much as, if not more than, those at an actual circus. Perhaps it was because the animals seemed wilder and less predictable at the farm.

We may have visited Benson's when Father was taking Raymond to Milford, New Hampshire, to work as a live-in farmhand for the Cutts family. Ray was about sixteen then, old enough, Papa figured, to leave home and earn his own way. I remember Raymond's taking but a few belongings, leaving his dog and a couple of homemade (archery) bows behind. The bows he'd recently cut in the woods, roughed out to shape and put up in the shed to season.

Raymond, I think, was born too late, by about a hundred years. He loved being alone with his dog, hunting and exploring in the woods. He made his own bows and arrows and practiced shooting at squirrels and woodchucks, sometimes with success. He also built snares and traps to catch wild animals, and box-traps for taking them alive. He continued those activities after moving to Milford, and after a while Father took Wayne up there to live with him.

One time, before Ray left home, I went with him on a skunk hunt. Wayne found a likely looking den, a hole in a dirt banking under the roots of a dead oak tree. I never saw a dog throw up dirt like Wayne did that day, uncovering the quarry in a matter of a few minutes. The cornered skunk turned out to be a mother, and she had four cute kittens with her. Ray "scooped" the mother, who wore a prime,

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predominantly black coat, and took care of her in the usual manner. Catching the kittens was no more a problem than a litter of domestics would have been. Apparently only recently weaned, either their scent-sacs were undeveloped or they didn't yet know how to use them, for they remained odorless.

Back home, Ray skinned out the big skunk and stretched its hide while Betty and I, with little Bobby underfoot, built a "skunk house" for the wee ones. We used old boards and chicken wire for the project.

Since the young skunks so resembled ordinary kittens, we suspected that they'd eat the same kinds of food. And sure enough they lapped up cow's milk with amazing gusto. Two of the little fellows died within a few days, though, from shock or lack of maternal attention, a third one lived several weeks, the fourth survived in apparent good health. (The first three skunks' dying despite our good intentions was a lesson to me. It was plain that we should never have tried to care for them.)

The survivor became a pet, and though he presumably had the means to "spray" he never did so. Once, for a lark, Betty and I walked him around the neighborhood on a leash, an act that caused people we met to veer away from us with exclamations like, "Oh no!" and "Watch out!"

I don't remember what we called our friend, but he was a good little fellow. Naturally nocturnal, he liked to sleep during the day and complained, making funny little whining noises, when we woke him. Almost anything edible satisfied his appetite, but he especially liked fresh raw vegetables. And that would be his downfall.

Toward the end of his second summer, when the sweet corn was ripening in our garden just a few feet away from his cage, the black-and-white kitten, now grown up, couldn't resist the temptation. He broke out, worked his way along the nearest row of corn and, one by one, pulled down an ear, peeled back some of the husk and nibbled the exposed kernels.

Not until morning did we learn of this escapade, when, after finding him absent from his cage, we looked and found the rascal resting comfortably on the cool ground in the corn patch. Mother might have tolerated his indiscretion, had he confined himself to eating just one or two ears and left the rest for us, but he had ruined a good part of our crop.

Betty and I repaired the skunk house and got him back inside. He seemed quite amicable, probably because he'd eaten so well. A few days later, however, he was out and at it again. This time he went on a veritable spree and decimated a majority of our corn. Mama then made it perfectly clear (in words quite succinct) that our no-name pet was no longer welcome. Reluctantly, Betty and I escorted him to the woods and turned him loose near where he was born; literally, back to his roots.

The following morning our little friend was back in his adopted home. We found him ambling through the garden, not the least bit sore at us for leaving him to walk back alone. (If Ray were still living at home, I'm sure he'd have nailed that skunk's hide to a stretching board by now.) We didn't wait for Mother's advice, but immediately took him away again, this time farther north, to a glen near the mouth of Mill Brook.

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It took him three days, but back he came. We found him going through the lettuce patch; he'd already ruined what corn he could reach. So we picked him up and Dottie drove us, by way of Bennett's Meadow Bridge, across the river to West Northfield. A mile north of the Mt. Hermon station, at the edge of a patch of dense woods and brush, we said goodbye to our furry friend. This time forever.

Betty and I felt pretty bad about turning him loose in the wild. It was akin to taking a kid from Brooklyn, turning him loose in Vermont and expecting him to survive. Or vice-versa. But then we concluded that this had to be better than our final alternative: Execution!

I like to think that our tame friend adapted easily to his new environment, perhaps to West Northfielders' gardens, and lived to find a compatible mate and raise a family.

Church, with its related activities, was such a normal thing that I didn't think about what my life might have been like without its influence. Almost everyone in town attended some church: Adventist, Baptist, Catholic, Trinitarian-Congregational or Unitarian. Those of Polish and Irish descent were predominant in the Catholic Church, but the majority of Northfield's citizens were of a Protestant faith.

We attended the Trinitarian-Congregational Church, which was located just north of Mill Brook "on a knoll... surrounding the rock on the face of which was carved the record of the killing of Aaron Belding by the Indians in 1756." [H.C. Parsons, *A PURITAN OUTPOST*, 1936]

Our minister in the 1930s was Reverend Stanley Carne. He was followed in 1941 by Edward Dahl, and in 1945 by Joseph Reeves. A Sunday school was held prior to the regular service each week, the latter beginning promptly at 11:00 AM. I managed to remain at least partially attentive to the sermon, in spite of my youthful predilection to be elsewhere. At hymn time, a grand pipe organ filled the auditorium with resonant sound. Singing along with that organ was a highlight of the service.

After the service, in good weather, the older folks gathered on the great steps at the main entrance of the building, to shake the minister's hand and offer comments on his sermon, and to exchange greetings with fellow parishioners. While that was going on, we kids ran around on the lawn, played tag, or found other ways to release that energy held at bay throughout the service.

The church sponsored a "summer school." It would be an understatement of fact if I said that I was not keen on attending. I hated it, but Mama insisted on my going. It just didn't seem right that a kid should have to go to school in the summertime, when supposedly on vacation from learning. Of course it was intended to keep us occupied and out of mischief.

In fair weather, tables were set up on the north lawn under the big trees. There we drew pictures, made "crafty" objects and played silly games, mostly related to Bible stories. My attendance was no doubt good for me, but I didn't appreciate it at the time.

On June 25, 1939, I became a member of the congregation, and received a copy of the King James Version of the Holy Bible to mark the occasion. My mother was pleased. Needless to say, at the age of

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eleven I had not yet developed a personal religious philosophy, nor was I a true believer in the miracles of Christ. I did agree with the church's precepts: the difference between "right" and "wrong," and the principle of treating others as you would like them to treat you.

It has been said that one's sense of smell is particularly effective in triggering his memory, and I have found that to be true. A distinctive aroma quickly conjures up the picture of the occasion with which it was originally associated. For years, before the age of plastics, the smell of any new car reminded me of my sister's 1937 Ford. It was a unique aroma, of mohair upholstery, leather, paint, varnish and oil. It was the smell of "new" to me.

When Dorothy first brought the shiny, black Ford Coupe to the house for us to see, you could smell its brand-newness. She bought it from the long time Spencer Brothers agency in Northfield, for about \$650, I think. The car boasted an economical, 60-horsepower V-8 engine, new-style headlights faired into the fenders, a spare tire hidden in a smooth, turtle-back trunk. Its overall lines were aerodynamically inspired.

Dottie was justifiably proud of her new acquisition, and took extraordinarily good care of it. She even let us kids help her wash and wax it periodically. She was also very generous with its use.

Most of our family's dry-goods shopping, along with banking and social activities, were done in Greenfield. Riding a bus was inconvenient and expensive, and sometimes unavailable. So Dottie's chauffeuring was extremely helpful. She would take the four of us, Mother, Betty, Bobby and me, to other destinations as well; two of us riding in the narrow space behind the seat. Compared to the bed of Papa's Model-B, it was the lap of luxury.

East of Greenfield, on the ridge that runs parallel to and directly above the Connecticut River, was a stone masonry tower. It was called "Poet's Seat." That fortress-like edifice, its top above the nearby trees, stood on the very edge of a cliff from which you could look to the west over Greenfield to the Mohawk Trail.

North of Poet's Seat, a portion of the ridge was privately owned by a Dr. Russell, a retired physician of considerable means.

On one occasion, after she'd dropped-off Mama in Greenfield on some errand or other, I spent a few hours with Dottie at her place of employment at the above-named estate of Dr. Russell.

To reach the place, after passing through an ornate gate off High Street, we travelled up a long, narrow, winding macadam road to the residence. It was a mansion, set in the midst of a deciduous forest yet with a superb view of the Connecticut gorge and Millers Falls beyond.

The interior of the home, what I saw of it, was spacious and handsomely furnished. There was a large area for entertaining and a kitchen commensurate with that requirement. I was impressed. A breezeway connected the main house to a good-sized garage. Stately elms and maples shaded a well-manicured lawn and flower gardens. To the rear of the garage, where the lawn sloped downward toward the gorge, a small gardener's shed was filled with the implements of his trade. I remember that shed in particular, because I was intrigued by something that I discovered there.

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I'd been innocently wandering around the grounds when my curiosity compelled me to enter the shed. Its door was ajar. When my eyes adjusted to the dim interior, they were drawn to an object on a shelf by the window. I picked it up. It was a shiny brown tin of pipe tobacco.

I read the prominent inscription on the can:

"Briggs Pipe Tobacco - When a Feller Needs a Friend."

Well, I don't know that I particularly needed a friend right then, but after raising the can and smelling its contents I just had to taste the smoke. I took up an apple-shaped briar from its resting place and studied it. It appeared to be almost new, and relatively clean, so I poured some tobacco into the bowl, tamped it lightly with my index finger, wiped the stem on my shirt front and stuck it between my teeth. I then looked for a match, and found a half-full box of Blue Diamonds on the bench. I removed one, struck it on an iron vise, gingerly held the flame over the pipe bowl and sucked on the stem. The smoke was very pleasing to my senses of taste and smell. I thoroughly enjoyed my first real "pipe."

Having lived near a tobacco field on the meadow, I had tried smoking the "weed" before. Roger and I once entered a tobacco barn, where the leaves were curing, picked out a likely looking frond, split it and rolled ourselves a couple of "cigars." But the smoke from that tobacco had been strong. Not as bad as corn-silk, pencil shavings or dead grapevine, but not very satisfactory all the same. In contrast, the smoke from that Briggs in a proper pipe was mellow and pleasant tasting. To this day, when lighting my pipe in the out-of-doors, I am often reminded of that time in the gardener's shed, of that stolen smoke.

As I recall, Dorothy cooked for the doctor, who suffered from some ailment which required a salt-free diet. So all of his meals were thus prepared. I don't remember if I ate anything that day, perhaps a sandwich or something, but I do remember the wonderful thunderstorm that came up in the afternoon.

I stood in the breezeway and watched the rain come down in torrents. And more rain seemed to be unleashed with each stroke of lightning and resounding thunderclap. Soon the grounds were awash. Then I witnessed a sight that I've observed but few times since; that is, St. Elmo's fire. A bolt of lightning struck a power pole near the driveway, and before my very eyes it formed into a ball of fire the size of a basketball and travelled along a power line overhead to an adjacent pole. The highly charged field surrounding the ball caused my hair to literally stand on end.

It moved in slow motion (taking about as long as it did to write this sentence) to the second pole, then found a path to the ground and exploded like a small bomb. I was fascinated.

I revel in a good thunderstorm. It is one of the best shows on earth, and free. You just have to be in the right place at the right time for the performance.

Thanks to Dorothy I enjoyed three firsts that day, though it's not likely she'd wish to take credit for introducing them all to me: My first visit to a rich man's estate; my first pipe smoke; and my first sight of St. Elmo's fire.

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I loved to climb when I was a kid, and around our home on Meadow Street there were lots of things to climb: the rafters in the unfinished garage, the tall elm in the backyard, the vines and birches in the woods, a red maple in the front yard (under the power lines), and the roof of the house itself. There was also a butternut tree at the west side of the house, whose branches conveniently outstretched to within reach from my bedroom window. The window, being a dormer, was easy to get in and out of. By getting a good grip on the tree limb, I could shinny over to the main trunk and down to the ground. Bedtime, for me, was often the beginning of an evening of recreation. I would meet some of my friends and play kick-the-can or hide-and-seek until it got too dark, and then return to my room the way I'd left.

When the nighttime atmosphere was oppressive, hot and muggy, I'd abandon my upstairs room in favor of the front porch. It was screened against mosquitoes, and was considerably cooler than the bedroom under the gable. At first I was scared to sleep outside, but I couldn't decide just what I should be scared of.

The only real threat, as it turned out, was a skunk. I heard it prowling around and my heart began to pound against my ribs. Wayne, who'd been sleeping on the floor inside the door, began to growl. The skunk then showed his true colors, or true smell, and let fly an oily perfume at Wayne. The shot penetrated the screen door and hit Wayne in the face. My sleep-out for that night, and for several following nights, was ended.

In the morning, with Mother's help, I tried to clean the screen door and adjacent clapboards, an area roughly three feet in diameter. We used soap and water, we tried vinegar, we resorted to tomato juice and anything else we'd ever heard of to ameliorate the odor. But only the passage of time would render the porch, and Wayne, approachable.

Speaking of odors, an unwritten law of nature decrees that a mother must have an unusually keen sense of smell. My mother had one, I know. Somehow Eugene and I came into possession of a pack of Camel cigarettes, and, naturally, we had to smoke them. I knew it was one of those things that I shouldn't do, and as a precaution against being discovered I chewed a "Sen Sen" after every smoke.

Well, I got no closer than five feet to Mother before she knew what I'd been up to. She threatened to wash my mouth out with soap (an expedient she once used to cure me of swearing), but instead she would resort to a whipping. She sent me off to cut a willow, then used it to flog my bare legs until they turned red, all the while chasing me around the yard. (I could hardly hold still for that kind of treatment.)

That was one of the few whippings I ever received, and the last. I suppose it was the last because Mother sensed the futility of it, and because she was getting too old for the chase. Anyway, I had come to the age that usually causes mothers to abandon the idea of meting out physical punishment. True to form, from that time on she spared the rod in favor of other, equally effective means of discipline.

I didn't smoke for a long time after that, more because I didn't like the flavor of cigarette smoke than from a sense of duty.

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As a matter of fact, I'd often refuse the offer of a cigarette with a half-joking comment: "You shouldn't smoke cigarettes," I'd say. "The paper will kill you."

It would be years before the United States Surgeon General would decree (as a result of pressures from anti-smoking activists) that all cigarette packages be labeled as follows:

"Cigarette smoking may be hazardous to your health."

The irony of his statement is in the fact that he decreed no similar admonishment to the labels of liquor bottles. There is no doubt that the use of alcohol has killed, maimed and otherwise incapacitated more people, directly and indirectly, than has the use of tobacco. It is another example of inconsistency in our civilized world.

CHAPTER SEVEN
PAPA AND MAMA, WIND AND MUSIC

In the thirties, my father became enamored with spiritualism. There was a group, or cult, that met in an old farmhouse off Highway 63 near Lake Pleasant, south of Millers Falls, Massachusetts. I've always thought that Frank's death was a factor in his becoming deeply involved. Although I never heard him say so, he apparently believed that he could communicate with his departed son through a medium. In any case, he spent many of his evening and weekend hours at the "farm," or with acquaintances of the same persuasion.

Father also learned to read palms. He was sure that a person's character, personality and future were plainly etched in the lines on his palm. A lot of folks believed in palmistry. I suppose the practice is harmless enough if not taken seriously.

I did not want him to, nor did I ever let him, read mine. I always held to the philosophy that, even if someone's future could be predicted (and I don't believe it can) he'd be better off without the knowledge. It's tough enough coping with life's events as they occur. It would be very frustrating trying to make a good prediction come true, or, worse yet, attempting to avert a predicted calamity. Father was less avid on the subject in his later years, perhaps as a result of seeing too many prognostications go awry.

I doubt if Father spent much money on his new avocations, but still there was not enough to satisfy our family needs. Mother earned some money by selling beauty products on commission, but now she decided to go to work for wages.

Before she married (at age eighteen), Mother lived with her folks in Keene, New Hampshire, and worked as a stenographer or clerk for the Goodnow Company, a merchandising firm. She had also worked in a candy store. But that was a great many years ago, and I'm sure she was apprehensive about starting out in her new job, that of an assistant librarian at the Dickenson Memorial Library in Northfield.

Mother quickly adapted to the job. She liked working with both books and people; and people, especially school kids, liked her. In the beginning, in 1938, she was paid 25¢/hour (by the town). Though meager by today's standard, those earnings were important to our family's survival.

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September of 1938 turned out to be unusually rainy. Rather like the year I was born, I'd guess. The ground got soggy and soggy. Many of our vegetables rotted, others never matured from lack of sunshine. Roger and I were rained-out of our clubhouse, and had to find other places to play after school. I took to listening to the radio.

Somehow, from somewhere, we had acquired a used, table-model radio, a Crosley, to which we ran a long wire antenna from the top of the skeletal garage. During daylight hours we could tune in WHAI in Greenfield, or WBZA in Springfield. After dark we could pick up broadcasts from WBZ in Boston and WGY in Schenectady, New York. Between school-out and supertime there were great programs for kids: "Jack Armstrong, the All American Boy," "Tom Mix" and "Little Orphan Annie," to name a few of the best. They all had something to give away. By sending in a box-top from their brand of cereal (Jack Armstrong's was Wheaties) and some coin, you could get a pin or other prize. Betty and I each sent away for and got a Decoder Ring from Little Orphan Annie. With them we could encode, decode and exchange secret messages.

Radio was new to us, and, as it would one day be with television, it was habit forming. Parents decried the fact that children's programs "interfered with home duties and schoolwork." It was, they said, a "terrible waste of time." (Sound familiar?) So our listening privileges were limited.

In many ways radio was better than television. One's imagination can conjure up scenes virtually impossible to create, for practical or economic reasons, for the camera.

Most of our programs were serialized; that is, an episode continued from one weekday to the next, always with a "hook" to make sure you'd tune in the next day to find out what happened.

The evening programs were outstanding, featuring such all-time greats as "Uncle Ezry," "Amos 'n' Andy," "Fibber McGee and Molly," "Jack Benny," "Burns and Alien" and "Fred Allen."

But back to our September weather. Everybody talked about it, as if that might somehow change it. By the 18th of the month, instead of the rainfall tapering off it increased to a steady downpour that continued both day and night. The ground, now saturated, shed its excess water into brooks and ponds, which subsequently overflowed onto surrounding fields. The Connecticut River reached flood stage again, only two-and-a-half years after the Great Flood of '36.

Roger and I put on raincoats and boots, and walked to the meadow to watch the water rise. We found the usual assortment of flotsam - bottles, boards and branches at the new shoreline - and dozens of mice and snakes swimming for their lives. We made sport of knocking the snakes on the head as they came close to shore, and threw rocks at the beer bottles bobbing on the briny. It was something to do, but we got soaking wet in the process.

The storm increased in intensity. The clouds grew thick and it was twilight all day long. And Papa didn't come home. He was often away a couple of days at a time, but now, with the storm upon us, Mama was visibly upset. Only the three of us kids were at home with her,

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Betty, Bobby and I. Ruth, who had graduated from high school in the spring, was in Brattleboro, Vermont, training to be a nurse.

I found the whole idea of a storm rather exciting; another of Mother Nature's exhibitions reminding us who's really boss of the environment.

A sudden clap of thunder reminded me of a story I'd heard a few weeks before, about a bolt of lightning that struck the chimney of a house over in Gill. The charge travelled down the flue and through the body of a man, who was seated in a chair and leaning against the chimney at the time, killing him in an instant and at the same time knocking his shoes clear off his feet. I moved away from our big iron range.

By afternoon of the 21st of September, the southeast winds had increased to gale force (50mph). Roger, who had been playing at our house, put on his raincoat and made his way home against the blast. Within an hour, Northfield was in the grip of a full scale hurricane, with winds over 100 miles-per-hour to accompany the deluge.

The storm was expected to veer to the northeast off Cape Cod, but it wasn't behaving as Man had predicted. The cyclone remained on a northward track, right up the Connecticut River Valley, before finally turning and dissipating along the coast of Maine.

It was the first hurricane to strike New England in a hundred years. Damage in the states of Connecticut and Rhode Island was severe, particularly along the coast, where windswept seas inundated low lying cities and ports. Yachts and boats of all descriptions were driven inland, to be left high and dry when the waters subsided.

When the winds peaked that afternoon, my earlier feeling of excitement changed to one of inner fear. How far was Mother Nature prepared to go with her show of strength? I wondered. Suddenly the power failed! And with it, of course, the radio, our only contact with the outside world. There was no organized "public service broadcasting" in those days, but station announcers had kept us apprised of conditions as best they could. Now we were really cut off from the outside world.

Mother and Betty and I went from room to room, with wide-eyed Bobby on our heels, checking the windows, that they were closed and securely latched. Now only the big picture window in the front room was a matter of concern. The full force of the wind-driven rain bowed the glass inward, and Mama decided that we should somehow board it up. All together, none of us wanting to be left alone, we traipsed down to the cellar, gathered up squares of pasteboard, wooden boards, nails and a hammer, and returned with them to the sitting room.

The situation had worsened during our absence. The window frame had loosened and water was being driven through the cracks. It would be dangerous to venture outside, so we'd have to do our best from the inside. We put the pasteboard sheets against the glass, and with Betty and Mama holding the boards in place I hammered nails through them, right into the varnished window casings.

Our hastily contrived remedy would prove to be successful.

I peered through the rain-distorted window in the sewing room. Trees across the street were bowed nearly to the ground. A brittle apple tree split and fell onto the pavement. Shingles, boards, brush,

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hay; everything of any size not firmly secured had taken flight and was whirling through the air.

And then it got dark. Darker than the darkest night I'd ever seen. Mama had already rounded up our old kerosene lamps (the ones we'd used on Huckle Hill), and now she lit them, placed one on the kitchen table and another in the sitting room. The light was very comforting, and some of the butterflies left my stomach. Mama fixed sandwiches, and we munched on them by the flickering lamplight while the wind screamed its fury outside. I was thankful to be in such a snug haven.

The wind blew at maximum strength for two or three hours (it seemed much longer), then diminished to an almost calm for a short time before picking up again, blowing from the southwest but not as fiercely. (I would later learn that the relative calm occurred when the interior of the hurricane passed by.) At last the winds abated and we went to bed, perchance to sleep.

Throughout that whole event, though we knew we were in an extraordinarily violent storm, we didn't know that it was classified a hurricane. How could we know? Without any kind of official communications. But as bad as it was at our house, the tempest was far worse up on Main Street. We were somewhat protected by the brow of the hill.

By the time we awoke on Thursday morning, a few rays of sunshine, already working to free us from our stygian captivity, could be seen through breaks in the clouds. I ate a quick breakfast, put on my jacket and rubbers, and hurried outside.

The air was permeated with the smell of dampness, of wet dirt and leaves and wood. Our house was undamaged, although the shed had lost some roofing paper. What was left of the garden (we had harvested almost everything before) was flat and flooded. But my elm tree in the corner was still standing, albeit tilted a bit to the northwest.

I jumped onto my bike and rode up the hill, eager to see how everyone had fared on Main Street. What I saw was a sorry sight for young eyes. Because of fallen trees it would be impossible to ride any farther, so I left my bike at Roger's house while he and I took off toward the center of town, walking and crawling under and over the trunks and limbs that lay about like giant jackstraws.

Northfield's beautiful Main Street had been decimated. Over half of its stately elms and maples had fallen, like pins on a bowling alley. They'd been uprooted from the soggy ground and laid across the street and sidewalks, with power, telephone lines and cables hopelessly entangled in their branches. We were cautioned, by our elders, to beware of the downed power lines. It was a needless warning, because the main transmission facility was severed in numerous places between Northfield and the power house at Millers Falls.

The top half of the spire on the Unitarian Church had broken off and toppled onto the main roof. House and store windows by the dozens had been shattered. Fences were flattened and debris was scattered everywhere indiscriminately. Miraculously, although many of them had trees resting on their roofs, most of the fine old homes showed few signs of damage.

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People milled about everywhere, evaluating the damage, taking pictures, exchanging stories of the night before. We heard about a man who'd been driving north on Main Street, on his way home from work, when a giant elm fell across the road directly in front of his car. No worry, he thought to himself, and steered into a driveway and around the upturned roots and back to the street again. When a second tree fell directly in his path he wheeled his car around to go back, only to have a third one block his way. So he sat there, in the comparative safety of his automobile, until the storm eased and he could take refuge in a nearby home. I noted several cars along Main Street, similarly stranded and abandoned.

Except for a tragedy at the Northfield Seminary, where two girls were killed and several injured when a tall chimney at Gould Hall fell through the roof, the hurricane had caused surprisingly few injuries.

Perhaps the most significant storm-related problem, spread throughout New England, was the virtual destruction of power and telephone transmission lines. People had come to rely heavily on AC power and telephone communication, both at home and in business. The loss of power for lighting was an inconvenience, but the lack of it to run pumps, refrigeration units and machinery was serious. And the impairment of telephone service slowed overall restoration efforts. Even in our modest home (we didn't have a telephone) the absence of power was a very real dilemma.

Our water, like that of many other people, was supplied by a well in the front yard. It was drawn from the well by an electric pump in the cellar, and stored in a pressurized reserve tank. As water was used at the taps, the volume and pressure in the tank decreased and the pump (normally) started automatically to replenish the reserve.

Well, as any fool could plainly see, no power, no water! I'm not certain who it was that first figured a way around this serious problem, but it was a good idea and we quickly adopted his plan.

We hauled a bicycle down to the cellar, braced it up with the rear wheel in line with the pump pulley, and removed its tire. Next we placed a long belt around that wheel and the pump pulley, the latter having been disconnected from the electric motor. By pedaling the bicycle, manpower replaced electrical horsepower. Usually a half-hour of pedaling was sufficient to provide enough water to last several hours. Monday, wash-day, was another matter. Longer tours of duty were required. Betty and I took turns at the job, with some reluctance after the novelty of it wore off. The power outage would last about three weeks.

The town crews really had their work cut out for them, clearing the obstructed streets. A practical chain-saw had not yet been invented, so crosscut saws and axes were the tools of necessity.

And then, when the streets were sufficiently cleared that traffic could resume, people wanted to buy gasoline. Portable, electric generators were almost non-existent, so virtually every station operator rigged up a bicycle to power his pump.

Power and telephone company crews worked hard and long to restore service, using large quantities of poles, cross-arms, insulators, wire and cable. They came from all over the United States to work on the repairs. Carpenters, plumbers, roofers and contractors of all kinds

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stayed busy for weeks. The CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) boys, based in the town of Warwick, had a major part in the cleanup work, both in town and in the forest.

Damage to public and private property was extensive, some of it long-lasting and irreparable. The flood took a fair toll in tobacco barns, bridges and soil erosion, but the winds exacted the highest price, devastating the predominantly tree-covered states of New England. A bird's eye view (which I wished I had) would have revealed that half the trees in the forests were downed. Giant patches, some a mile across, were laid flat, the tree trunks all pointing the same way and denoting the direction of the felling force. And when the leaves dried out that fall, the tangled masses proved to be the worst fire hazard in the history of the northeast. All forms of hunting in the woods were outlawed.

(Actually, because of the hurricane damage and subsequent war years when a majority of hunters would be gone, there would be very little hunting activity in southern New England for a decade.)

Now, whenever I visit my native land, I am overwhelmed by the proliferation of trees. There must be at least twice as many as there were when I was a lad. Back then, in addition to the loss of trees to the storm, more farms were in actual use and the fields were free from encroachment. With the transference of a large number of small farms to "city folks," who seldom work the fields, former clearings have grown up to brush and woods. And there have been no "really big blows" for half a century.

As for signs of the '38 hurricane, 50 years has marvelously covered her tracks. But those of us who were there can still recognize the traces.

My father had gone to Keene, we learned after the fact, just before the high winds arrived. And so he was with his folks during the worst of the storm, and stayed on a while afterward to help them clean up. I suppose it was better that he was with them than with us, but at the time, not knowing where he was, we missed him.

A month later, on the 25th of October, Grandma Phelps wrote me a letter; the only one I ever received from a grandparent. In it she wished me a Happy Birthday, and explained how helpful it was for Papa to be there at that time. (Grandma and Grandpa were 78 and 83 years old at the time.)

Just as the summers found us kids enjoying our own forms of entertainment, so too did the winters. I have already written about the sledding on icy Meadow Street. We also had our own ice-skating pond. Every year, in late winter when some of the snow melted, small ponds would form in depressions in the fields and then freeze over. One such ice pond formed in the field across the street from our house, and we took advantage of it. Depending on the climate that year, the pond might be as small as a tennis court or as large as a baseball diamond. In either case it was shallow, so if we broke through the ice we'd suffer only wet legs. Sometimes a new storm would cover the ice with snow. We'd shovel it clear, or, if that was too much work, create a network of paths on which to skate. When spring was near, the water invariably drained from underneath the ice,

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leaving a saucer-shaped rink and wide cracks to watch out for. I really enjoyed the sport, but with hand-me-down skates that were two sizes too large I couldn't skate worth a damn.

The older we got the more we took to the toboggan, provided we could find an unobstructed hill to descend. One such hill was near Dunnell's Coal sheds, above the Great Meadow. It was very steep, clear of brush, and with an ice-pond at the bottom where you could come to a slow stop. We had to haul the toboggan almost a mile to get there, but it was worth the effort.

On one memorable day, when the temperature hovered around the zero mark and a hard crust covered a two-foot base of snow, the toboggan fairly flew down the hillside; although getting it back up was a bit of a chore. We were having so much fun we hated to quit, but when the sky darkened we began the long pull home, over the frozen snow and ponds on the meadow. While crossing one of the saucer-shaped ponds, I lost my footing and fell hard on the ice. My left mitten came off, when I turned loose of the toboggan rope and tried to break my fall, and my hand caught the knife-edge of an ice crack, opening a wound at the base of my thumb. The blood flowed profusely for a second or two, and then froze solid. So I pulled my mitten over it and we continued on. As soon as we got home, Mother dressed the cut, which was an inch-and-a-half long and fairly deep. It healed slowly and left a prominent scar.

(As an aside, that scar was so located that I could forever use it and the tip of my index finger as a six-inch rule. It was an especially handy guide for measuring fish.)

Mama fretted and scolded me for not taking better care of my "violin playing" hand. She always worried about me and what I was doing, afraid that I'd get hurt and be unable to practice.

Another such time was when, on a Fourth of July, I inadvertently held onto a 1-inch firecracker just a tad too long, and mangled the skin of my left thumb and fingers. It hurt a lot and looked horrible, so I knew I had to show it to Mother.

Mama had me wash my hand in Lysol, her favorite antiseptic, and then periodically soak it in a strong tea solution. Between the soakings I wore a bandage permeated with Unguentine. The cure was successful. Not even a scar remained.

The above stories remind me of a quite different injury I suffered when we lived on the Holton Farm. I was about six years old at the time. While standing on a chair by the stove, watching Mother fry doughnuts in a big iron kettle, I lost my balance, hit the kettle of hot grease and splattered some of the stuff onto my face. She doctored my burns with Unguentine, and made me lie still on a couch in the sitting room to recuperate.

I spent a great many hours on that couch, then and at other times, and became attached to a pastel picture that hung on the wall across the room. Displayed in an ornate gilt frame, tall and narrow like a window, it was a country scene; a pathway winding up a shallow ravine past a large birch tree toward a steep-roofed cottage on the brow of a hill under billowing cumulus clouds and a patch of blue sky. (It is still my favorite piece of art.)

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The Unguentine worked its wonders. In two or three days my face quit hurting and I was back to normal, with no scars to worry about.

My mother was very good at nagging me to practice the violin. No matter how much a kid may want to play a musical instrument, it is vital that a parent oversee his daily exercise. Especially in the early months and years, until the notes of dissonance turn melodic. She must have been good at it, for I was soon performing "on stage" at local women's clubs. Ah well, one has to start somewhere. Betty usually accompanied me, and was by far the best accompanist I had in my short career. Her piano playing made me look good even when I wasn't. But an accompanist seldom receives due credit.

In 1938, Mr. Leslie, at the age of thirty-six, organized the Young Peoples Symphony in Greenfield, the town he'd grown up in. It was a real symphony orchestra, instrumentally balanced and made up of about forty members aged eighteen or under. Mr. Leslie was a natural organizer and leader, demanding yet understanding, and as a consequence the orchestra performed in a very professional manner, better than some comprised of college-age students.

I was playing well enough by then to become a member, a charter member at that. There were three of us young violinists from Northfield in the group; Helen Durgin (whose parents were overseas missionaries), Helen Howard (whose father worked at the Northfield Seminary), and me. Rehearsals were held weekly in Greenfield, in a large conference room in the rear of the Western Massachusetts Electric Company's building on Federal Street.

Rehearsals were both hard work and fun. It was not uncommon to work up a sweat, but it was exciting to play with so many excellent musicians. The bad part of the evening came afterward, when we had to wait outside for a ride home with either Helen's father or my sister, Dorothy. We'd stand at the front entrance, always, so it seemed, in cold and rainy or snowy weather. It's amazing how cold and impatient one can get when awaiting a ride. I longed to be old enough to have a car of my own.

Just learning to play the violin had been educational. As a member of a symphony orchestra I got acquainted with others of my own age and interests, and learned to perform in concert with them. It was altogether different from playing solo. Whenever I had to perform solo, I was nervous. (I suspect that many, if not most, accomplished musicians experience that same reaction.) But sitting in the orchestra I was relaxed, alert but relaxed.

I believe the first time I played "up front" with the Young Peoples Symphony was in 1939, at a concert in Greenfield. John Janek, a fellow student of Mr. Leslie's, and I performed Labitzky's "Traum de Sennerin" (The Alp Maid's Dream) for two violins. I have no idea how well I did, but I survived the butterflies and finished standing up.

In February of the following year, the orchestra performed in my hometown of Northfield. Again I had a solo spot, playing Brahms' "Hungarian Dance No. V." That piece and Fritz Kreisler's "Old Refrain" were my favorites.

A couple of months later, immediately prior to doing a concert in the Greenfield High School Auditorium, I suffered a minor but traumatic accident. I was helping to move a grand piano from the main

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floor of the auditorium to the stage, for the solo pianist. As we were raising it above chest level, I changed the position of my left hand and pushed upward with thumb and finger tips, as a waiter holds a tray. It was then that I heard a cracking sound and suddenly went sick to my stomach. My thumb was bent backward "out of joint."

When the piano was safe on stage I stared in disbelief at my deformed hand. I pondered whether or not I should find Mr. Leslie and tell him that I couldn't play, but I felt too sick right then to move. And then, without further premeditation, I grabbed the thumb with my right hand and jerked it outward as hard as I could. It went back into place and I was much relieved. It began to swell, and gave me some pain, but the queasy feeling in my stomach disappeared. I went ahead and played my part that evening. Not with any noble "the show must go on" feeling, but because I was too much embarrassed to admit to anyone what had happened.

I was a member of the Young Peoples Symphony until 1942 or 1943, often performing solos or duets at center stage. I might note, for the uninitiated, that without exception solo performances were played entirely from memory.

I believe the apex of my musical career, based on degree of difficulty and quality of performance, was achieved on March 28, 1941. The orchestra was in concert at the Northfield Town Hall and I would perform, solo, J.B. Accolay's "Concerto No. 1."

I was experiencing my worst ever jitters and had a splitting headache when I walked onto the stage, my "fiddle" tucked under my right arm, in front of the orchestra before an audience made up largely of acquaintances. But God was with me. By the time I completed the introductory passage my headache was gone and I was engrossed in the music; confident, now, that my hours and hours of practice and preparation had paid off.

I played as if "J.B." himself was guiding my hands, and I was pleased. At the conclusion, the applause was overwhelming. I took a deep bow, and though I neither looked for nor recognized anyone in the audience, I knew that many of my relatives and friends were out there, including Mother and Dorothy. I hoped that they were as well pleased as I was.

I bowed again and walked proudly off-stage. The applause continued and Mr. Leslie motioned to me to return, which I did, to take another bow of appreciation. I was unable to suppress a little grin then, and another when, during intermission, Mr. Leslie tendered his own words of praise. I was happy beyond belief.

Perhaps this is a good place to reveal another "back stage" incident, related to my musical career, which took place in the same town hall. Several of us were rehearsing for some sort of a school function. I was horsing around behind the scenery, showing off (as I was apt to do), tossing my violin-bow up in the air and catching it by the nut-end, as a juggler does a knife. Inevitably I missed it. The bow landed on the floor, on its fragile tip, and snapped in two. How embarrassing! How stupid of me. And how would I go about breaking the news to Mother?

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My kindly schoolmates, bless 'em, felt sorry and took up a collection to help defray the expense of a new bow, for which I was eternally grateful.

About that violin: Dorothy purchased it for me in 1941. It was a beautiful, quality instrument with a remarkably fine tone. Inscribed inside was (presumably) the name of its maker, "GIO PALO MAGGINI," and the name of "Joseph J. Bohnak," the expert violin maker and repairer of Northampton, Massachusetts. Dottie bought the violin, bow and case from Bohnak for \$92, which seemed an enormous sum to me at the time, equating to a month or more in wages. He allowed \$22 for my old violin.

The Maggini was much easier to play than the old one and more satisfying. I would spend a lot of hours practicing on and entertaining with that violin, before entering the service in 1945.

In 1942 I became a member of the Pioneer Valley Symphony of Greenfield, an adult orchestra of 75 people, also organized by Mr. Leslie in 1939. Dottie, who had taken up the violin herself, was also a member. I was never good enough to do a solo part with the big orchestra, but we played some pretty sophisticated music and it was great experience.

From Greenfield, Mr. Leslie went to Springfield (Mass.) in 1944, to organize the Springfield Symphony. He would direct that fine orchestra until, in 1955, he'd suffer a cerebral hemorrhage and die. He was in the prime of his life and career.

I can say with all sincerity that Harold Alexander Leslie contributed more to the good of our society in his too short lifetime than the average man contributes in twice the time.

In 1943 I retired from the world of classical music, at least as a performer. My years of association with the symphonies had been educational, enlightening and rewarding, comprising a very important chapter in my life.

CHAPTER EIGHT
FIRE, FOODS, FISHING ETC.

I matriculated in relative happiness at Northfield's Center School. It was a neat old building, originally used to house both grammar and high school kids, but had been modified for the lower grades when the new high school, up the street, was built.

While it was old, it was nowhere near as ancient or colorful as the edifice next door. That place was of interest if only for its history of uses. First it was Hunt's Tavern, on the Boston Turnpike; next, in 1829, it was the "Northfield Academy of Useful Knowledge"; In the 1850s it was "Bruce's Institute of Learning."

When I was a kid, it was first operated as an Inn and then as a nursing home, by Reverend George Bronson, a rather heavy, round fellow of the Burl Ives type. At some time, when an industrious house of learning, the place acquired the nickname of "Beehive," and that is what we called it. Along with some un-printable things we called the reverend, who made it clear that he didn't like kids fooling around on his property.

But back to the Center School. While it was a good, solid structure in the 1930s, it already showed signs of age. The floors had seen a world of use and gallons of "oil." The janitor, before he swept, scattered oil-impregnated sawdust around to keep the dust down. As a consequence they were always oily.

Our desks were typical for the times: cast iron and hardwood, marked with the "glyphs" of generations of bored students. The basement, at ground level at the rear, housed a coal-fired furnace and separate indoor toilets for boys and girls. The classrooms were light and comfortable. Overall, it was a satisfactory school.

"Fire!" The school's on fire!" Roger came yelling to our house on the evening of February the 17th, 1940. That "spoiler" of man's works was even then raging through Center School.

The fire had started earlier, perhaps from a faulty furnace, and by the time of its discovery was too hot for the volunteer firemen to control. Many of us, kids and grownups alike, gathered in the cold to view the conflagration; which, fueled by dry woods and layers of paint and oily floors, was a gigantic bonfire whose heat could be felt clear across Main Street.

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With mixed emotions I stood there in the glowing firelight. I guess a lot of kids have wished that their school would burn, but when it actually happened I was sad. It had become a friendly, familiar place and I'd spent a large part of my life there. Now it was going, taking with it memories (if a building can harbor memories) of generations of students.

The thing burned all night long, ending up a pile of rubble in the basement. When the embers cooled, a couple of days later, I joined some of the neighborhood kids and poked around through the remains, looking for recognizable objects. We found, among other things, the bronze bell from the tower. It had melted into a mass of twisted metal impregnated with bits of charcoal. We hauled it away anyway, cleaned it up and kept it for a time as a "valuable souvenir." (It was eventually lost and forgotten.) We salvaged pieces of metal and pipes for future use, but what we got the most of was filthy dirty. So we abandoned that form of recreation. Besides, it was time to go back to school, wherever it might be.

There were about 125 of us displaced students, but because the fire occurred during a vacation period, administrators had time to work out temporary arrangements. Grades one through six (I believe) would go to available space at the high school, grades seven and eight to the Town Hall. I was then in the seventh grade.

Several banquet tables were set up in the hall, with folding chairs along one side of each table, all facing the front of the room. One can imagine the problems incumbent with such an array. It would be well-nigh impossible for a teacher to maintain any kind of discipline, what with under-the-table note passing, pass-it-along punches.

By the end of the school season we might well have met the requirement for days in attendance, but because of all the horseplay I'd doubt if we learned anywhere near as much as we were supposed to have. And I was one of the worst offenders, always getting into trouble for "picking on" the poor girls, for an ill-timed remark or for an out of place chuckle.

Miss Brailey was (to put it candidly) a big fat old-maid teacher. Oh, she was dedicated to her craft, just not very inspirational. As Rodney Dangerfield would have put it, "she got no respect." Especially in the town hall environment. She had trouble identifying a culprit and when she did, she couldn't get between the tables and chairs to carry out a threat.

The mood of the classroom was chaotic, if not hilarious. Well, I really got to her one day; although I'm not proud of the fact. I had perpetrated some mischief or indiscretion and was invited to accompany her to the hall for a one-on-one dialogue.

And that's what it was. Miss Brailey was the "one" doing the talking; I was the "one" doing the listening. By virtue of her towering bulk she backed me into a corner, raised her voice - and coincidentally her blood pressure as evidenced by the beet red color of her face - and let loose a terrible diatribe.

I neither denied, disputed nor agreed with anything she said. I just stood there in shock while she raved on. After a while, thinking about the predicament I'd gotten myself into, I began to smile in resignation.

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Sometimes a smile can be disarming. In my case it only added fuel to the fire.

"Don't stand there and grin!" she snapped, angrier than ever.

I was afraid she was going to have a stroke, or apoplexy, or some other dire malaise. She lost all patience, grabbed me by the arm, marched me to Mr. Harding's office and, after giving him a detailed account of my transgressions, left us. I then received a (rather mild) reprimand from Mr. Harding and was returned to the classroom. Believe me; I made a conscious effort to never again intimidate Miss Brailey.

I completed the seventh and eighth grades at the Town Hall. Though we discussed "current events" in class, my world consisted of an area within a fifty-mile radius of Northfield. My traveling experience was limited to occasional visits to grandparents, uncles and aunts. I'd not see Boston or the Atlantic Ocean, only a hundred miles away, until I was nearly eighteen years old.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was the only president I would know in my youth, his time in office coinciding with my school years. Although I can recall hearing the campaign ditty: "One, two, three, four, who are we for? Hoover! Hoover! Rah! Rah! Rah!" Hoover lost the race to FOR. Wendell Wilkie and Thomas Dewey would also be defeated by Roosevelt's political machine.

Father didn't think much of Roosevelt; his life style in particular and his policies in general. But a lot of people must have for he would be elected an unprecedented four times, the last time undoubtedly because he was Commander in Chief of our war-winning military force.

Talk of war was not uncommon in the thirties, and I saw a lot of pictures of bloody wars (in the brand new "Life" magazine) in Asia and Europe. In a continuing effort to acquire more space and resources, the Japanese were raising hell with the Chinese. Young, militant Adolf Hitler seized power in Germany and rapidly gained fame, or infamy, by organizing the Aryan "super race" of Nazis.

Still the prevailing feeling in the United States, as expressed in the newspapers, was that Americans should remain neutral and isolated from events beyond the seas.

(It has always struck me as odd that people in the U.S. refer only to themselves as "Americans." Are not the inhabitants of other new world countries - Canada, Mexico, Brazil and all - Americans? I think it's a misnomer. And yet, because it is common practice, I use the term myself.)

Many news items were sufficient to grab my attention in those days, though, such as accounts of the Hindenburg disaster, in 1937, Howard Hughes' flight around the World in less than four days, in 1938, the great Pan American Clipper airships that flew across the oceans, in 1939, the first successful helicopter, invented by one Sikorsky and flown in 1940.

I remember when the ships "Queen Mary," "Queen Elizabeth" and "Normandie" plied the seas with speed and style; when the Golden Gate Bridge was first opened to traffic; when "Galloping Gertie," the suspension bridge across the narrows of Puget Sound, collapsed. I remember the excitement of the first splitting of the atom; of the

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first pictures being transmitted via radio waves; when nylon stockings became a reality. Events of scientific achievement, or failure, intrigued me much more than those involving politics.

To earn money I took up lawn-mowing, mostly for friends of the family, most of whom lived in East Northfield. One of them was Miss Merriman, whose place was a short way north of our church. She was exceptionally friendly and generous.

The work was really difficult for the grass was always too tall, too wet, and inevitably on a hillside. It was all I could do to push a mower through the stuff.

I helped my friend Eugene with his paper route. At first I just rode along on my bike as he pedaled from house to house, then I started delivering a part of his load, for which I was reimbursed with a bottle of pop and a bag of potato chips at the end of the route. After a while I took over the business from him, signing a "Lease Agreement" with the Greenfield-Recorder-Gazette."

Every afternoon, except Sunday, a man would bring a wire-tied bundle of papers for me, dropping it off on the top step in front of Gingras's Drug Store. I'd cut the wire straps (saving them for use at home), stuff the papers in the provided canvas bag, twist its wide strap around the handle bars of my bicycle, with the heavy load resting on the front fender, and go.

It took a couple of hours to cover the almost-five-mile route, delivering to patrons throughout all of Northfield south of Mill Brook except the Farms area.

A lot of the credit for the success of my new business went to Betty, who learned the route and often, probably more often than she liked, delivered the papers in my absence.

A paper route was a good job for a youngster. He had a fair degree of individual responsibility, learned to deal with people and money, and at the same time provided a useful service to the community. Sometimes there was hard work involved, even adversity, but it was always exciting. He got to meet new people, watch the seasons change, endure thundershowers and snowstorms.

And while it was door-to-door peddling, I didn't look at the paper route as a sales job. My customers were steadies, most of them non-complaining. Some were really generous on payday, Saturday, with tips in coin or good things to eat.

The worst part of the job was dealing with dogs. Apparently from instinct dogs don't like bicyclists. Or perhaps they do, for the sport of barking, chasing and nipping at their heels.

One of the little beasts would lie in wait at the Morgan's house, till after I had dropped the paper on the step and turned to ride away. Then he'd run up behind me and grab my pants-leg or shoe. I finally thought of a way to get even. Watching out of the corner of my eye, I waited for him to come up beside me then hit him on the top of the head as hard as I could with my fist. Surprisingly, I almost knocked him out. He fell away in the dirt, rolling and yelping something fierce, and I went on about my business. After that he waited for me every night, growled, bared his yellow teeth and looked mean. But he never came too close again. I felt as if I'd finally won an important battle.

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I am reminded of another particular dog. A big collie on the farm nearest the end of my route. In a predictable manner he'd wait for me to ride down the hill and into his farmyard. Then he'd race toward me at full tilt, and pull up short just inches before making contact. Never once did he hit me, knock me over, or sink his teeth into my leg.

But his demeanor was enough to unnerve the timid, a fact that sometimes led to an un-delivered paper when my substitute, unfamiliar with his habit of bluffing, refused to trust him.

I could never throw a ball worth a damn, but I was pretty good at tossing a rolled-up newspaper from a moving bicycle. There was a knack to it, of course. With one hand I'd pull a flat-folded paper from the bag, roll it twice, then flip it back-handed (as one would toss a Frisbee today) toward the doorstep as I rode by. When the weather was nasty, though, I had to dismount and walk up the steps and place the paper behind the screen or storm door, a procedure that added a lot of time to the overall job.

Sometimes in the winter, because of deep or slushy snow, I'd resort to walking some or all of my route. Since I didn't much like walking with that heavy paper-bag, I fabricated a "tire chain" for the driving wheel of my bike. (By now I had a balloon-tired bike, so the tires were wide and soft enough to accommodate a chain.) It was a quarter-inch chain, the kind used to hold a drop-leaf desk shelf. The finished product resembled that for a car, with cross links every three inches or so around the circumference. As with most homemade devices, my chain was prone to failures, mainly the breaking of cross-links. The metal was too soft.

In spite of the inherent problems, with my chain on I bicycled through some pretty deep snow and across some very slick ice. But repairs were too time consuming and I finally abandoned its use.

The human mind is indeed an extraordinary thing. Apart from its miraculous ability to care for all of a body's repetitive, life-sustaining functions, its capability for learning, decision making, imagining and invention, is its wonderful capacity to remember things. Further, I have observed, the mind has the unique propensity for retaining good memories while allowing unpleasant ones to fade away. It is this amazing facility, I believe, that permits us (most of us) to remain rational, even content and optimistic, in the face of events seemingly impossible to cope with. It would be terrible to be forever hounded by those unpleasant and tragic events with which everyone is faced at some time or other. Much better to remember the fun times, the satisfactory times, the "good old times."

Then there is one's imagination. Mine was a great companion to me when I was a youth, though perhaps no more so than that of any kid. (I never compared notes on the subject.) I found this human trait, of conjuring up figurative beings and things, to be better in many ways than reading a book or listening to the radio. I could make up my own stories, stories over which I had complete control of the plot, the characters, the settings, colors and every other detail under the sun or moon.

My mother always insisted on an early-to-bed routine. A good plan, but I was not always tired enough to go right to sleep. When it

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was too cold or rainy to sneak outside for a little recreation (as related above), I'd lie awake and let my mind wander.

One evening I hit upon the idea to direct these imaginings along a certain line, a story line. From then on I created fictional adventures, always with me as the main character, the "hero," which continued night after night like a movie serial. Sometimes I was a great inventor, sometimes an explorer or world traveler. Sometimes I constructed exotic machines or vehicles that could do anything or go anywhere, even to remote parts of the universe. I'd go to the scene of a flood, a shipwreck, a fire or a hurricane and "save the day," or the girl, or whatever, always in great detail. I suppose a disciple of Freud would have found some hidden meaning in this, but to me it was merely entertaining.

As I grew older and went later to bed, I'd fall asleep more quickly and my dreams were relegated to the subconscious.

In addition to my being small for my age, I was afflicted with an aberrant eyelid that caused me some embarrassment. My left eyelid drooped slightly (as is apparent in photos of me as a kid). I don't remember the doctor's terminology for the malady, but it was attributed to weak or underdeveloped muscles of the eyelid. I was frustrated whenever someone would say, "Open your eye," and I could not. Not completely. Fortunately, it was in no way detrimental to my vision and in time I would almost outgrow the problem.

When we were living in Keene I suffered a bad pain in one of my knees. It was "growing pains," Mother said, and at frequent intervals she massaged the area with Sloan's liniment. I could never prove it, but I was convinced that the cure - a smarting, foul smelling liquid - was designed to hurt more than the original pain, an incentive against malingering. Within two or three weeks I was back to normal and back to school.

In those days, measles, mumps, whooping cough and chicken pox were unavoidable diseases, although none were particularly serious. At one time or another I contracted them all. My siege with chicken pox was probably the worst. The pox broke out over most of my body: face, neck, stomach, thighs, arms, legs, even the inside of my mouth. Mother scolded whenever she caught me scratching the sores, saying that if I did so I'd carry scars the rest of my life. I believed her, but the itching was too much to ignore. So I hit upon an ingenious compromise. To satisfy the uncontrollable urge, I concentrated on scratching a pox on my thigh in deference to those on my face and other exposed areas. I scratched to my heart's content.

Mother was right, as usual, and I bear a good-sized pockmark about a foot below my right hip.

I was still in grammar school when I had chicken pox, but measles got me in my sophomore year, around Valentine's Day. Miss Austin's Latin class delegated a schoolmate, Barbara Chamberlin, to create a get-well/Valentine card for me. The verse was in Latin. With knowing perception, Barbara included an English translation of the verse and a note of the latest school news of interest.

Childhood diseases were common among my peers, and my getting them had nothing to do with the state of my normal health or with my diet, the latter a matter of great concern to my mother.

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Ever since I can remember, I've had an aversion to the flavor and/or texture of certain foods. My mother, brothers and sisters said I was "picky." I prefer the definition, "a discriminating sense of taste." I must admit that the list of foods which I can tolerate is small, and the list of those I actually like is even smaller. But when certain foods caused me to gag or be sick to my stomach, I learned to avoid them.

Mother got extremely upset with me. For years she repeated the same trite phrases: "You eat what is set before you and clean your plate," and, "Don't waste food, think of the starving children in Ethiopia." (It was sexual abstinence that was needed in Ethiopia.)

When those didn't work she'd threaten, "If you don't eat your (whatever) you can't have any dessert." I was not the least bit intimidated. I'd rather do without than eat something I couldn't swallow. I went without a lot of desserts. She tried the old, "Go to your room," theory, but that didn't work either. Better to go hungry than eat something distasteful. Finally, I guess out of fear that I might starve to death, she allowed me to eat whatever I could and leave the rest on my plate. Of course she never stopped nagging but she fixed things that were both flavorful and good for me from that time on.

I had a great aversion to meat, particularly to so-called red meat. Just the smell of boiled lamb was enough to make me nauseous. Dishes containing a mixture of several different foods were not for me, I preferred to taste each flavor by itself. If one likes the flavor of potato, I rationalized, why smother it with onion? If you like the taste of carrots, why put them with beef in a roast?

My diet included a lot of eggs and cheese, most common fruits and vegetables, and the mainstays bread and potatoes. I would condescendingly eat chicken and turkey (white meat only), hot dogs and bologna, bacon (if it were cooked very crisp), and ham (if free of gristle and fat). I learned to eat freshwater fish, but sparingly, as the hair-like bones sometimes caused me to gag. Seafood of every kind made me sick to my stomach. Bakery goods were A-okay. I could make a pig of myself on doughnuts, cake or pie, even plain white bread tasted good to me.

Most kids raised on a farm rave about the taste of warm milk straight from the cow's teat. Not me! Even after it was cooled I had to force myself to drink the stuff. Lumps of cream floating on top of a glass of milk were about as appetizing as coagulated fat on a bowl of cold soup. Neither was palatable. Not until we lived in Northfield, and had to buy our milk, did I learn how to get it down, and then because it was homogenized. I liked eggnog, an egg beaten into a glass of milk with sugar and spices added, and drank lots of them as a kid. In later years, milkshakes took their place.

Probably my favorite dish was macaroni-and-cheese. Not only did it taste good to me, but it was also nutritional. And, like beans, it was economical. It is difficult to find true Boston baked beans these days. (If it has onions in the recipe it's not the real thing.) Mother made the real thing: beans, a chunk of pork, brown sugar and/or molasses. Potatoes, cooked in almost any manner but without additives such as milk, onion or garlic, were great.

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As you can see, I've always leaned toward bland foods. Certain spices are all right; herbs are kind of "heavy." Salt, pepper and sugar, in my opinion, are about the only condiments necessary to the appreciation of food.

It is interesting to note that, according to history, Old England's need for pepper triggered her becoming a nation of worldwide power. It came about because the English needed pepper to preserve their meat (there was no refrigeration then) and to make it more palatable. But the supply of pepper was halfway round the World. They built a merchant fleet to transport pepper and other spices from the Orient to the British Isles, and then had to develop a navy to protect the merchants on the high seas. And thus the way was paved for colonization.

Ultimately the peppercorn became so precious it was used as legal tender. It has been much devalued since then, but a ground-up peppercorn still enhances such foods as potatoes, vegetables and meats.

Most Far East spices were used to enhance rather than cloak original flavors; as do onions, garlic, hot peppers and so on. I doubt if there is a handful of Americans today who can truthfully say that they like the flavor of hamburger. Without onion, tomato, ketchup, Mayonnaise etc. they wouldn't know what it was.

In time I would tolerate more meat in my diet, adding pork chops and beefsteak to my list of "acceptables." But in spite of my being the target of the old clichés, "Try it, you'll like it," and "You don't know what you're missing," I'd always maintain a selective diet.

"Hah!" I would reply, "I've already tried it. I know what I'm missing and I'm the happier for the omission."

In fact, I feel sorry for those people who seem to exist just for the opportunity to eat, to stuff themselves with gourmet or exotic foods, often to their own detriment.

A few years ago I read the biography of "*Ishi, the Last Wild Indian in North America*" by Theodora Kroeber. Ishi was the last survivor of the Yahi tribe, a tribe that once inhabited a small area in a remote recess of the Sierra Nevada foothills. He put himself in the hands of the "white eyes" and was well taken care of by Professor Kroeber, at the University of California, in exchange for invaluable information relative to his people's culture.

Of particular interest to me was Ishi's diet. He ate a relatively small variety of simple foods, even kept them separated on his plate. He wanted, he said, to savor the individual flavors. Now there was a man whose manner of eating I could relate to.

(The demise of the Yahi tribe was not the result of its diet, of which Ishi's may or may not have been representative, but was due to its annihilation by white immigrants to California.)

In summary, while I have been forced over the years to compromise my eating habits, I still believe in the premise that one's sense of taste should dictate the kinds of food he eats. So far that philosophy has worked well for me.

From the time I was a kid, I had no living uncles or aunts on my father's side of the family. His only sister, Zoella, had died when still a young lady. While my elder siblings were acquainted with

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several of his relatives, I remember only my Great-aunt Mertie and distant Cousins George and Flora Woodward.

Nor did I hear much about Great-uncle Preston Phelps, possibly because he and Grandpa hadn't gotten along too well.

Preston was a fine artist. During his lifetime he produced quite a number of landscapes. His work, mostly in oil, mostly of the Monadnock Region in New Hampshire, would endure and increase in value after his death.

I knew even less about another Great-uncle, Edgar Seaver, who lived in Chesham, New Hampshire. He was said to have been somewhat eccentric, probably because he valued his privacy.

I did become somewhat acquainted with my Cousins George and Flora. To me they were a typical old New Hampshire farm couple, and were still operating the farm when I first saw them in Milford, when Father drove us over there in his Model-B Ford,

The Woodward Farm stood on a sidehill, as did every farm in New Hampshire, and was surrounded by a stonewall fence, also not unique. As I remember it, the place was exceptionally neat and well maintained.

Cousin Flora, who was born on April 19, 1866, was a Foster and somehow related to the Phelps clan. She was a dear little lady, very proper, very generous and outgoing, and with a perpetual smile beneath twinkling eyes. When I knew her, her beautiful gray hair showed definite signs of having once been quite red.

I rated Cousin Flora an excellent cook, although I may have been persuaded by the fact that she served me foods which I liked. I especially remember her berry pies, steaming hot and oozing dark red sweetness through a flaky crust, the berries having just been picked from a patch beside the barn.

Cousin George (for whom I was named) was born on October 21, 1865. At over six feet he was quite a bit taller than my Grandpa Phelps, but, like him, stood ram-rod straight. I remember him in a Sunday suit of charcoal gray, a heavy gold chain connecting a shiny gold watch in his right-hand vest pocket to an equally shiny fob across the way. A metal case, a bit larger than a cigarette package, was suspended from a button-hole in the front of his vest. It contained an amplifier and a small microphone. A half-concealed pair of wires led from the case to a tiny "speaker" in his ear. He was quite deaf, you see, but unlike Grandpa Phelps, Cousin George was not averse to wearing a "new fangled" hearing aid. As a result I found it easy to communicate with him.

Cousin George wore a full gray mustache. I had not seen many people with mustaches. (An old lady in our neighborhood had one, but that was different.) Cousin George's was the genuine article, and I watched wide-eyed when he ate or drank. He had one of those special cups with an extra "lip" to prevent his mustache from getting wet when sipping coffee or cocoa.

I really admired Cousin George, and he seemed to take a liking to me. But then he may have given that impression to everyone. He was that kind of a man.

A few years later, after they'd retired from the farm, I saw the Woodwards at their "city" home on 24 Marshall Street, Milford. On that

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occasion I was shown their family albums and a collection of souvenir folders from a trip out West, of California and places along the way. That really impressed me. I had never personally known anyone who'd traveled so far, and concluded that they must have been wealthy. "Frugal" would have been a more accurate assessment.

I saw them a couple of times after that, and should have made an effort to visit them in their latter years. Alas, I neglected to do so before it was too late. Flora died in 1945, George, in 1950.

I had gotten to know Aunt Mertie in 1934, when we had tea with her at her home in Keene, and had a chance to get better acquainted when we vacationed at her summer cottage at Silver Lake, near Chesham, New Hampshire.

Unlike the Woodwards, Aunt Mertie was prone to "put on airs." Still it was kind of her to invite us to spend some time at the lake. Dorothy drove us, Mother, Betty, Bobby and me, and perhaps Ruth, to her cottage where we stayed two or three weeks.

Actually she had two cottages on her lake property; one rather pretentious structure near the shoreline, the other, much smaller and sort of primitive, behind it on the hill. Both cottages had open-beam, pine board interiors. (If I am not mistaken, my brother Richard built at least one of them.)

The main cottage boasted of a spacious room with contiguous, small-paned windows along the east and south outside walls overlooking the lake. The furniture was rustic but comfortable. There was a small utilitarian kitchen at the rear, two or three bedrooms upstairs, and a wide veranda extending around the three "downhill" sides. Space underneath the cottage was used for storing a boat, lawn chairs, lounges and so on. A flight of stairs led from the veranda to a narrow beach, and to a small pier, perhaps thirty feet long and four feet wide, over the water.

The smaller cottage, being in the shadow of tall pines and equipped with fewer windows, was dark inside but cozy. It was here that Mother set up "rough" housekeeping for us. I guess there was a little kitchen area, at least a sink and a counter, some kind of a water supply, either indoors or just outside, and an icebox for storing perishable foods. It was like camping out.

We obtained ice from an ice-man, who drove down the narrow, winding dirt road every day in an old Dodge truck. A local farmer came down the same road twice a week in another old truck. This one had wood-and-tarpaper top and side curtains to roll down or up depending on the weather. From it he dispensed fresh fruits and vegetables to the summer folks. He probably sold eggs, bread, milk and butter as well, for there was not a store within miles.

The trees were pretty thick there on the sloping west shore (before the hurricane). Thick mats of brown pine needles covered the ground and the cottage roofs, effectively holding moisture accumulated from frequent fogs and rainstorms. Thick green moss grew not only on the north side of the tree trunks, but also on everything else: chimneys, roofs, sidings and railings. Only at noontime did sunlight find a way through the trees, so the smell of wet wood and earth almost always filled the air.

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When the rains came we sat comfortably inside, played games and listened to the music of raindrops on the roof. Or we'd venture onto the veranda to watch the lake turn dappled and gray and misty. When the weather cleared, we'd walk along the shoreline in search of water creatures, tadpoles and frogs, hike uphill into the deep woods to seek out squirrels and birds in search of food, or wander over to a field on the old Seaver Farm and pick daisies and other wildflowers.

A rock-and-brush pasture sloped upward from the field. There we discovered a bonanza of ripe blueberries and huckleberries. With lard buckets we harvested the wild fruit. (The lard bucket was a quart-sized, tin-coated round can with a wire bail, an ideal utensil for gathering berries.)

Blueberry bushes came in two types: low bush, not over two feet above ground, and high bush, standing as tall as a man. Unlike blackberry bushes, these fellows didn't "attack" the picker. And they were conveniently spaced, far apart and easy to get at. Whenever I think of wild blueberries, I think of those in the pasture by Silver Lake.

The morning dew had long ago evaporated when we began picking, but within a couple of hours the sky rolled up in clouds overhead. The air grew hot and muggy, unmistakable signs of a pending thunderstorm, so we headed for the cottage. Besides, our buckets were nearly full.

In spite of the fact that I'd eaten half as many berries as wound up in my can, I was anxious to make a meal of them. Crackers and blueberries and milk, with a little sugar sprinkled over all, was a dish fit for a king. Add a chunk of cheddar on the side and I doubt if even a king could command such a treat. And that's what we were eating, at lunchtime, when the storm broke. Did we care? Not a bit. We were dry and content in the cottage.

A young man (I believe it was Eugene Seaver) came to the lake while we were there. He was a handsome guy, dressed in white slacks and shirt, wearing a nautical cap. He put the boat in the water and readied it for us. It was a dory, perhaps 12-feet long and 3-feet abeam, made of wood and in reasonably good repair. Because of my natural aversion to water I was hesitant to go aboard. At Dorothy's insistence, however, I finally climbed down from the dock into the gently rocking vehicle.

There was no motor but a set of good oars with which our cousin easily propelled us away from the dock; all the while my fingers gripped the gunwales, as if I could keep the boat from rocking so much. In a short time I was overwhelmed by the wonder of this overwater conveyance, and was no longer apprehensive.

When Cousin Eugene left, Dottie took over as "commander" of the dory. She was pretty good at it, and taught us kids how to row. I was fascinated by the ease with which the boat cut through the water, and couldn't get enough of that occupation. In fact it was a highlight of my vacation.

We dug worms and caught grasshoppers for bait, made fish poles out of willows and hooks out of safety pins. We rowed out to a "secret spot" north of the cottage, and Dottie instructed us in the age-old art of angling. Letting the boat drift, we nigger-fished. I could see our prey (rock bass, I believe), four or five feet down near the

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bottom; dozens of them, of which we caught enough for a meal. I even ate fish that evening, more as justification for having caught them than for any other reason. Along with fresh-baked biscuits it was not a bad meal. We did quite a bit of fishing after that.

Sometimes we hiked around the shoreline to the south end of the lake, to a sandy beach near the outlet gate, to go swimming. The girls seemed to really enjoy that sport. As for me, I didn't see much fun in getting water and sand in my ears and eyes, sore feet from stepping on sharp stones, slipping under the surface when I least expected it, swallowing vast quantities of putrid water and coughing and sputtering to get rid of it.

I quit the water in favor of playing in the sand on the beach, or climbing the poplars that grew above the high-water line, until the others were ready to return to the cottage.

We were well entertained by Aunt Mertie. She had lots of books to read, picture-puzzles to put together, games to play. She'd tell us stories about the early days at the lake, and of the hard work involved in taming the area. She talked about our relatives, told us who was married to what's-his-name, who was born to so-and-so, who had an ongoing feud with whom. I remembered none of it. She sometimes went out walking with us, but for the most part she remained indoors in her big wicker chair by the window, reading or knitting as the mood struck her, enjoying the serenity of that wonderful environment.

Many years later I would revisit Silver Lake with Stan and Elsie. Surprisingly, except for its being populated with recreationists, it was very much as I remembered it.

CHAPTER NINE
ON TO ADOLESCENCE

How strange a human trait it is, that between the ages of ten and twenty one's life seems so interminably slow and difficult. (Or so it seemed to me, problems appeared to arise one on the heels of another.) School, that paramount consumer of time, presents daily challenges to growing girls and boys, both in the areas of book learning and social life.

Those are the years when ordinary but miraculous stages of growth take place, but not without attendant pains, some of them pains of the heart. There come the stirrings of unknown forces, crying out to hurry up, to get on to adulthood, to mate, to do whatever it is that providence has in store. Only later can one look back and wonder at his wish for haste.

For some unknown reason, throughout most of my adolescent years, I lived under the strangely apprehensive delusion that I might never reach the age of twenty-one, the age of majority. It wasn't that I feared dying, what bothered me was that if I died prematurely I'd never get to reap the rewards of adulthood. Perhaps the feeling was born when my father left us and I, being the elder boy in the household, became the "man of the house" without credentials.

(Obviously my worries were unfounded. I would not only make it to age twenty-one, I would also rack up another [four]-score and more years on this earth.)

I entertained another worry in those days: That if I should ever attain manhood, get married and have children, I'd not be competent to raise them. I suppose that worry was the result of my observing the lives of my own and other peoples' parents. Being good parents seemed an awesome responsibility, and one for which there was no formal training or apprenticeship.

The job of parenting (as they now call it) must have changed dramatically over the thousands of years since the first father and mother looked at their wrinkled offspring and muttered, "Ugh, what we do now?" Major changes have been brought about by religions, by medicines, by social upheavals, and more recently by legislation.

So I concluded that there is no one "correct" way to be a parent. When it comes right down to it, parents must rely on their instincts

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and experience, along with the tenets of right-versus-wrong and fairness, when raising children. But then, are those not the very precepts that should govern every aspect of our lives?

My folks probably did as good a job of "bringing up" the first part of our family as any could have done. But when I was about ten years old, Father began to shirk (in my opinion) some of his parental responsibilities, thereby throwing an undue burden on Mother.

(I know; there are lots of "single parents" these days, but relatively few of them are capable of raising good citizens without a lot of outside help.)

My mother certainly did her best to get the last three of us off on the right foot. Betty was a really good child, always very helpful to Mother. On the other hand - much as I hate to have to admit it - I caused her an awful lot of grief and worry. And Bobby probably caused her more of the same. It is a great testimonial to her abilities that, after helping to raise eight children, Mother had the physical and mental capacity to deal with three more "all by herself."

Now, as I write, after having become a parent and worked at the job, I've not changed my opinion about the tremendous responsibility of parenthood. And while I would never profess to having been a model father, I take some comfort in the knowledge that I, in comparison to so many obviously non-qualified fathers in the world, was not so ill-equipped after all.

Harold Streeter of Bernardston was a "wheeler dealer," be it buying and selling horses (he was a consummate horse trader), cars, groceries or farms, whatever would turn a dollar. He and his family would be prominent in the town's business community for generations to come. It was he who had taken over the Huckle Hill Farm, back in 1934, and would own it for a number of years hence.

In the late thirties, Stanley moved up to the old farm and ran it for Streeter. In 1939, he left Huckle Hill for a better job in Greenfield. Streeter then moved Charlie, who was working on a farm on Bald Mountain Road, to Huckle Hill.

Still a bachelor, Charlie had a busy time of it up there, cooking and housekeeping in addition to doing farm chores from before light to after dark every day of the week. A farmer really needed a wife, or at least a cook/maid to share the load.

One summer I went to Huckle Hill to stay with Charlie for a couple of weeks or more, ostensibly to help enough with the chores to earn my keep. At the same time, I would learn a few more things about farming.

Milking machines were then in common use, but cows had to be stripped (milked by hand) when the machine was removed, to get the last drops of milk from the udder. Charlie taught me how to do the stripping. I didn't take to it, so he put me to work getting hay down from the loft, ensilage from the silo, and sweet-smelling grain from the wooden bins to feed the cows. Those were jobs more to my liking.

A less glamorous task, but just as important, was that of cleaning the stalls and shoveling manure out of the gutter. I usually helped with that chore, too.

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But it was not a case of all work and no play for me. One of the neighborhood boys, in his 'teens, came around with a machine that was a cross between an automobile and a tractor. It was once a fine car, I expect, before being modified, but now it was more a piece of junk. At least in my eyes. The frame had been cut in two in the middle and "glued" back together, shorter than before. It still had an engine and a radiator, four wheels, a steering wheel, a couple of instruments on an abbreviated panel, and a gas tank strapped to the frame behind a wooden box that served as a seat. It had all of the basic requirements but none of the niceties of an automobile.

Obviously the thing was conceived and constructed with but one purpose in mind: to go like hell up a graveled road, spin around and go like hell back down. And raise a big cloud of dust in the process. That purpose was accomplished with near perfection.

Since it was such a basic machine, Charlie figured that it would be a good rig for me to learn to drive. I did just that, starting by coasting down the drive-lane and eventually graduating to the little-used town road.

On my first solo drive, while coasting down the hill, I lost all sense of man-over-machine control, bounced across the town road and came up short in front of an apple tree in the orchard. Had there been fenders on that thing, they would have surely been bent or crumpled. But there were none and no harm was done, except to my confidence.

By the end of my stay, though, I would learn not only how to start, go and stop the vehicle without incident, but also how to drive it up and down the road and turn around; though not as fast as the big boys did.

Charlie was an amiable fellow, patient and with a good sense of humor. He could tell a good story, even on himself, enhanced by his native Yankee dialect. He and his neighbors - Streeter, Flagg and Field boys in particular - invariably swapped jokes when they got together. I heard a lot of them that summer, some "off color" with words not used (in those days) in mixed or polite company.

After working like a peasant all week, Charlie often found relaxation at a weekend dance. Perhaps it wasn't relaxation as much as recreation, for I could never see how a square-dance or a polka could be anything but tiring.

One Saturday, after the last cow had been milked, the barn secured and a quick meal consumed, he jumped into his shiny Oakland and headed for town, whichever one had a dance going on that night, and left the farm in my care. By the time he'd gone it was dark so there was little for me to do but go to bed; which was a good idea because I was bushed.

I slept soundly for a while, oblivious to any possible distraction. But then I awoke with a start, realized that I was all alone and began to imagine all sorts of frightful things. There were my old nemeses the night sounds: creaks and groans emanating from roof timbers; quick, thumping footsteps of scurrying rats and mice; the mournful call of a whip-poor-will; the hoot of a barn owl. I could not go back to sleep.

Finally, cautiously, I rose up on the bed, found the string hanging from the light fixture overhead and pulled myself into a

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sphere of calming luminance. (Electricity was a recent and welcome addition on Huckle Hill.) I dug my Westclox dollar-watch from the pocket of my trousers and read the time. It was almost one o'clock. Instinctively I put the watch to my ear and listened for ticks. It was running. But one o'clock? Surely my brother would have been home by now, perhaps my watch was wrong.

I turned off the light and lay back on the bed. But not to sleep. I was far too nervous for that. Had Charlie's car broken down? Or worse, had he had an accident on some dark and remote stretch of road and was even then lying out there, helpless? If so, what should I do? Anxiously, fitfully, I spent the rest of the night half awake, repeatedly checking the time and listening for the comforting sound of his car.

At least it wasn't stormy. There was no wind or thunder to add to my worries. But what if he didn't get home by daylight? Who would do the chores? I was certainly not competent to milk the cows. Well, I'd just have to hope for the best. And then (it must have been about four in the morning) I dropped off to sleep.

Fear of the unknown is a powerful emotion, especially in the young and inexperienced whose fears are generally much worse than reality. So it was with me that night. All of my fretting and worry was for naught.

Sometime after dawn I crawled out of bed, went to the kitchen and stared out of the window. The Oakland was parked on the driveway. I tiptoed outside for a closer look. There was my brother Charlie, sound asleep on the front seat. Relieved, I sheepishly hurried back to bed, very tired and very much annoyed with myself for having been so uneasy.

When I next awoke it was to the sound of rattling utensils.

"Y'sleep good?" Charlie inquired when I walked sleepily into the kitchen.

"Oh...yeah," I replied.

One by one he flipped over the batch of griddle cakes he was tending.

"Wall, I overslept a little m'self," he said offhandedly. "I got tiahd on m'way home and slept b'side the road awhile...an' when I got home I figgahd I c'd sleep as good in th' cah as in bed...so I did.... Couase I didn't mean t'sleep s'long." He chuckled. "Eat up now...they's work t'do."

I sat down at the table, covered two hot griddle cakes with butter and maple syrup and began to eat. Charlie cooked some more, scooped a mess of crisp bacon from a big spider (an iron skillet) on the back of the range, and joined me.

After breakfast, and when the morning chores were done, we took the truck to the upper field (I drove it up), pitched a load of just-dried hay onto it, took it back to the barn and pitched it up to the hayloft. What a workout.

Since it was Sunday and we were both tired (although for different reasons), we stopped for dinner then relaxed until time to call the cows in and do the evening chores.

And so went my stay with Charlie on Huckle Hill: get up early, work hard, eat good, go to bed early, sleep soundly, and occasionally

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find time for amusement. I enjoyed it, and no doubt Mother was glad to have me out of her hair for a while.

My friend Roger left the public school system to go to Mt. Hermon. It figured, since his father was an employee there. So I would hang out with other guys my age, Freddy Luciew and Eugene in particular.

Freddy Luciew lived over on East Street. We called him "Jug-head," after the contemporary comic-strip character. Why, I don't know. He didn't resemble a cartoon figure but he did have a great sense of humor.

In the wintertime, the swamp in back of Center School always froze over. Warren Hutchinson, Eugene's brother, and other "older boys" would gather there after school and play ice-hockey, or don speed skates and race against the clock. Then they decided to jump over a barrel. Taking turns they'd skate really fast up to the barrel (lying on its side on the ice) and leap over it. That got to be too easy so they added another barrel, and another and another to see who could clear the most barrels without falling. Warren, who was a classmate of Betty's, usually won those ice contests.

(Warren Hutchinson would leave high school before graduating, to enter military service. After the war he contracted leukemia and died at a very young age. Ironically, he was always a very athletic guy and appeared the picture of health. Such is life and death.)

One time Jughead, Eugene and I decided to try our luck at barrel-jumping, even though none of us owned a pair of long-bladed speed skates. Jughead took off first, cleared the barrel and landed standing up at the other side. But his landing took him right on through the thin ice. He was up to his neck in the frigid water, thrashing around and hollering for help and we were afraid he might drown. Until he put his feet down, stood waist deep on the bottom and laughed at us for believing his convincing act.

Eugene was slightly taller than me. He was a handsome guy, with blond hair, blue eyes and an athletic build. He was good at sports, but never quite as good as his brother Warren.

My mother didn't come right out and say so, but she didn't approve of my hanging around with Eugene. She believed that he was a bad influence on me. (Though who influenced whom might have been debatable.) He was with me when I got caught stealing candy, and when I smoked my first cigarette, and he was my partner in a scuffle with two other guys on the steps of Gingras's drug store, a scuffle that resulted in our breaking the plate-glass store window. (My share of the cost of replacement was two hard-earned dollars.)

When we were in the "paper business" together, Eugene and I hung around Gingras's soda fountain after school while waiting for the courier to drop off our supply of dailies. The fact that there were always girls at the fountain was circumstantial, but it coincided nicely with our discovery that girls could be more than just a nuisance.

Harry Gingras's attractive daughter, Lorraine, helped out in the store, and other girls our age congregated there as well. We naturally

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responded to their flirting, and indulged in the typically witless "ping-pong" of words kids use to impress each other.

We crowded into the leather cushioned booths at the rear of the store, or sat on padded stools that swiveled atop chrome stems bolted to the linoleum floor in front of the marble-topped soda fountain. Behind that impressive counter, six flavors of velvety Turnbull's ice cream resided in heavy, rust proof, covered cans. The simple pull of a ceramic topped lever by the soda-jerk dispensed a refreshing drink - Coca Cola, Moxie or Hires Root Beer - from an appropriate pressurized container in the cellar. Vanilla, strawberry, chocolate and other exquisite syrups reposed in glass jars, each jar capped with a slotted-metal lid through which a long spoon-handle protruded. My favorite sundae was vanilla ice cream with (real) butterscotch syrup. My favorite drink was a root beer "frappe," which (in that region at least) was a mixture of milk, ice cream and root beer extract.

Gingras's was a wonderful place to await the arrival of our newspapers.

Some people claimed they didn't like living in Northfield. Too stuffy, too religious, too quiet, too dry, they said. It was dry, dry in the sense that all forms of alcoholic beverages were prohibited from sale.

It was not always thus. Several taverns and even a brewery were listed in the town's records, but hardly anyone could remember that era. Those who felt an insatiable desire to wet their whistles had to drive to Bernardston, Hinsdale or Winchester (the latter two in New Hampshire), the closest towns where the drug was available. Not even wine was sold in Northfield.

Of course there were those who kept liquor in their homes, and those who, like our neighbor Larry Quinlan, imbibed on occasion. Old John Phelps (to whom we were not related, Mother carefully explained) must have maintained a good stock of booze at his home, for he quite often appeared "tipsy" or "in his cups." Old John once caught us walking across the back of his property and hollered, "You...damn punks...get the hell away from here!"

We assumed he was drunk at the time. Why else would anyone yell so vehemently at a couple of innocent youngsters?

Regardless of my early impressions of John Phelps, he was not a ne'er-do-well. On the contrary he had been a man of some note in his younger years. In 1930 he composed a splendid poem, a eulogy to Northfield, and in so doing assured his place in history and left a meaningful asset to the town.

As a matter of fact that same John Phelps, whom we unwittingly maligned as kids, was the son of John Wolcott Phelps, a Civil War general from Vermont. (Both lie buried in the church cemetery at Guilford, Vermont.)

The fact that our town was dry didn't bother me in the least. (Perhaps that explained its likeable provinciality.) I never had an urge to drink and resolved to abstain from doing so, at least until I was "of age" and could make a mature decision on the subject. Some of my friends were not above taking a sip now and then, but I felt no pressure to join them.

Speaking of friends, I had a wealth of them.

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Not surprisingly, many of my grammar school friends played musical instruments, often in extra-curricular school functions. Following is a brief introduction to them:

Carl Stone, whose mother, Lura, was a close friend of my mother's, was tall, wiry and curly haired. He lived way out in the woods off the road to Warwick. Carl didn't much like schoolwork but he excelled on the ball field, both at baseball and football. When not involved in sports he played the Spanish guitar.

Short, husky, feisty Charlie Dresser also played a guitar. He lived only a short distance from our school, on School Street.

Calm, studious John Rikert was a clarinetist. He would attend Mt. Hermon after the eighth grade, but we still got together with him for a game of touch-football on the Seminary lawn near his home. John's father was a hero in our eyes when, in 1939, he rode a bicycle all the way to the New York World's Fair and back.

Kay Moody, of the famous Moody family, played the cello. A big girl (she stood at least a head taller than me), Kay was pretty, personable and intelligent. She was not only a fine cellist but also a fine songstress. Alas, Kay would leave us to attend The Seminary School for Girls.

Helen Howard (mentioned above) played the violin and was a fellow member of the Young People's Symphony. She, too, would go to school at the Northfield Seminary.

But I considered Neil Churchill and Billy Shattuck my closest friends. We would be together throughout the rest of our school years.

Neil Winston Churchill looked a lot like the famous Britisher might have appeared as a young man. So we nicknamed him "Winston" though he didn't really appreciate our taking the liberty. (It actually was his middle name.) Neil claimed to be a grouch, but as far as I could see he was anything but one. He had a wonderful sense of humor and a great affinity for people.

Neil was about my height, was slightly chubby, wore a perpetual smile and always appeared happy-go-lucky. He was at once a good athlete, good musician and good scholar. He made no pretenses. He just went ahead with whatever needed to be done and did it well, whether it was giving a class speech, sliding into third base or "sliding" to a sonorous note on his trombone. He was not just a good trombonist, either, he was a great trombonist.

I only vaguely remember Neil's father, but knew his lovely mother Anna, who was also a close friend of my mother's. She was diminutive in size only. Her radiant smile and sparkling eyes signaled an outgoing, kindly and wholesome personality. Neil obviously inherited many of her attributes.

William Ashley Shattuck, Jr. (Billy to us) was a good looking, athletic sort of a guy, taller than either Neil or me, with light hair and blue eyes. He really loved the game of baseball, and was not only good at it but also kept track of every major league team and player in the country.

Although he might have denied it, Billy was somewhat self-conscious. And to me, at least, he was somewhat of an enigma. He wished to excel in everything he undertook - schoolwork, sports, music

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or whatever - and did so; but he was awfully self-critical, always insisting that he "should have done better."

In addition to his athletic abilities, Billy could play the drums and several woodwind instruments. His forte was the saxophone. He played it with élan, with a tone not always attained by professional performers.

It was the school nurse's niece who came to occupy an important niche in my young life. Blonde, blue eyed, doll faced, shapely Shirley Purrington took my eye and my adolescent heart as well. I was inexorably attracted to her, and left no stone un-turned in vying for her attention. One might say that I played the part of an eager suitor while she acted the coquette. But I was not acting. In class we exchanged secret notes, at the drugstore we shared two-straw sodas.

It was traditional, in those days, for the Center School eighth grade graduating class to take a trip to celebrate the occasion. It was, after all, one of life's milestones, if only a minor one. That year, 1941, we made an enthusiastic excursion to an amusement park near Northampton (probably Look Park). It was a neat place, with concession stands and picnic areas and rides. But I was not much interested in those things, only in Shirley. As long as we were together I was happy.

At dusk our gang returned to the bus. Shirley shared a seat with me and held my hand all the way to Northfield. It was like being in the seventh heaven.

Even before the bus stopped, not far from her aunt's place, I determined to walk Shirley home. It seemed the chivalrous thing to do since the house was set a ways back from the avenue and there were no streetlights. We walked up the steep driveway as if in a dream; the night air, pleasantly cool after the long hot day, the pungent perfume of summer flowers lingering under a canopy of leafy trees.

We talked about the trip and the activities of the day, not really conscious of our words but of the intimacy of the occasion. As we neared the brow of the hill Shirley stopped. Still holding my hand, she suggested that it might be best if I let her go on alone. Her aunt, she said, was sure to be waiting for her on the porch.

I didn't think that was reason enough to not escort her all the way but she prevailed, saying that her aunt didn't trust boys and would get really mad if I was seen with her. Instinctively then (certainly not from any training or prior experience on my part) I put my arms around her waist and kissed her "full on the mouth."

It was wonderful!

However, had I more presence of mind I'd have stood on the uphill side of her, to avoid having to rise on tiptoes in order to reach her lips. No matter, the kiss was accomplished and the experience was most gratifying, better than I could possibly have wished for.

We were in a world apart. A world inhabited by just the two of us. A mystical world of semi-darkness, with no light other than that from mate-seeking fireflies. It was wonderfully quiet, with no sound other than that from mate-seeking crickets.

Shirley was soft and tender and demure, no longer laughing and bouncing and vivacious as she'd been all day, and I was pleased with this new mood in her, this completely feminine mood. This must be

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love, I decided, but avoided saying the word. Anyway, now I knew the meaning of romance; not the sexually explicit kind but the sentimental, poetic kind of romance.

All too soon some unseen referee sent a times-up signal and Shirley spoke two words, soft and muted, little more than a breath between her sweet lips: "Good night."

I echoed the words, but in a voice rendered husky by emotion. Without further conversation I turned and walked on air to my home.

The year 1941 was filled with important events and activities. My brother John married Gladys True on March 7 (Mother's birthday) and was inducted into the Army a few days later. Ruth married Albert Cembalisty, with grand and formal ceremony, in May. On the eleventh of June I graduated from grammar school, in exercises held at the Town Hall.

Before school was out, I entered an amateur-musicians radio contest, sponsored by Wilson's Department Store of Greenfield. We performed "live" in the studio of Greenfield's station "WHAI," on Saturday mornings. It was my first experience in front of a microphone, and the first time I ever played in an anechoic (echo-less) chamber. I noted that every aspect of the program was precisely timed; individual performances, brief interviews and all.

I played "Song of India" and thought I'd done a creditable job. Indeed it was good enough to get me into the finals, but Mr. Leslie was apparently not so favorably impressed. At my next violin lesson he was really critical, saying that I had performed like a robot or a machine with no feeling at all for the music.

I was crestfallen. I made some excuse like "I was nervous in front of the microphone," but that didn't seem to cut any ice with the master. I was somewhat relieved, though, when with a wink and a smile Mr. Leslie began to correct my faulty ways.

In the days that followed I practiced hard, in preparation for the final onslaught of the contest. I became so familiar with the "Song of India" that I could play its haunting melody with genuine emotion. And that's the way I did it in the finals.

There was no doubt in my mind, after my prize winning performance, that without Mr. Leslie's criticism I'd have never earned a judgment of first place. My elation was only slightly eroded by the announced decision (in July) to award two first prizes; I'd share the honor with a pianist by the name of Brien Jacobus, from Turners Falls. Wilson's then presented a brand new, balloon-tired Columbia bicycle to each of us.

I was understandably proud of my achievement. Winning a grand prize was good for my self esteem, an esteem further indulged by compliments from family and friends. Unexpectedly, I received a letter from Cousins Flora and George who had tuned in, from far away Milford, New Hampshire, to the broadcast.

"We wish to congratulate you," Flora wrote, "on the good fortune that has come to you.... Hard work brings its own reward. Now I want to tell you that I heard you on June 28 on your broadcast. That is, I heard the music but could not hear the replies to the questions."

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(Once again I was guilty of not speaking up.) "But the music was as sweet and clear as the songs of the birds and very smooth."

She went on to congratulate Dorothy for helping me, to wish me a pleasant summer, and to "Wish Betty one, as she is to have a vacation also, and she is a helper to you in your music."

How right she was!

The Columbia bicycle (which was manufactured in Westfield, Massachusetts, USA), was considered top-of-the-line in those days. Mine was the color of deep maroon, its frame and fenders decorated with fine white stripes. It had white-sidewall tires (size 26 X 2.5 inches), full fenders for protection against mud and a full chain guard to prevent one's pants from getting greasy or torn. I would immediately add a wire basket and a flashlight, both clamped to the front handlebars.

The bicycle was not just an item of prestige to me, it was of real benefit to my business ventures. My old bike was by that time literally worn out.

The Columbia was the only brand new bicycle I would ever own, and was my most prized possession until the time when it could be replaced by a car.

CHAPTER TEN
MUSIC CAMP, HIGH SCHOOL

Getting away from one's home and parents occasionally may be one of the most beneficial things a growing boy or girl can experience. Whether a brief stay with a relative or at a youth camp, being temporarily disengaged from parental ties allows a kid to broaden his horizons and accept new responsibilities.

In July of 1941, when the radio contest was over, Dorothy arranged for me to attend a summer music camp. On hearing of the plan I was both nervous and anxious about the prospect of leaving family and friends.

The Greenwood Music Camp was (is) located in the township of Cummington, Massachusetts, which in turn is in the Berkshire Hills, a stretch of the Appalachian mountain chain that enters New England from the southwest and continues northeasterly through Vermont (the Green Mountains), New Hampshire (the White Mountains) to Maine. The most prominent nearby feature is Mt. Greylock, at some 3,500' above the sea, the highest point in Massachusetts.

The Berkshire Hills were always famous for their summer greens and autumn pastel colors. They were verdant when I went to camp. Trees, grass, ferns, even the streams were green, the latter made so by clayey soils. And I was to learn that at least one reason for the Berkshires' beauty was rain, which fell in abundance during my stay.

Greenwood Music Camp was initiated in Vermont in the early thirties, by Ruth McGregor and Dorothy (Bunny) Little. In 1940 the camp was moved to its permanent site in Cummington, where it was run by Ruth, Bunny and Dwight Little.

I remember best the Littles. They were then fairly young, very innovative, energetic and outgoing. Everyone liked and admired them. Though they were both versatile musicians, Bunny usually played the violin, Dwight the viola.

The founders' objective was to provide an inspirational environment for the study of music. But not exclusively. Our daily schedule would include time for music, alone and with groups; time for work, digging, mowing, landscaping et cetera; and time for recreation, tennis, ball, kick-the-can and so on. I would never be overworked, overplayed, idle or bored at Greenwood.

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We students ranged in age between twelve and fifteen. Our counselors, who helped the administrators and watched over us, were probably a little older. All of us musicians and would-be musicians had some experience. Most of us played a stringed or woodwind instrument. I think there was a French horn or two in our midst, but I don't recall anyone's playing a trumpet or a trombone. Our number was about equally divided between boys and girls, an arrangement that I found appealing.

The site of Greenwood Music Camp was formerly a farm. The main building, the old farmhouse, stood on a rise surrounded by handsome shade trees. The staff lived there, at least in the summer, and it was there that we dined, in a spacious dining room, and met in the parlor or music room at eventide for ensembles.

From the big house a rolling terraced lawn fell away to an orchard on the right, to a tennis court in the center, to cabins and a bunkhouse on the left. Beyond the tennis courts a long low barn served as an auditorium for ensemble or orchestra rehearsals and concerts. The girls' cabins stood close to the main house and were "out of bounds" to us boys in the bunkhouse. A garage and sheds filled out the complement of buildings, while woods and pastureland made up the rest of the property.

The tennis court was new. In fact it was one of our work projects, which amounted to the laying, grading and rolling of a clay surface. Another project was the renovation of a water-well. That project was of great interest to me so I will elaborate.

The well was located on a steep sidehill in the trees a short distance from our bunkhouse. It was enclosed by a roof and, when we were not working in it, walls of moss-covered boards to keep the animals out. I say "in it" because we literally worked in the well, digging and removing clay. The greenish stuff - which might have been good for making pots - was sticky, saturated with water and heavy. A good foothold was non-existent and we slipped and slid and frequently fell into the mud or water. Still, under Mr. Little's able direction and despite a lot of joking and chatter on our part, the job progressed quite rapidly.

Using buckets, one of the crew - whose members varied from day to day but consisted of both boys and girls - would bail out water while the others dug and hauled out clay. Hard work? Yes. But it was the kind of work that, unlike a session in a gym, built strong muscles and taught cooperation and resulted in a useful product. I would wonder, at the end of the season, what comparable project the Littles might devise for future camp students. It was sad to think that they might be deprived of an opportunity to work in the mud, for I really enjoyed that part of the curriculum.

Soon after arriving at camp we subconsciously chose-up "best friends." All of my new acquaintances, twenty-five or thirty of them, were good sports; a majority were residents of Massachusetts, many were students at the Deerfield Academy, a private school in the Pioneer Valley.

Gerald (Gerry) Mayer, a clarinetist, hailed from Greenwich, Connecticut. He and I became good buddies right away. We seemed to

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share common interests and notions of humor, and were usually on the same side, or team, when playing "steal-the-flag" and other games.

Another clarinetist, Ruth Bosson of Belmont, Massachusetts, was one of my girl friends. She was a sensible yet fun loving girl, and were I not so enamored of Shirley at that time I might have sought her affections. (Quite likely she already had a boyfriend.)

Just outside of nearby Lenox was a place called Tanglewood. It had been recently built to accommodate music festivals, and was the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The stage was set in a triangular "music shed," really an acoustical horn, the front of which was open to a natural amphitheater. Auditorium seats were lined up close in, the rest was open sloping lawn where crowds of music lovers could gather, and did, to enjoy concerts in a picnic-like environment.

The Littles had a Ford Beechwagon (sometimes called a station-wagon because of its use in meeting trains). Its doors and panels were made of real beech wood, hence the name Beechwagon. Sometimes we'd all pile into that Beechwagon and several big cars and travel to Tanglewood. One weekday we went to see the famous orchestra in rehearsal. Our seats were in close proximity to the orchestra, right down front where we could see and hear everything that was going on.

The conductor was Serge Koussevitzky; "Koussie," as his close friends referred to him. He was not a large man but he certainly fit my image of the ultimate conductor; supple in body and arms, long hair sticking out as if electrically charged.

It was a real treat to watch Koussevitzky in rehearsal. He worked with rolled-up shirtsleeves and no tie but was still the formal master. I shall never forget one of his actions that day. Frustrated with the way things were going he rapped the lectern with his baton, pointed his left hand at the first violin section and pleaded, "Play de nuts! Play de nuts!"

Gerry and I could hardly keep from laughing out loud. But the violinists proceeded to "play the notes," presumably to Serge's satisfaction this time.

Koussevitzky was said to be a taskmaster, demanding perfection of every individual member of the orchestra. And every member was, in my estimation, a virtuoso in his own field. I guess you could say that he was both a musicians' conductor and a conductor's conductor, for in addition to directing the orchestra he taught the art to others. Mr. Leslie, now Dr. Leslie, was among his protégés.

On Sunday, August 3rd, the Littles took us to a real concert at Tanglewood. Lounging or sitting on a blanket in the shade of a tree, like the rest of the crowd, we drank soft drinks, teased one another and tried to concentrate on the far-away symphony.

The weather was ideal and I enjoyed the music - particularly Gregor Piatigorsky's solo rendition of Hindemith's "Concerto for Violincello and Orchestra" - but not to the same degree that I had at rehearsal a few days before. We were too far from the stage.

For a change of pace, and to introduce us to the realities of outdoor life, the staff organized an overnight camp trip. We each packed a tin cup, tin spoon, tin fork, toothbrush and toothpaste in a bag, rolled it inside a blanket and wrapped the whole in a square of canvas. (The canvas would prove to be a Godsend.) Our counselors

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hauled food in their packs, for we weren't expected to live off the land.

Away we went, briskly hiking down an old cow trail through the fields and woods to a "wilderness" somewhere, I knew not where, far from our bunkhouses. Sometime in the late afternoon we arrived at a small, grassy opening alongside a clear-water brook, and there the march was terminated.

The air was hot and muggy during the hike, but it was pleasant enough that evening, though cloudy, when we staked out individual camp-spaces and gathered wood for a campfire. The fire was kindled and old logs brought up to sit on. We opened bean cans and put them next to the coals to heat. We cut and sharpened willow sticks, on which to roast hotdogs and toast buns, and drew a supply of drinking water from a nearby spring.

When everything was ready we gathered around the fire to eat, and to swat at pesky mosquitoes that hovered over and lit on every exposed patch of skin in sight. When we were through eating, at dusk, a counselor started a ghost story and we took turns adding to the plot, each trying to outdo the last with embellishment and frightful rhetoric.

Ultimately, we turned to singing familiar tunes such as "Old Black Joe" and "Way Down Upon the Suwannee River." Some of us played our HOHNER MARINE BAND harmonicas. It was my first camp-out in the wild, and already I was enthused by the activities and camaraderie of the event.

The fire died down to a glow and we turned to our beds, tired and anxious for a good night's sleep. But sleep was not to come easily to me. I quickly learned that a layer of fresh-cut hemlock boughs, while fragrant, was a damned poor substitute for a stuffed mattress. Whether lying on my back or my side or my stomach, I was uncomfortable. And the night, though devoid of manmade sounds, was filled with a cacophony of wild noises. A whip-poor-will called, I supposed to its mate. A night hawk "boomed" overhead. Rustlings in the bushes triggered my imagination. I conjured up all kinds of beasts to go with them. (Mice would have been more appropriate.)

After a seemingly long time exhaustion took over and I slumbered, only to awaken with a start when all went suddenly silent, eerily silent. It was as if I'd been transported to a planet in outer space where, I'd heard, there is no sound because there is no atmosphere. I rose up on one elbow and looked around, but could see nothing beyond the dim glow of an almost dead campfire. At least that was reassuring.

I lay back on my hard bed and shivered, more from anxiety than cold. I fought the emotion, knowing full well it was cowardly and foolish, but I couldn't help myself. At length I realized why the quiet. It was the calm before the storm. I felt a drop of moisture on my cheek and it wasn't sweat, it was rainwater. Of course, I remembered, much relieved, animals and birds always shut-up just before it rains.

The rest of my night was spent in two major occupations: Turning over and over in an attempt to keep my extremities from going numb, manipulating the canvas in an effort to keep my bed dry. It turned out to be a pretty sleepless night.

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So this is what camping is all about? I asked myself. Sufficient to alleviate my own discomfort, however, was the knowledge that my peers were experiencing the same kinds of trouble; giving credence to the old adage, "misery loves company."

It has always been and always will be a fact that a bad night must eventually end. And that one ended, at least as far as I was concerned, when first I could make out the treetops above our tiny clearing. The darkness ended but not the rainfall, for it was one of those drizzling rains that could last for days.

With little reluctance I emerged from my cocoon - thankful that I had not undressed the night before - went to the brook, washed my face and hands in the cold water, dried them as best I could on my damp shirttail, brushed my teeth and retired to a relatively dry spot under a tree. There I sat, holding my canvas over my head, until the others, grumbling as I had, were all up and about.

I have no recollection of our eating anything that morning, only of moving around zombie-like in the drizzle, of securing our wet bedrolls and waiting for the order to march. Silently then, in single file, we slogged back up the cow path to the welcome comfort of our warm, dry, mansion-like bunkhouses.

Thus ended my first overnight experience in the woods. And not really by accident, it was my last such outing in New England.

Except for a raccoon, several skunks, chipmunks and squirrels, I saw no "wild" animals at Greenwood. But I did see the destruction perpetrated by a (presumably) hungry hedgehog. Mr. Little was in the process of outfitting a work group, to mow the tall grass in the orchard, and when we entered the barn (or shed) for scythes and rakes our leader, glancing up at the rafters, let loose a mild epithet. Following his gaze I observed the outline of an upside-down canoe on the two-by-four stringers, but I didn't immediately understand why he was so upset.

"Those dirty, blankety-blank porkypines have eaten my canoe," he voiced in a tone of disgust.

That canoe, he said, had been built by an Algonquin Indian some years before and was a prized possession. He had paddled it up and down a number of streams in Vermont and Western Massachusetts. Mr. Little went on to explain that it was constructed of birch bark over a spruce frame, and was made watertight by applying pitch to the seams.

All that remained of what must have been a beautiful vessel was its skeleton. A porcupine, or porcupines, had eaten every shred of its birch bark skin and left the frame intact.

For the moment the mowing job was postponed. Instead we all fanned out and searched the woods for signs of the culprit(s). But of course none was found.

At Mr. Little's direction, we returned to the barn and nailed boards over every crack and opening we could see. It was a case of "closing the door after the horse was stolen." The damage was done.

I felt sorry for Mr. Little, for the canoe was irreplaceable. If I could have found the hedgehog that ravaged it, or any hedgehog, I'd have dispatched it with a vengeance.

We finally got to the haying project and that evening, at dusk, the boys challenged the girls to a game of steal-the-flag. It was a

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lively game, played on the fragrant, new-mown field in the orchard. Of course we captured the girls' flag and won.

While at camp that summer I received several welcome letters, most of which I saved. Betty wrote at length about my paper route (that she'd taken over in my absence), of the nice customers who gave her tips and one who hadn't paid for over two weeks; that her bike needed painting and that Papa had put an old tire back on to replace a flat one "and he didn't know how to do it too well." She wrote that Shirley had won a prize for learning the most Bible verses in Bible School, and had asked about me. She told of swimming at Schell's [pond] with her friends and of being afraid of being caught by Mr. Moody; of the new chickens "growing real fast," and other items of interest. She ended with the non-sequitur, "there is such little news to tell you."

Shirley also wrote to me, disclosing, among other things, that she would not be in Northfield when I returned. I guessed that her aunt decided to "take her away" for a while. She signed off, "With love, Shirley."

My friend Neil, who was working as a caddy at The Northfield's golf course, wrote that his trombone was "coming along swell" and that he missed me. And "P.S. Don't take any wooden nickels."

On the eighth of August we gave a concert in the barn. It was attended by family and friends. In addition to performing with the full orchestra, I played a Haydn "String Quartet" with three girl violinists. During intermission there was an abundance of cake, ice cream and conversation.

Our concert may not have been one of symphonic perfection, but the evening was enjoyed by all and it was a fitting celebration to end our summer encampment.

We were still residing on Meadow Street when I entered the hallowed halls of Northfield High, just a few hundred yards "cross lots" from our door.

It was a classical building, of red brick and two-plus stories high under a slate roof. The main entrance consisted of a half-dozen wide granite steps and a portico supported by tall white columns. It faced the east and Main Street. A large spruce tree stood on either side of those steps, their tops, in our time, reaching to the second floor windows. A full basement opened onto ground level at the rear.

Classrooms occupied the south half of the first floor, but an auditorium (named Alexander Hall after Mrs. Adeline Alexander, its benefactor) took up all of the north half.

On the second floor, over the auditorium, was the assembly room, home room to all four grades. More classrooms occupied the south half of that floor. There was attic space above, but I have no idea what was up there. The heating plant, a coal-fired furnace, was housed in the basement.

Rank had its privileges at Northfield High. Members of the senior class got to come and go through the front entrance while lower classmen had to use the back door. But that was only one of the things we freshmen had to get used to. Classroom procedure, going from one room to another for different subjects and teachers, was new to us.

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Our class, which initially totaled twenty-four students, was seated at the west end of the home room. We would migrate each year, hopefully, with promotions, to wind up as seniors with desks at the east end.

But first we had to endure the (mild) rites of initiation, as prescribed by the sophomores, and content ourselves with staring wistfully at the upper classmen. Personally, I had to learn which, if any, of our several teachers might tolerate fooling around in the classroom. I'd been forewarned about two of them, in advice handed down by my elder siblings, that neither Miss Austin nor Miss Lawley would put up with any kind of foolishness or inattention.

Despite her reputation for being stern, Miss Lawley allowed a subtle sense of humor to show at appropriate times; one corner of her mouth would slowly creep up in a curious smile and her dark eyes would twinkle as if to say, "Okay, that was funny but don't overdo it."

Miss Evelyn G. Lawley was, in my estimation, a truly great teacher, one to be held in esteem. During her 34-year tenure she taught a good many generations of Northfield's youth, never letting up on her obvious objective; that of instilling as much knowledge as possible into the heads of her pupils. In order to accomplish that goal she had to have their undivided attention and respect.

Some of us were slower than others in that realization, and alas, I was one of the slow ones, as I will attempt to illustrate:

For reasons that I cannot explain (or would rather not admit to) I was always trying to think of ways to break the monotony at school. For example, just for the heck of it, one warm spring day I climbed out of the biology classroom window, made my way along a narrow ledge (several feet above ground) and reentered through a window in an adjacent classroom. The windows were all open at the time and no teachers were present. It was a stupid thing to do, and I was lucky to escape detection and a severe reprimand.

Whenever we changed rooms we had to pass through the halls and/or climb the rear stairway. (Only seniors could use the front one.) At the halfway level was a landing, where the stairway made a 180-degree turn. There was a handrail on the wall side of the stair well, and a banister on the inside, or open side. Because certain kids were apt to push or shove, or try to slide down the banister, one of the teachers always stood guard at the bottom of the stairs. Often, it seemed, that guard was Miss Lawley, whose presence was generally enough to eliminate horseplay.

But not, unfortunately, in my case.

I was leaving class and headed out to lunch with some of my friends. At the top of the stairs I was suddenly struck by an urge to do something funny. I didn't have enough presence of mind to see who was on guard, but immediately put my thought into action.

As I started down the upper flight of stairs I grabbed the banister, turned and twisted, dragged my heels on the steps, let go of my handhold and rolled up in a heap on the landing. My fellow students all stopped and stared, which was, of course, consistent with my objective. I made the turn, and continued my performance from there to the bottom where I sprawled to a stop. Unknown, to me, at Miss Lawley's feet.

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My plan had been to then stand up and walk nonchalantly out the door. But it didn't work out that way. I was about to rise and dust myself off when I discovered Miss Lawley bending over me in a very solicitous manner, asking after my health.

"Are you all right, young man?"

I made no answer.

With a firm grip on my arm she helped me to my feet and escorted me to her classroom. She then suggested that I sit still while the school nurse was called in "to check for injuries."

I insisted that I was okay, that I had accidentally tripped, that I hadn't broken anything, and I convinced her not to call the nurse (Shirley's aunt). But she still exhibited concern for my well being. Perhaps too much concern it suddenly occurred to me, and I was embarrassed to think that she was onto me.

Anyway, she forced me to sit right there throughout most of the lunch hour. Finally, much to my relief, she smiled her curious smile, allowed that I would be all right and told me to leave. Not, however, without issuing a stern warning.

"Don't you ever pull a stunt like that again!"

Case closed.

Miss Lawley taught the "tough" subjects: geometry, which I enjoyed, algebra and chemistry, which I liked but thought difficult, and I think Ancient History, which I found fascinating. She also taught a new subject called Aeronautics. I virtually devoured that subject matter. It was then that I developed an everlasting interest in meteorology.

It is a testimonial to Miss Lawley's ability that I, in spite of my being a poor student, received passing grades in all of her class subjects, even if by small margins. Further, the knowledge I acquired from her teachings would prove to be invaluable in the future.

In contrast to Miss Lawley, who was of medium height and rather stocky (not fat) in build, Julia B. Austin was small, slender, nervous and not a really attractive woman. She was energetic, intelligent, firm, fair and warm hearted. Like Miss Lawley, Miss Austin was an old maid. Again, like Miss Lawley, teaching was her whole life.

Among other subjects, Miss Austin taught history and Latin. I took both Latin I and II, never learned the "language," got less than scholarly grades but really appreciated the class. I probably learned more about the English language than Latin.

Miss Austin helped us in many other ways, especially with the school paper, the "N.H.S. REVIEW." She also tried to make actors of us, for school plays that were presented each year at the Town Hall. They were ostensibly senior plays but since ours was a small school, students from all grades participated. (In my freshman year I played in "China Boy; my only lines were spoken in phonetic Chinese.)

Whatever she did, she did wholeheartedly and never seemed to tire of her occupation. I think that of all of Northfield's high school teachers in the twentieth century, perhaps ever, Miss Lawley and Miss Austin were the most dedicated, the most enduring and the most revered.

Only two sports were available to boys at Northfield High: baseball and football. For the girls it was softball and volley ball.

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Participation was voluntary and you were not graded, as I recall, on performance. You could get good reviews in the school paper if you did well. Baseball and softball were intra-mural, including such nearby towns as Winchester, Hinsdale and Bernardston. I attended most of the home games, yelled encouragement, acted as bat boy and retrieved foul balls from the poison ivy patch at the edge of the field. (I was immune to the ivy's poison.)

Before he went into the military service, Richard Cobb was our principal. He was a very handsome, athletic, smart, respected and personable young man, and a good coach. He molded a number of good ball-players before leaving. We all hated to see him go, but in those days a lot of our best men were being invited to serve.

As for me, not only was I unable to throw a ball accurately but also my mother dissuaded me from playing on account of my "violin hands." I could throw a tennis ball over the roof at home or skip a flat stone across a pond, but those activities didn't require a whole lot of talent.

In spite of Mother's advice, I sometimes joined the guys in a game of touch football. (Because there was no protective gear of any kind, such things being nonexistent during the war years, touch football was the "name of the game.") If there was no snow on the ground Neil, Billy, Jughead, Gilbert Stacey, Floyd Dunnell, Donald Lilly and/or others would get together after school for an unofficial scrimmage. Often Mr. Cobb was there, too, playing and coaching. I learned to throw the pigskin a ways, and sometimes even to catch it. I was small and swift-of-foot and with the ball tucked under my arm I could run and dodge almost as well as anyone. But there my expertise ended.

The days grew short, the temperatures dropped, the turf turned brown and bare patches of ground froze hard. It was November, just before snow time, and I got in on one of the last scrimmages of the year.

I was wearing my usual school clothes: dark blue pants, light shirt, leather soled shoes and a heavy pullover sweater. I never bothered with a jacket until it got really cold, and that day the temperature was still in the twenties. Anyway, the game was enough to keep me warm.

From the left of the line I went out toward the southeast corner of the field for a pass; the ball was in sight over my left shoulder; I was certain to catch it and go in for a touchdown. Until suddenly a giant, shadowy form moved rapidly into the space between me and the ball.

I never again saw the football, only that form towering over me and then on top of me as I fell to the hard ground. Naturally the interceptor had to be one of the biggest guys on the field. He was at least a foot-and-a-half taller and a hundred pounds heavier than me. We skidded to a stop. I was immobile. The guy got up and extended a hand.

"You okay?" he asked.

I recognized the voice of Don Lilley and groaned.

Finally, with some effort, I sat up. But I was still out of wind and could not speak. It seemed an eternity before the process of

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inhale-exhale worked again. It was comforting, however, to learn that I could still wiggle my fingers and toes. I stood up, took a deep breath and muttered, "I'm okay...but I think I'll sit out for a while."

I thought I'd feel better in a few minutes and get back in the game before dark. But after a half-hour of hurting and shivering I knew something was wrong and that I had to get home and warm. With a wave to the guys, I headed off through the Quinlan lot.

Mother was not at home when I got there. She was probably at work at the library. Just as well, I thought, and went into the bathroom, closed the door and commenced to worry. I didn't feel well at all. In fact, I now felt nauseous. And how was I going to explain to Mama that I got hurt playing football? Beads of perspiration covered my brow. I was weak and cold all over. (Unknown to me at the time, I was suffering from shock.)

I raised my arms to remove my turtle-neck sweater and felt a sharp twinge of pain between my neck and shoulder. I stopped short and gasped.

Pain! Pain!

I felt along the bone beneath my collar and, sure enough, discovered a noticeable lump. It was fractured, no doubt about it. But sooner or later I'd have to get that sweater off. (I never considered the possibility of cutting it off. And ruin a good sweater?)

Seated on the lid of the stool in a mounting sweat, shivering, almost in a faint, I gritted my teeth and forced the sweater over my head. Coincidentally I felt and heard a "crack," as what had been a hairline fracture in the bone became a full-fledged break. I had successfully rid myself of the sweater but at the expense of a broken (though not compound) collarbone. Leaning forward, I put my head between my legs and avoided fainting.

After a while I regained my composure and called out to Betty, who came running to see what the matter was. About that time Mother arrived home, quickly sized up the situation and soon got me to a doctor. I believe I was taken to Greenfield for treatment, but I was in such a daze the details escaped my attention.

As was the practice in those days, my shoulders were immobilized by a cumbersome plaster cast. My upper arms stuck straight out to the sides. I could move my forearms but could reach no part of my head.

Back home, when the time of worry was past and I was resting easy at last, Mama gave me the lecture I'd anticipated; ending the discourse with, "You know, if you hadn't been doing something you shouldn't have this wouldn't have happened."

I remained prudently silent.

The cast made it extremely difficult to do certain things, like eating, washing, bathing, dressing, writing and sleeping. I stayed home from school a few days and took two-months leave from violin practice. At first, until the novelty wore off, I got a lot of sympathy from my schoolmates. And then they paid no attention to my "handicap."

On the appointed day for removal of the cast, the doctor cut it away with a big pair of tin snips while jokingly warning me that, when he was done, my arms would feel as if they were going to fall off. He

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wasn't joking. They did feel as if they were going to fall off. It was a strange sensation caused, he explained, by muscle atrophy.

I was "fit as a fiddle" before long and put the event away in my memory. For the most part, after the cast had been put in place, the whole experience was somewhat of a lark.

But once again I had learned a lesson the hard way: If one is small and a lightweight and abhors pain, he should never play football with the big boys.

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CONCERT
by
The Greenwood Music Camp

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- Concerto Grosso in D minor, op. 11 No. 4 *Sammartini*
Andante
Tempo Giusto
Andante Sostenuato
Allegro Assai
Tempo di Minuetto
- Suite from the Opera "Castor et Pollux" *Rameau*
Overture
Gavotte
Menuet
Passepied
-
- String Quartet in Eb major, op. 33 No. 2 *Haydn*
Allegro Moderato, Cantabile
Finale: Presto
Ethel Silberberg, George Phelps, Jean Drake, Susette Coolidge.
- Andante from the Violin Concerto in A minor *Bach*
- Brook Green Suite *Holst*
Allegretto
Andante
Allegro

ORCHESTRA

Violins. Ethel Silberberg, *Concert Mistress*, Betsy Aub, Christina Binney, Edward Hewitt, Helen-Mae Knafel, Dorothy Little, Ann McColleston, Elaine Pinkerton, George Phelps, Helen Rice, Roy Welch Jr., John Winslow.

Violas. Margaret Clark, Jean Drake, Dwight Little, Jack Peterkin.

Violoncellas. Susette Coolidge, Betsy Drake, Sidney Knafel, Ruth McGregor, Patsy Pigors, Ted Rex, Danny Mackay-Smith, William Wigglesworth, Bridget Wilson, Joanna Winship, Oliver Winter.

Bass, Mrs. Alice Brown.

Flute, Winifred Prince.

Oboe, Bobby Dellheim.

Clarinets, Ruth Bosson, Gerry Mayer.

Bassoon, Peter Dellheim.

Piano, Lee Lyman, Alasdair Nicol.

Conductor, George Brown.

Friday, August 8, 1941 at 8:15 p. m.
Cumington, Massachusetts

CHAPTER ELEVEN
WAR BREAKS OUT

Enactment of the Selective Service Act of 1940 was evidence that Hitler's actions in Europe had finally awakened the Congress of the United States to the reality of war. Men of ages 21 through 35 were required to register for the draft. By summer of 1941, nearly everyone was at least aware of the war, if not particularly concerned about it. The British were in dire straits, and President Roosevelt (now serving an unprecedented third term) used whatever means within his authority, and some without, to provide them with much needed aid. Several countries, including France, had already succumbed to the Nazis, and the odds were against Britain's survival without our help.

Still, many people in the United States were of an "isolationist" persuasion, feeling secure by virtue of the wide Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Even our congressmen continued their usual mode of operation: much talk and little action. Some were hesitant to vote for defense related legislation, for fear of being labeled "warmongers" by their constituents. Roosevelt, with a little help from his friends, figured out a way to provide some machinery for the British war effort, and persuaded Congress to pass the Lend-Lease Bill. War materiel would be sent immediately and compensated for later. In effect, we began to pay the wages of war without actually waging war. But it was a good plan.

Meanwhile, the Japanese were considering an alliance with the Axis powers; the Germans and the Italians. Hitler was sending his troops into Russia, and he wanted the Japs to provide a diversion in the East. At the same time, Japan's smiling ambassadors were in Washington, D.C., supposedly working out a "friendly arrangement" with our government officials.

In big cities across the U.S. ubiquitous anti-war protesters took to the streets. In Northfield, thank God, we were spared their unpatriotic ranting.

I believe that most people dislike war, but one has to read only a little history to understand its inevitability. So it behooves a society, no matter what its politics, to be prepared to defend itself and its resources. In 1941 we, the people of the United States of

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America, were ill prepared for war. Our complacency would soon be blasted into oblivion.

I first became aware of the seriousness of the situation when my eldest brother was drafted into the Army. Although he was near the upper age limit, John was the only one of my brothers then eligible. Richard and Stanley were both married and had children, and were therefore exempt, Charlie, though a bachelor, was deferred on account of his occupation of farmer. Ray was not yet twenty-one.

Strange as it may seem, while I remember hearing the news on the radio, I cannot account for my whereabouts on that fateful Sunday when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Most people claim to remember exactly what they were doing on that particular day and time, but in truth I do not.

On the seventh we heard virtually no details of the bombing, a fact that increased our apprehensions. But on the 8th of December I listened in disbelief to President Roosevelt's eloquent message to Congress (which was broadcast to the American people via radio.)

"Yesterday, December 7, 1941," he began in a firm, resonant voice, "a date which will live in infamy, the United States was suddenly and deliberately attacked by the naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan...."

A few hours later we were officially at war. Not only with Japan, of course, but with all of the Axis powers. Suddenly my brother's "membership" in the U.S. Army took on more significance.

Almost immediately after Pearl Harbor, civilian life in the U.S. changed dramatically. Conservation of food and materials was the rule. In May of 1942, books of War Ration stamps were issued, limiting households to a pound of sugar every two weeks (which didn't seem too bad), and motorists to 25- to 30-gallons of gas per month for non-essential driving. Tires were rationed then as well.

The fact that most people had been living "close to the vest" since the depression made shortages easier to accept. Doing without was already a way of life. As for jobs, anyone with an inclination to work could do so. Those in agricultural and industrial occupations began turning out more of everything. And as the number of men entering the military service increased, women were pressed into the work force to take on all sorts of jobs both menial and cerebral.

Virtually everyone was now convinced that the war would be a difficult one, more difficult even than the "War to End All Wars" (World War I) had been.

Speaking of "women in the work force," this is as good a place as any to elaborate on the subject:

In recent years, there has been a great deal of fuss about so-called equal rights for women. Some feminist groups - whose agendas were usually at odds with femininity - succeeded in forcing a lot of business owners and managers to place women in jobs traditionally occupied by men. Predictably, certain federally mandated rules - that is, specifying given ratios of women to men in those jobs - proved detrimental to women, men and businesses alike.

Women activists have also lobbied (as yet unsuccessfully) for an amendment to the United States Constitution to "guarantee" equal

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rights for women. Their activities are, in my opinion, out of order. Our Constitution already guarantees equal opportunity to all U.S. citizens, male and female.

Beginning with the dawn of civilization - whenever that was - tasks undertaken by men and women evolved in a logical, natural way. True, historical evidence points to countless examples of women in unique situations, but in the overall scheme of things the male assumed those tasks to which he was best suited and the female assumed those tasks to which she was best suited.

Wars have always been rich in side benefits, albeit at horrendous cost in human lives and resources, World War II perpetuated the trend. Among other things it provided an excellent proving ground for testing women in (traditional) men's jobs. In the absence of millions of men women did every conceivable, and some hardly conceivable, kinds of work on the home front.

They labored hard on farms, docks, factory assembly lines and in shipyards. They wielded jackhammers, rivet guns and welding torches, they drove tractors and they operated giant cranes. They also occupied supervisory positions.

Most of them did very well in those occupations. As a matter of fact, I firmly believe that the war could not have been won without their efforts, both at home and abroad. But the point is, if it were meant to be that they should do those jobs in normal times more than a few of them would have remained in the post-war work force. But it didn't work out that way. Virtually all of them were happy, even eager, to relinquish those dirty, physically demanding and difficult jobs to returning men. They just wanted to go back to being mothers, housewives, secretaries, clerks, social workers and so on. The experiment was over. And no amount of legislation would have changed the outcome.

In the years that followed the war, my opinion on the subject would not change. On the contrary, it would be strengthened through observation and personal experience. When the federal government decreed (and the Bell System conceded) that women should be placed in traditionally men's jobs, I was in a position to learn the sad results. There was a general decline in job quality and productivity and an increase in the cost of doing business; all of which contributed to inflation. There was a lowering of morale, not to mention problems of "sexual harassment" (both real and imagined). At the same time the divorce rate among Company employees increased dramatically, without a doubt fueled by the coeducational working environment (men and women working "alone together").

Throughout my career I would advocate better compensation to women in traditionally-women's jobs; as opposed to the notion that they should do men's work in order to receive comparable wages.

Better that they should be paid more for doing traditional tasks, which they did well, than be assigned to men's jobs where many would fail. But Company and union agreements tied them to a lower pay scale.

Whether we like it or not, it is a fact of life that men and women are different, both physically and emotionally. And while there have always been individual cases of women doing men's work, and vice versa, it is illogical to assume that everyone of either gender should

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do equally well in his opposite's role. Quite possibly, quite probably, the tried and true evolutionary process worked far better than a revolutionary one can ever hope to.

Alas, the "great and mysterious" plan for mankind seems to evolve around the premise that every generation must suffer the consequences of personal experience rather than learn from the trials and results of its predecessor, whether with respect to politics, foreign affairs, religious practices or social behavior.

But back to the days of my youth.

I was really fortunate to have spent those summers at Silver Lake in New Hampshire, in a community of musicians at Greenwood Music Camp in Cummington, and on the Huckle Hill Farm with my brother Charles. And then, in the early forties, I got another lucky summer break, this time at Sheldegren Farm with Stanley and Elsie and family.

The name Sheldegren was cleverly derived from the three townships in which it lay: Shelburne, Deerfield and Greenfield. The town lines met right in the middle of the house. It was owned by a man named Bill Koch, who also had a grocery business in downtown Greenfield. In 1939 Harry Koch, Bill's son, took over as manager of the farm. That same year Stan went to work as Koch's herdsman, and within a year or two Charlie hired on as well. Harry and his wife resided in the northern part of the farmhouse. Stan, Elsie and family (and I think the hired hands) lived in the southern part.

To me, Sheldegren represented the ideal farm. Situated in the Berkshire Hills it consisted of a big hay-and-dairy barn, a big chicken house and several outbuildings and pens in addition to the aforementioned farmhouse. All were modern in design and construction; all were surrounded by beautiful rolling fields, pastures and woodlots. From the top of the hill above the barn one could look down on the town of Greenfield and surrounding countryside.

One Fourth-of-July we held our family reunion at Sheldegren. It was a typical celebration: kids running around, playing games; menfolk throwing horseshoes, target practicing and swapping stories; womenfolk looking after little ones and preparing food for a picnic on the lawn in the shade. At dusk we climbed up the hill through a hayfield to a clearing, and when the lightning bugs signaled "it's time" my elder brothers launched rockets from homemade wooden troughs out over the valley. It was a memorable experience indeed.

I always felt an affinity for Stan. We were quite different in personality and physical attributes; he was strong, energetic, vocal and boisterous while I was small, quiet and (admittedly) not very active. But I liked his sense of humor, marveled at his practical knowledge, and admired his attitude toward life. I enjoyed being in his company.

I first got to know Stan when he was running the Huckle Hill Farm for Streeter. He owned a big Packard then, of early thirties vintage, I think, open like a present-day convertible and long. As long as two of today's cars end-to-end. Stan loved to drive, and to drive hard and fast. One time he gave me a Barney Oldfield ride up the graveled road

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over Huckle Hill, the big Packard throwing rocks and dust on every turn, the noise scattering chickens and dogs at every farmyard.

"Goes prutty good don't it," he shouted over the roaring engine and pounding gravel.

I didn't answer, just turned and grinned at him while maintaining a firm grip on the leather seat cushion.

Another time he took me with him to Keene, to get a load of groceries for the store. It was a hot and muggy morning when we left the Connecticut River Valley above Northfield, and headed across the state line toward Winchester. Stan slowed down in that little town, then urged the straight-eight to go all out through the unsettled forest beyond.

We bounced across the B&M Railroad tracks, picked up more speed, rounded a curve at the bottom of a grade and entered the dark mouth of a covered bridge spanning the Ashuelot River. Stan then hit the brakes and the Packard decelerated with a series of deafening blasts.

Framed by the opening at the other end of the bridge, silhouetted against the daylight, three figures were leaping, apparently, to safety. Stan got the big car stopped, just inches from a gaping hole in the roadway where the workmen had just removed some planks. Below, swirling dark and ominously, was the river. I shuddered.

Stan was told that he'd have to wait until they'd replaced the flooring, but he was too impatient for that. He said he could make it, the gap being only two or three feet across. The workmen shrugged.

Stan backed the car almost all the way to the bridge entrance, shifted to a forward gear and hit the gas pedal. I clenched my teeth, grabbed ahold of the seat and silently prayed. The Packard fairly flew, loose planking flopping in its wake, and cleared the crevasse with ease.

Once more out in the open, on smooth road again, Stan resumed his cruising speed. "Kind o' excitin' wasn't it," he drawled.

Before long we arrived at Keene, stopped by to visit Grandpa and Grandma for a short while, then went to a warehouse. Stan and a couple of workers put at least a truckload of goods in the back of the car, filling the space from floorboards to canvas top (the seat had been removed). More stuff was strapped to luggage carriers at the rear and on the running boards. Then, before leaving for home, because it looked and smelled like rain a canvas tarpaulin was tied over the cargo.

Sure enough, we hadn't gone a mile when the heavens descended upon us in the form of a deluge, accompanied by brilliant lightning and pounding thunder. Stan, because there were no side-windows or curtains to protect us, had to drive "real fast between the drops." At the Swanzey Bridge I was much relieved when he slowed almost to a crawl. (The bridge had been repaired in our absence.) Pretty soon it quit raining and the sun came out bright and shining, and the rest of my tour was anticlimactic.

When I was with them at Sheldegren, Stan and Elsie had three children; Dennis, Lois and June. They were eight, six and four years old, respectively, and kept Elsie pretty busy in addition to her farm-wife duties.

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I was fascinated by the way Elsie operated her kitchen range. It was a big stove, the biggest one I'd ever seen, with space for several pots and pans on its top cooking surface, a cavernous oven below and a warming oven above. She knew, no doubt from trial-and-error, just how much wood to put into the firebox, and when, to produce the correct amount of heat on top and in the oven. Neither the range, nor Elsie, was often idle.

A big garden and an orchard provided most of the farm's vegetable and fruit requirements. I'd had some experience at gardening, and helped with the weeding and harvesting. When the edibles showed up fresh and sweet on the dinner table I ate my share. As was the custom in those days, Elsie canned great quantities of vegetables and fruits, enduring the heat of the range in late summer to provide for the off-season months ahead.

The sweet corn ripened and I stuffed myself with corn-on-the-cob; picked, cooked and eaten, as only it should be, in less than an hour. And potatoes. Stanley was an avid potato eater. Almost every meal included spuds in one form or another. They were also a favorite of mine.

Elsie must have baked just about every day, for there were always fresh bread, biscuits, pies and cakes to be devoured. In spite of wartime shortages, meat was an important part of their diet, fuel for the hard working men. I shied away from it in favor of baked goods, fruits and vegetables.

Despite the rigors of farm life - caring for husband, kids and hired hands, keeping house, doing the wash, gardening and cooking - Elsie maintained a remarkably good sense of humor. I'm sure she often felt out-of-sorts, but she always appeared cheerful, giving tit-for-tat when the men teased her.

I followed Stan around the farm, trying to keep out of the way while at the same time attempting to be useful (without too much success). I hung around the barn at milking time, to watch the compressed-air-powered machines empty the swollen udders of the cows, and sometimes carried pails of warm milk to the cooling room.

There, amidst an array of clean, shiny, odd-shaped aluminum and steel gadgets, the cream was centrifugally separated from the milk. The cream was drained into small, two-quart, tinned cans, the whole milk into twenty-gallon ones (for later shipment.) The room and everything in it were cleaned, using a "live steam" hose, after each milking time, leaving a fresh odor to the place.

As I had done at Charlie's, I sometimes helped the farmhands throw down ensilage from the silo, or climbed up to pitch hay from the loft. When the cows were turned out to pasture, after milking, I'd man a broom and help clean the stalls, a job that I could do with expertise.

In between times I found a lot of ways to amuse myself. I "experimented" with the flycatcher, a one-by-two-foot horizontal grill of electrically charged wires that "zapped" the dirty buggars when they tried to fly through it to the bait and dead flies below. I used various materials - grass, leaves, grasshoppers, butterflies etcetera - dropping them on the grid to see which resulted in the best arc. I was fascinated by that invisible force.

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I studied the big bull with the ring in his nose, testily reposing in his strong, iron-barred pen. He was a mean, wild-eyed fellow, and I stayed well clear of the bars for fear of riling him. When Stanley or Charlie opened the gate, attached a stout wooden "leading pole" (about three feet long) to his nose-ring and led him out to breed a cow, I watched from an advantageous perch on a very high fence.

It was an interesting sight to behold: a lot of sashaying and eluding on the part of the cow, a lot of bellowing and pawing and obstinacy on the part of the bull, a lot of hollering and determination on the part of the breeder to get the bull squared off to the cow. What a hassle! In the end, the cow relaxed and the bull realized his moment of pleasure.

Dairy bulls were wild and dangerous cusses, I was told. A lot of farmers had been seriously gored, injured or killed while handling them. I wanted no part of that job.

I think the farm hands at Sheldegren considered Stan to be a good boss. He certainly knew farming, knew what had to be done and how to do it. His orders, given in a "well-modulated" voice, could be clearly understood and were expected to be followed. I doubt if he ever asked a hand to do anything unreasonable.

And while he was very familiar with the old ways, he looked for new, more efficient ways of doing things, freely sharing his knowledge with his men. Being ambitious himself, those around him were generally inclined to work hard too. Still, if they didn't toe the mark he was not hesitant to set them straight.

His philosophy seemed to be, "If you've got a job to do you might as well do it right and have fun doing it."

I suspected that if you were not afraid of hard work, you'd enjoy working at Sheldegren.

Stan kept a close watch on the hay crops. When driving by a field he'd stop and check the blooms for maturity. At the proper time he'd send one of the men out with a tractor-mower to cut it, then hope for a pause in the rain pattern. With good luck, in a day or two it could be raked into windrows.

In the old days, it would have then been put up in piles and pitched onto a wagon for transporting to the barn. But now, using a modern hay loader, it was picked up directly from the windrows and dropped onto the bed of a truck.

When the hay on the field downhill from the barn was ready to bring in, Stan climbed up behind the steering wheel of a truck - a pretty big truck from my perspective, a one-ton flat-bed Chevrolet, I think - and I climbed into the cab beside him. One of his men grabbed a pitchfork and climbed up on the bed, and we went to the field where they hitched a loader onto the rear of the truck.

Now we were ready. Stan drove astraddle a windrow while behind us the mechanized loader raked the dry hay onto a conveyor, lifted and dropped it onto the truck bed where the guy with the pitchfork, stumbling around on the jostling load, distributed and "tied it in." His was a hard job.

After a while Stan stopped the truck, turned to me and asked bluntly, "You ready to take over here?"

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I guess he figured that if I couldn't do any heavy work, at least I could drive the truck. And maybe he thought it was a good field to practice on. The slope was only about ten-percent, as compared to some sidehills that you could hardly stand on much less drive on. (Except for the meadows alongside the Connecticut River, level hayfields were almost non-existent in Western Massachusetts.)

I was excited by the prospect of driving, though I tried to appear nonchalant. I was also worried about taking on so much responsibility; not only for the equipment but also for the lives of two people involved: the man on the load and me. But who was I to argue.

Stan rode on the right-hand side while I, sitting on the very edge of the driver's seat, for I could hardly see over the hood or reach the foot pedals, maneuvered the big truck up and down successive windrows, somehow executing the sharp turns at the ends. Then he left me on my own.

I did quite well, gaining confidence at every turn. But after a while it seemed as if the truck was losing power, or was it the growing weight of the load? The engine stalled. I got it started again and drove ahead a short way only to have it stall again. Frustrated, I sat there wondering what to do.

The hired man, seeing my predicament, jumped down off the load. I climbed down from the cab.

"I think somethin's burning," I ventured, and we both looked for a source of the now apparent smoke, a blue haze curling up from under the back of the truck. Fortunately for us, this was one of those times when the adage, "Where there's smoke there's fire," did not apply. As yet, at least, there was no sign of a flame though the point of combustion must have been close.

A lot of trucks were built with the driveline enclosed in a steel tube. This one was not. Would that it were because the exposed, whirling "U" joints had picked up strands of hay and wound them, like cotton candy on a stick, around that driveline until the mass bound up against the bottom of the truck bed. The resultant friction caused so much heat that it began to smoke and very soon would have caught fire. It was too hot to touch.

Stanley, who was tossing hay a short distance away, saw the idle truck and came over to investigate. Without hesitating he grabbed a tire iron from under the truck seat, slid under the bed and started to unravel the mess. The hired man and I helped him pry it loose, some of it smoking and glowing red.

It took a while but the driveline was free at last and we crawled out from under.

"Y'oughtta stop once in a while and check that," Stan said. Thus advised we went back to haying.

Another particular job sticks in my mind, because the reason for it was unique and the doing of it was a hard and nasty task. It was unique in that, as far as I knew, the practice was hitherto unused on the farm, at least in the North.

Peanut shucks! As a wartime measure, peanut shucks were being shipped from the Deep South to be used as a substitute for sawdust or straw (apparently both in short supply) as bedding for cows.

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I went with some of the men in the big truck, one that had been outfitted with high sideboards and tailgate, to the rail yard near Greenfield where a freight car full of the shucks stood waiting to be off-loaded.

The truck was backed up to the door of the car and, using big, heavy, scoop shovels, we went to work transferring the shucks from the one to the other. With handkerchiefs tied over our lower faces, stripped to the waist, covered with sweat, dust and fiber, we labored like slaves. As the bulk of the shucks near the door diminished, we shoveled from even dustier recesses. And to add to our discomfort it was unbearably hot. I did my share of both shoveling and "good natured" complaining.

It was a welcome relief when, hauling the truckload up to the farm, we could once again breathe fresh air.

We must have gotten three or four more loads in the next few days. But I was happy when we could shuck that shuck-shoveling stint, and I sincerely hoped that shuck-shipping from the South would cease. Never before had I worked in such a dirty, dusty, or inhospitable place. Nor would I ever again.

I had a number of other interesting experiences on the farm that summer. Trivial, perhaps, but important in the life of a growing boy.

I watched a calf being born. There was some problem and the cow required a great deal of help from my brother. I decided that it was a good thing to observe. Once.

I helped in the harvesting of field corn and the subsequent process of converting it to ensilage. The corn, stalks and all, was fed into a maw of whirling spikes and knives where it was chopped fine and blown through a pipe to the top of the silo. That machine, like so many on the farm, demanded the operator's undivided attention. It could just as easily chop-up an arm or a leg.

Stan taught me how to shoot a twelve-gauge shotgun. The blast knocked me back about five feet, but propelled a slug the size of my thumb clear through a fencepost fifty feet away.

By the end of my stay at Sheldegren, I was a much smarter kid. I was also physically stronger and probably healthier.

That was the last of my summertime farm experiences. From then on I would be a "town boy," although a small town one.

Before he went into the army, I occasionally visited John. The first time was when he was living in Springfield and working with a fellow artist, Roger Wolcott, on a WPA Federal Arts Project. They, along with two or three other artists, were painting murals in the Springfield Museum of Art.

I spent a couple of very interesting days at the museum. I'd wander through galleries filled with marble sculptures, classical paintings, dioramas and exotic artifacts (I was really impressed by the standing suits of medieval armor). I watched, fascinated, as the artists created larger-than-life-sized figures and scenes on the walls of the high ceilinged rooms.

John lived in a tiny apartment, or room, not far from the museum. I remember being astounded by the fact that he, a man, could cook. And he was a good cook, too, as demonstrated by the exquisite soufflé he produced one evening for supper.

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A year or two after that, after the WPA project ended in 1938, John set up a studio in Northfield, in the back wing of the Proctor Block. It was an ideal place for a studio, spacious and with skylights in the roof allowing the "north light," so necessary to an artist, to fill the room. Sometimes, while waiting for my papers to arrive, I'd stop by for a few minutes to visit. And then I sat (several times) while he painted my portrait.

I was always in awe of John. He was so knowledgeable of so many things. Sometimes, while painting, he'd engage me in serious conversation. I liked that. He also offered advice to help with my drawing, an avocation that I would pursue all my life. When I was of an age to be attracted by the opposite sex, it was John who gave me a comprehensive book on the subject.

In many ways John reminded me of Grandpa Phelps; especially when he strapped on the old snare drum, stood at attention and beat a tattoo, or when he took up a wooden fife and played a familiar melody or two. And when we went for a walk, like Grandpa he'd describe and explain the many things we saw. I learned a great deal while in the company of my brother John.

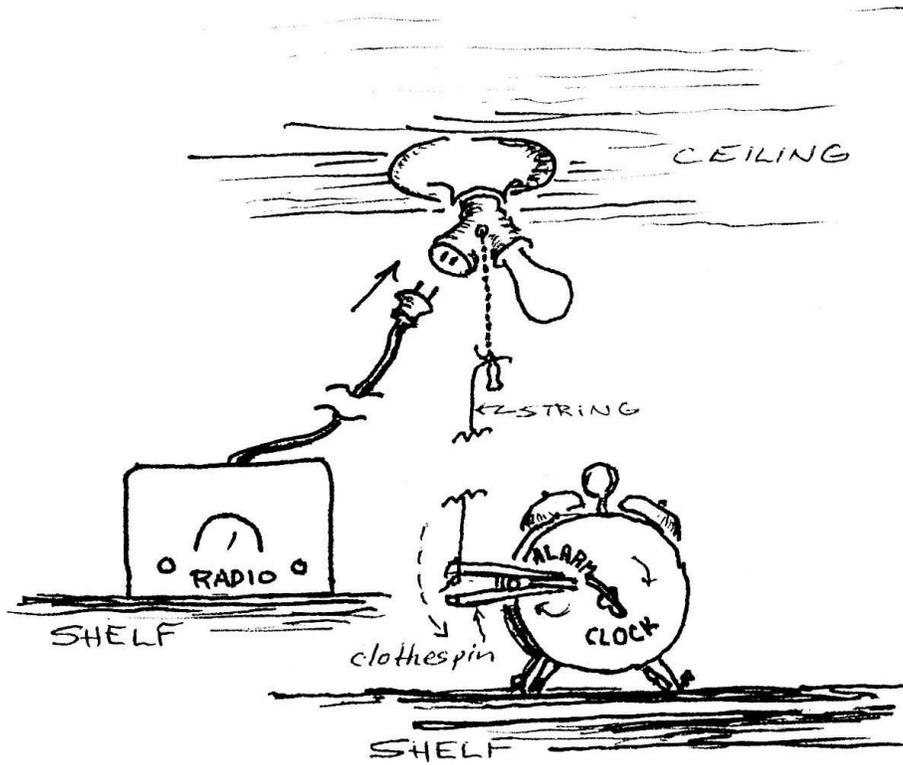
Richard, next in line to John, was for some reason the hardest of my brothers to get to know. Not that he didn't teach me a lot. He was a carpenter when I was very young, and I spent a few hours with him when he was working at a big house across from the old Powers Institute (high school) in Bernardston. It was then that I learned how to use a hand saw, a plane and a chisel, things that I was too young to learn from Grandpa Phelps in Keene.

Dick took me fishing on the Connecticut River when that river was still a filthy stream. We caught a species of small bass (possibly rock bass) from the rocky riverbank just north of the Bennett Meadow Bridge. One time I became quite discouraged, however, when I reeled in a slippery, writhing eel about two feet long. Dick kindly removed the beast from my hook, and took it home with us along with the bass.

Audrey, a schoolteacher, was an outgoing, smart and ambitious lady. I seldom had occasion to dine at her table, but when I did she invariably tried to get me to eat foods that I disliked. Using all of her powers of persuasion she tempted me to taste the eel. But I remained adamant. I could not forget how disgusting a creature it was when I dragged it out of the river.

Dick and Audrey, with their two children, lived in a house on South Street, Bernardston; by coincidence the very house in which our mother once lived as a girl. He had a big workshop toward the back of the lot, filled with the latest kinds of power tools for cabinet making and other jobs. Many of his machines were powered by belts off of a single shaft driven by an electric motor. It was an arrangement new and fascinating to me.

In the early forties, Dick built an apartment onto the rear of the house. When Grandpa and Grandma sold their home in Keene, they moved into the apartment. It was a great place for them to live out the last days of their lives.



EARLY INVENTION

CHAPTER TWELVE
A NEW ENVIRONMENT

Sometime in the late summer or early autumn of 1942, Father announced that we were once again going to move. This time to East Northfield. The move would appear to be a "step up" in our living conditions. East Northfield was thought to be the "better" part of town and the house, at 179 Main Street, was larger than the one on Meadow Street. It would be farther away from school, but that was irrelevant now that I had a reliable bicycle for transportation.

Known as the Britton place, the big house was flanked by the painted brick home of Joe Colton - dispenser of Indian lore and insurance policies - on the north, and the white clapboard house of a retired missionary, William Giebel - who owned a vast collection of oriental and other artifacts - on the south.

A guest house and tea room across the street was owned and operated by the Briesmaster family. A hardware store, a grocery store, a general store, a cafe and a Texaco gas station were all within easy walking distance, although I never walked anywhere in those days.

The Britton place was architecturally impressive. It was a two story, clapboard building under a mansard roof. The top part of the roof was almost flat, the lower, mansard, part was almost vertical and interrupted by dormer windows. It was a slate roof, of course, the mansard done in a scalloped design. The long axis of the house ran east and west, perpendicular to the street, and continued under one roof to a shed and a small barn. A large porch encircled the front part of the house, and a smaller one was built into the ell just outside the kitchen. That porch was screened and suitable for summer sleeping.

At the rear of the up-sloping property stood a big, square building that at one time housed a store, I was told, but that now stored such items as old desks, wagons and buggies that Mr. Britton had required for his business, a livery service between the railroad stations, the Seminary, Mt. Hermon and the Northfield Inn.

Two immense sugar maples shaded the lawn between the street and the house. A long, graveled driveway led up the slope from the street and curved toward the barn, which doubled as a garage. That driveway would grow to twice its size in the wintertime, when I'd have to shovel it clear of snow. A line of lilacs and other ornamentals marked the edge of the property on the Giebel side.

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In addition to a big kitchen and a dining room, there was a comfortable sitting room, a formal parlor and a bedroom on the first floor. Upstairs were three more bedrooms and a huge bathroom. The latter appeared to have been converted from a bedroom; it was too large and had too many windows to be efficient, especially in cold weather.

An ornate fireplace occupied one corner of the parlor. I think we never built a fire in it. A coal-fired furnace in the basement pushed steam from a boiler through pipes to radiators throughout the house. Most of the time we got by without the furnace, relying on heat from the kitchen range and a coal-burning, pot-bellied stove in the sitting room. The parlor doors were then kept closed, and the only heat upstairs got there by convection.

I fell into the jobs of stoking the fireboxes and removing the "clinkers." Both tasks were distasteful, the latter particularly dirty. With regularity Mother had to nag me to clean the waste from either the furnace or the stove. She called me a procrastinator. It was a long time before I'd get wise to the fact that, since I'd have to do it sooner or later anyway I might as well do it sooner.

The clinkers were spread on the driveway when it was icy, so that cars could make it up without tire chains. When the ice and snow melted in the spring, both mud and ash were tracked into the house, upsetting my mother no end.

My room was located on the second floor, on the north (cold) side of the house. As at Meadow Street, there was a way to get into and out of my room without having to go through the house. One window opened onto the porch roof, from which I could easily climb to or from the ground. I would seldom use that avenue, but it was good to know that it was there if needed.

This was the first time I had a room of my own, complete with a full-sized bed, a dresser and a closet. To conserve fuel, the valve on the steam-heated radiator in my room was seldom opened. As a consequence it was too cold to spend much time up there in the wintertime. It was great for sleeping, however, especially in a feather bed.

I did my own daily housekeeping; that is, making my bed and keeping the room tidy. (It was good training for a future life in the Navy.) I usually practiced my violin up there, away from the rest of the family.

During my high school years I somehow developed, and afterward perpetuated, a habit of rising late in the morning. It wasn't so much that I needed the sleep, just that I hated to exert the effort and get out of bed. I'd lie there listening to my radio, enjoying and squandering the minutes. Even having to reach out to turn on the radio was a bother.

When at last I forced myself out of bed it was a mad dash: wash, dress, bolt down a bowl of cereal, jump onto my bicycle and pedal fast for school. Quite often I skipped breakfast. And even more often I was late for class.

My mother loved to quote wise and prosaic sayings. She had one appropriate to almost every situation. Two of them were: "It's the lazy man who takes the most pains," and "Necessity is the mother of

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invention." One morning, after being awakened by my alarm clock, I lay comfortably warm in my bed and both of those sayings came to mind. I knew that I was lazy, so why not invent a better way to be awakened.

That very evening, after school, I was to take a lot of pains in the invention of a clock-radio-alarm system. My radio was a portable AC/DC Philco; my clock was a wind-up Westclox Big Ben. I had only to devise a way to put the two of them together. I screwed a "Y" adapter into the ceiling light-fixture, screwed a bulb into one side of it, a plug-receptacle in the other and plugged the radio into the latter. I tied one end of a long string to the on/off pull-chain of the fixture, routed it through eyelets placed along the top and side of the window frame and attached it to a wooden clothespin. After setting the clock alarm for, say, 7:30am, I wound the alarm key and clipped the clothespin to that key.

When the alarm went off the bell would sound, the winder key would unwind, the string attached to the clothespin would pull the string and chain at the other end, in turn applying power to the light bulb and the radio; the latter having been previously adjusted to the proper station frequency and volume. In operation, the string tightened and the winder stopped turning after a few seconds, the bell ceased its obnoxious ringing and the music played on.

While it took some extra effort to set at bedtime, my system paid off in the morning, as I was awakened by the pleasant sound of Tommy Dorsey's band or Johnny Mercer's singing, and frequent announcements of the time of day.

I didn't get out of bed any earlier but I enjoyed "sleeping in" more than ever.

After moving to East Northfield, my father became even more of a stranger to me. And he was more involved in spiritualism than before. He still appeared to have all the jobs he could handle, at painting and paper hanging, but never had enough money to satisfy our household needs. Mother would hound him and he'd mete out a few dollars for fuel and groceries. As might be expected, those sessions often developed into unseemly disputes.

The fact that they argued at all was a source of discouragement to me, even though I knew not the substance of their disagreement. In time I would come to realize that Father no longer felt any affection for Mother. It was a sad state of affairs, but there was nothing that I could do about it.

I have always hated it when people argue. It is so unproductive. Good examples of the futility of argument are those involving politics and religion. Neither party can ever succeed in converting the other to his way of thinking.

On a related subject, one school of thought (to which I do not subscribe) claims that it's good to "say what you think." It has been my observation that those who do so are likely to say what they think without thinking what they say, without regard for fact or tact. "Speaking one's piece" most often promotes bitterness, sometimes alienation, seldom better understanding.

One wintry afternoon in 1942-1943, I found myself in the sitting room with the men of the family. Our chairs were drawn up in a semi-

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circle around the red-glowing, pot-bellied stove. I'm not certain of the occasion, but I recall that my father and three or four of my elder brothers were there. I listened attentively to the discussion, which, because of the times, quickly turned to the subject of war: how the war was going, whether or not our leaders were acting responsibly, even the philosophy of war itself, why countries go to war with one another.

I listened with great interest, though I was not considered old enough or knowledgeable enough to contribute to the conversation. But I couldn't help thinking about the analogy of warring countries to bickering families. When family members argue, it is usually because one has something that another wants, or one has done something of which another disapproves. Isn't it the same with countries? Albeit on a larger scale? I was remembering a recent dispute that I'd overheard, between Papa and Mama.

The more I listened to this discussion (which was, I should point out, an amiable one), the more evident was the truth of my analogy.

Finally, feeling really proud of myself for having such insight, I jumped into the conversation with both feet (as they say) to "speak my piece."

"How is it," I boldly asked, "that countries and nations are expected to treat each other amicably (I stuttered over the word) when two people in the same family can't get along?"

By the time I finished I realized that I, myself, had fallen prey to the trap of emotion. I had presented an argumentative question to which there was no definitive answer.

My momentous outburst was greeted with silence. Everyone was surprised, I'm sure, since I'd seldom if ever entered into a family discussion. Only my father elicited any form of response. A smile formed on his lips and the dimple in his left cheek (a natural dimple accidentally enhanced by a pencil jab when he was a youth) deepened. A twinkle showed in his steel-blue eyes.

"Hmm-hmm-mm-mm," he nodded.

I interpreted that to be receipt of my point, that he understood my meaning, which, after all, had been directed at him. Embarrassed, and without further ado, I got up from my chair and left the room.

Not long after that episode my father went away for good. My perception of the seriousness of the rift between him and Mother had been correct.

"Papa's gone," Mother stammered to me when I arrived home from school. "He's gone away... and not coming back."

He may have left her a note containing his intentions but I'm not certain of that fact. At any rate, she seemed quite sure that he was not going to return.

And she cried. Openly. It was the first time I was to see her cry, for she had always shielded us kids from any personal feeling of sorrow.

I could think of nothing to say. If I could have, I was too upset to say it. So I turned, climbed the stairs to my room, closed the door behind me, took up my violin and commenced to play Fritz Kreisler's "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen." I played with a profoundness that I'd never before achieved. It was quite possibly my best ever

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solo performance, so emotionally inspired was I and feeling sorry for myself.

After a while I calmed down, came to my senses and realized that it was Mother, not I, who had suffered, and who would continue to do so for a very long time.

On further reflection I found that my emotions were mixed. On the one hand I was angry with Father, the God-fearing, respected head of our family, for actually leaving. It seemed a despicable thing to do. On the other hand I sensed a measure of relief. There would be no more marital disputes in the household, and, as hard as it might be for Mother, at least she now knew where she stood. It also occurred to me that I would automatically become the "man of the house," though I was not yet fifteen years old and was far from being qualified for the job.

Betty was obviously disturbed by the news. Father had always shown a great affection for her and she must have felt betrayed. As for Bobby, he was of an age when the significance of the situation was not likely to sink in. But it was he, more than any of us, who would be the most deprived by Father's leaving.

We learned that Father had gone to work in Winchester, New Hampshire, at the Lawrence hide-and-leather factory. Presumably he'd found a place to live nearby. (I would not see him for almost six years.)

Father's exodus occurred, as I remember, around the time when his folks moved to Bernardston, to Dick's apartment. No doubt he helped them make the move.

Grandpa Phelps died on June 28, 1943 (by coincidence on my father's birthday), six days before his 88th birthday.

Grandma Nettie, elderly and in poor health herself, went to live with her younger sister, Mrs. Mertie Pond, at 82 South Lincoln Street in Keene. One night Grandma wandered in her sleep, opened the cellar door by mistake, fell and broke her hip. She never fully recuperated and died on December 28, 1944, in Keene's Ellis Memorial Hospital.

Grandpa and Grandma were buried in the Keene cemetery, not far from the beautiful chapel and grounds that Grandpa had cared for for so many years.

Within a few weeks of Father's leaving my anger and disillusionment subsided, as well they should have. (It must be difficult to hold a grudge forever, as some people do.) Our lives went on much as before. Mother, already accustomed to being self-reliant, was just more determined than ever in her endeavors. She was now getting a substantial wage at the library. Betty and I earned enough to buy most of our own "necessities," but the financial burden still fell on Mother.

She walked to and from the library, a round-trip distance of over a mile, in winter as well as in summer. Dottie encouraged her to learn to drive an automobile, and took her (in the '37 Ford) to the relatively deserted West Northfield road for a lesson. And she did well. With a little more practice, Mother gained confidence in her driving ability. But she would lose it all, the confidence and the will to drive, in our own yard one afternoon.

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Mother was going to drive down Main Street to Northfield, with Dottie (the licensed driver) on her right. I watched her successfully back the car away from the garage, and stop. She then shifted to first gear, pressed down on the throttle and steered toward her left down the driveway.

Alas, she continued turning to the left and at the same time pushed down harder on the throttle. The car virtually leapt across the narrow strip of lawn beside the driveway, crashed through the line of lilac bushes and finally came to a halt with its bumper against the foundation of the Giebel house.

Dottie had offered curt advice to Mother, such as "Stop!" and "Put on the brakes!" but that was all she could do. The emergency brake handle, unlike those in older cars, was located to the left of the driver and well out of reach from the passenger's side.

Mother must have taken her foot off the gas pedal in the nick of time, and the lilacs attenuated the car's forward motion enough that it was barely moving on impact. So no one was hurt in this unusual accident nor was the car damaged in the least.

Good fortune notwithstanding, Mama resolved then and there to "never again attempt to drive an automobile." She would maintain that resolve forever.

I guess I was about thirteen years old when I found that my eyesight wasn't what it should be. My brother John, and my sisters Dottie and Betty wore glasses, and now it was my turn. Dot took time out from her busy work schedule to drive me all the way to the Dartmouth Eye Clinic, in Hanover, New Hampshire, where my eyes were examined by an ophthalmologist. Sure enough, I had astigmatism and myopia. I was particularly nearsighted in my right eye. (The examination cost \$10.00.)

We returned home with the prescription, and an optician in Greenfield made the glasses. (The glasses cost about \$12.00.) I was actually shocked when I first put on my new "specs," to find how colorful and concise the world really was. It appeared as if every store and street sign were newly painted; geometric patterns of roofs, gables, bricks and windows stood out in crisp relief; even the grass was brighter green than usual. While I had not been too keen on the idea of wearing glasses, of being known as "four eyes," seeing things as they really were would make it worthwhile.

Back in Northfield, my friends razzed me good naturedly. "How come you have to wear glasses anyway?" they asked. To which I replied, "Because I was gettin' too close to too many ugly girls."

As every glasses-wearer knows, or knew in the days before safety glass, you have to be particular about what you do and don't do; else you'll wind up with a broken lens, a bent frame or both. Luckily I was not involved in athletics, but I did accidentally break my glasses a time or two.

A "plump" lady by the name of Charlotte Shearer ran a coffee shop in East Northfield, next to Buffum's gas station. Miss Shearer was an affable lady, and patient to put up with us kids. She had a soda fountain and lunch counter up front, booths and tables in the rear. With just a nickel for a Coke and a few more to feed the pin-ball

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machine or the juke box, one could easily while away an hour or two in her establishment.

I almost never played the pinball machine. I considered the amount of entertainment-per-nickel no bargain. A nickel's worth of music lasted longer and was more rewarding. At least to me. All the latest hit records were ingeniously stacked right there inside that brightly lit, glass-and-celluloid machine, ready to be moved into position by automated fingers the instant you dropped your coin in the slot and punched the key of your choice: "Sleepy Lagoon," "Paper Doll," "Mairzy Doats," "Chattanooga Choo Choo" to mention but a few. Strangely enough we seldom danced to the tunes, preferring instead to listen to the rhythms and lyrics. Lyrics, by the way, so well enunciated that you could understand every word.

One afternoon, long after I should have, I hung around at Miss Shearer's with the guys and gals; Billy Shattuck, Neil Churchill, "Hutch" Hutchinson, Ruthie Dawe, Helen Howard and others. I just couldn't tear myself away. We were talking, laughing, sipping Coca-Cola, playing with the napkin holders, mixing pepper with salt in the shakers, using straws for paper-wad blow guns, all the dumb things kids did in those days.

Then, over by the juke box, Hutch and Billy and I began exchanging "mock slaps," like they did in the movies, where one guy feints a slap at another guy's face while the second guy claps his hands together sharply to make it sound like a hit. But in our zeal for realism, some of our feints came perilously close.

I suddenly found that I could not see very well. Everything in my field of vision was blurred. Several seconds elapsed before I realized why. My opponent's hand had missed my cheek but clipped the right lens of my glasses, so neatly that I never even felt it. The right lens had flown clear across the room; the left lens and frame were still exactly in place. (In those days, frame-less lenses were the style, each lens being held in place by a single bolt near the nose piece.) My friends helped me find the pieces of my broken lens, but I'd be out the cost of a new one.

Needless to say, that brought our fun and games to a screeching halt. Further, I was late getting home. Worse yet, I had to explain the accident to my mother.

"If you'd been home when you should've been it wouldn't have happened, y'know."

It seemed to me I'd heard that phrase before. Once again, horseplay resulted in an unnecessary expense.

A few years after D.L. Moody established the Seminary in East Northfield, he saw the need for a hotel to house the many visitors to his summer religious conferences. The Northfield Hotel was built to fill that need, and was dedicated in 1888.

The Northfield Inn (as it was then called) was ideally located on a low hill, a quarter-mile above and to the east of Main Street, northeast of Mill Brook. This large wooden structure, oriented in an east-west direction lengthwise, had over a hundred rooms on four floors, the fourth under a steep-pitched, multi-gabled slate roof. An attic provided space for storage. A full basement housed several

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ancillary rooms, including some postage-stamp-sized bedrooms for employees. A wide veranda ran along the south side and west end, affording a view, before the trees grew tall, of the Connecticut River Valley.

The interior of this grand hotel boasted well-appointed guest rooms, an ornately decorated parlor on one side of the lobby, a large formal dining room on the other. It was everything a fine hotel should be, except that no liquors were dispensed. Also (as H.C. Parsons noted in *A PURITAN OUTPOST*) the first manager soon learned that a well stocked cigar stand was not in order.

The hotel quickly reached a measure of prominence when the new manager, D.L.'s nephew Ambert G. Moody, in September of 1902 hosted a president during his visit to Northfield. Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt dined and slept at the hotel after making a spirited speech to the students at Mount Hermon School. [H.C. PARSONS *A PURITAN OUTPOST*]

By the 1940s decade, the hotel had taken on a look of quiet grandeur not unlike that of a European Inn. Just the right number of shade trees broke the wide expanse of lawn that fell away from the building on all sides. Gracefully curving, paved driveways led to and away from the north-facing entrance. Farther out, the fairways of a nine-hole golf course wound between stately elms, adding more lush green to the already extravagant lawn area.

At some point in time the building had been extended eastward, beyond the kitchen and loading areas. Two or three stories high, it served as a dormitory for some of the Seminary girls in winter, and for girls who worked as waitresses or maids in summer. Beyond the dormitory, beyond the range of the average person's sense of smell, were barns, stables, garages and maintenance sheds.

The Northfield did a reasonably good year-round business, housing conference goers in the summertime, school children's' parents in the spring and fall, and winter recreationists in the snow season.

In summer the hotel offered golf and tennis, horseback, buggy and bicycle riding, and swimming in a pond on Mill Brook. Guests could take their poached-eggs and toast in a sun room off the dining room, while watching those with more ambition hit little white balls on the course below. In the heat of the day, they could enjoy the serenity of the shady porch.

In winter there was ice skating - replete with a warming hut, lights at night, and sometimes music from a record player - on the pond north of the hotel. A long wooden chute, erected in the fall and removed in the spring, took brave tobogganists down a steep and thrilling course from its starting point, in front of and high above the hotel entrance, to the pond where it dumped them onto the ice. Depending on conditions, hay- or sleigh-rides were available and nearby trails accommodated skiers and snowshoe fanciers.

To run a hotel such as The Northfield required a large number of employees. The labor pool for many of its jobs - clerks, chambermaids, waitresses, busboys and bellhops - consisted of Northfield's sons and daughters. But in addition to the locals, many out-of-town Seminary and Mt. Hermon students were employed there as well. So the establishment not only provided good jobs for Northfield's youths, it

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also provided them with an opportunity to get acquainted with outsiders, an important factor in a small town.

That I should join The Northfield work force was not at all unusual. I would follow a tradition that had been in effect for half a century.

I really had a knot in my stomach when I first reported for work at the hotel, as a bellhop. I guess everyone is a bit nervous on starting a new job, unless he is arrogant; I was worried that I might not make a good first-impression on the boss.

I checked in with Mr. Ralph Forsaith, who was (I believe) the head clerk or supervisor of the office force. At any rate, he was the man I was told to see. Tall, lean, with graying hair, wearing steel-rimmed glasses, a conservative three-piece suit and a white shirt and a big black bow tie, it struck me that he could be typecast for the part of hotel clerk in a movie. He greeted me with a reserved smile, made a brief but kindly speech about the hotel's high standards of conduct, and then turned me over to the secretary, Priscilla Lawrence, who had some papers for me to fill out.

Pris, as she was known by her friends and as I would come to call her, was not a stranger to me. I knew her when she and her husband, Charles, lived on Warwick Avenue on my paper route. Charlie was now serving in the U.S. Army.

Priscilla, a tall, attractive woman in her late twenties, was personable, pleasant, intelligent and perceptive. She was outgoing in personality, and her sense of humor and quick wit endeared her to the hotel's guests, whom she invariably greeted by name followed by a pleasantry. She had apparently inherited many of the traits of her father, Philip Porter, though she was not nearly as boisterous. (Mr. Porter was the hard working, "colorful" boss of the hotel's farm and grounds maintenance operations.)

Pris was more than just a secretary at The Northfield. She was A. Gordon Moody's "Girl Friday," although he may not have totally appreciated the fact. (A. Gordon, following in his father's footsteps, was the hotel manager.) She kept track of everything that went on in and around the hotel. If one had a question, Pris had the answer. Or she would get the answer. In short, Priscilla was virtually indispensable to the success of the hotel during the war years.

She knew all of the employees, what they did and what they were expected to do. She was also an unofficial "counselor" to the youthful employees, taking an interest in their problems, actual or imaginary, offering good advice when solicited.

It was she who was responsible for my being employed there.

Officially, Irma Broun was my immediate boss, although there were times when we bellhops weren't sure to whom we should report; Irma, Pris, Mr. Forsaith or Louis Potts. Mr. Potts was the bookkeeper/desk clerk. Irma, whose husband was also serving in the armed forces, was a small but good-looking woman. And a nice woman too. But because of the war and a shortage of men she'd been cast in the difficult position of bell captain, a job traditionally held by a man, in charge of a bunch of fifteen- to seventeen-year-old boys.

Working for Irma was both interesting and educational. She was far too sensitive, in my opinion, to successfully supervise the likes

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of us. It was fairly easy to ignore her orders or to talk her into changing them to suit ourselves. So she pretty much let us do things our own way. Rarely did she assert her authority, and when she did it was generally an embarrassment to all concerned. But she persevered.

I liked Irma but in the end, as a result of having worked for her, I hoped that I would never again be in a position subordinate to a woman. Any woman. Except, perhaps, Priscilla Lawrence.

But I have gotten ahead of myself. I wanted to point out, at the beginning, that my going to work at The Northfield placed me squarely in the midst of the United States labor force. Statistically, at least. I now had a social security number and was "privileged" to contribute to the federal coffers for the defense of our nation, for the maintenance of our highways, for aid to foreign countries, for domestic welfare and so on. I was not old enough in the eyes of the law to be responsible for my own actions, nor old enough to cast a vote in an election, but I was nevertheless a part of "the system."

The significance of all this was not apparent to me when I filled out those employment forms for Pris on my first day on the job. It would not sink in until the end of the calendar year when I received my first W-2 form, the Statement of Income Tax Withheld on Wages for 1943. To wit:

"Income earned, \$287.30."

"Income tax withheld, \$0.80."

How would the Congress divide that sum among its needs?

Since my future was unpredictable (as was everyone's in the 1940s), my immediate objectives were survivalist rather than ambitious. I knew that I had to earn a high school diploma, and I also knew that I must work and earn money to pay my way.

I would meet those objectives, if only just barely.

My first assignment on the job was polishing the handsome brass handrails, door handles, kick plates and fixtures in and around the hotel lobby. To me, brass is the most beautiful alloy concocted by man. So I worked with diligence, until the brass-work rivaled that on a battleship.

There were interruptions, though. At the "clang" of a bell or the call of "Front!" I'd leave off polishing and bound eagerly up the steps to receive my orders, perhaps brushing a bit of lint from the sleeve of my uniform on the way.

I liked wearing that uniform. I suppose it conveyed a feeling of prestige. The pants and double-breasted coat were made of wool, dark green in color. A thin gold stripe ran down the outside of each pants leg, and another circled the cuff of each sleeve of the brass buttoned coat. The smallest uniform in the supply locker was still too large for me, but I made do with it hoping to grow into it eventually. We supplied our own white shirts and green ties. Thus attired I received my orders and rushed to carry them out.

Guests arrived at the hotel by diverse modes of transportation; aboard the "Transfer" (as the beechwagon shuttle that met the trains was known), by bus or by private automobile. Some came in a big, black, chauffeur-driven Cadillac or Lincoln. The vehicle would grind up the long curving driveway, stop in front of the portico and deposit

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its important occupant(s); just as shiny, horse-drawn carriages had done at the turn of the century. It was a stirring sight to see.

We kept an eye out for guests, and one or another of us bellhops would meet them at curbside, open their car doors, escort them up the wide steps and through the entryway to the desk. Whenever there were two or more of us on duty we'd take turns "hopping."

Our tips were not pooled, but were our own to keep. A tip, of course, was a gratuity. So the amount you received depended in large part on how efficient and courteous you were. I would quickly learn that affluence was not necessarily the criterion for a good tipper. In actuality, the wealthiest patrons were often the least generous. (Perhaps that was an indication of why they had money, they didn't give it away.) But penny-pinching guests were rare at The Northfield.

The fact that I was small, weighing in at about one-hundred pounds, did not deter me from pulling my weight on the job. I could carry as many bags at one time as any of the guys, though not as casually. A common load consisted of three suitcases: one under the left arm, one in the left hand and one in the right hand. If there were a fourth it went under the right arm, and a golf bag could be carried over the shoulder as well.

Throughout our lives countless incidents, generally subconscious acts, get tucked away in our brains for future use. Most are insignificant and soon forgotten. Some are significant enough to be recalled, related, and hence remembered. I am reminded of a particular experience I had as a bellhop, one not easily forgotten.

I was pushing a yard-wide broom over the concrete landing at the hotel entrance when the call, "Front," resounded in the warm summer air. I left off sweeping, stood the broom behind a door and hastened to the desk. Mr. Potts looked up from his books and recited a third floor number. "Check out," he added as an afterthought.

At the room, a middle-aged man answered my knock, opened the door and indicated a pile of baggage inside. He and his attractive wife then walked on down the hall to the elevator, leaving me to my task.

It was a considerable load, and I should have planned to make two trips instead of attempting to carry it all at once. Had I done so the job would have been routine (and I would not now be relating this story). I picked up the bags, two large leather suitcases, a middle-sized grip, a golf bag and a leather case containing two vacuum, or Thermos, bottles.

Resembling a pack mule I thumped down the hallway. The guests were already out of sight. So far, so good. The elevator came up empty and I stepped aboard, reaching around to punch the "Lobby" button on the way in. The door closed behind me and the car started down.

I felt a pain in my left shoulder under the heavy golf bag, so I shifted the position of the strap. It was then that the leather case slid down and off my right arm, hitting the floor with a thud and the unmistakable sound of breaking glass.

My heart skipped a beat. "Damn!" I muttered aloud, knowing full well that to replace a Thermos bottle, with a war on, would be virtually impossible.

The elevator continued on. My mind was all a-worry. Now what should I do? I could tell Irma or Mr. Potts what happened and let them

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decide on a course of action, but that didn't seem like a very straightforward way to handle the situation. I could act innocent and say nothing about it to anyone, and likely, on later discovery, the guests might think the damage occurred while the case was in their own care. Or I could confess my clumsiness to the guests themselves. What a dilemma.

Feigning innocence would have been the easiest alternative, but deceit was contrary to my upbringing. Still I gave it strong consideration. I had not yet made up my mind when I reached the curb at the front landing, where my patron was assisting his wife to her seat in their Cadillac. He then came around and opened the trunk lid to receive the baggage. Now, after having agonized all the way from the room, the words came forth.

"I have to tell you," I ventured hesitantly.

"What is it?" the man asked absentmindedly.

"Well, I dropped this case," handing it to him, "and I think something broke inside."

He opened the case, took out each of the Thermos bottles in turn and shook them. The second one rattled. He uttered something like "Oh my," returned it to its case, put the case in the trunk of the car and closed the lid before saying anything more.

In a pensive manner I awaited his further reaction. At best I figured to get away with a stern lecture and no tip. At worst he would get upset, demand compensation from the hotel and a reprimand for me.

My most fervent hopes were exceeded. The gentleman gave me a lecture all right, but not in the vein I had feared. While handing me a five-dollar bill - an unusually large tip - he explained that it was to show his appreciation for my handling of his heavy bags as well as for the responsible way I faced him with the truth.

"That was a lot better," he emphasized, "than to let me discover it later."

I stammered an apology and thanked him for his generosity.

He did not then say "Forget it," but continued in a parental tone, "Now remember...it was an accident. You must be more careful in the future...but you did the right thing by telling me. Remember that...and don't worry any more about it."

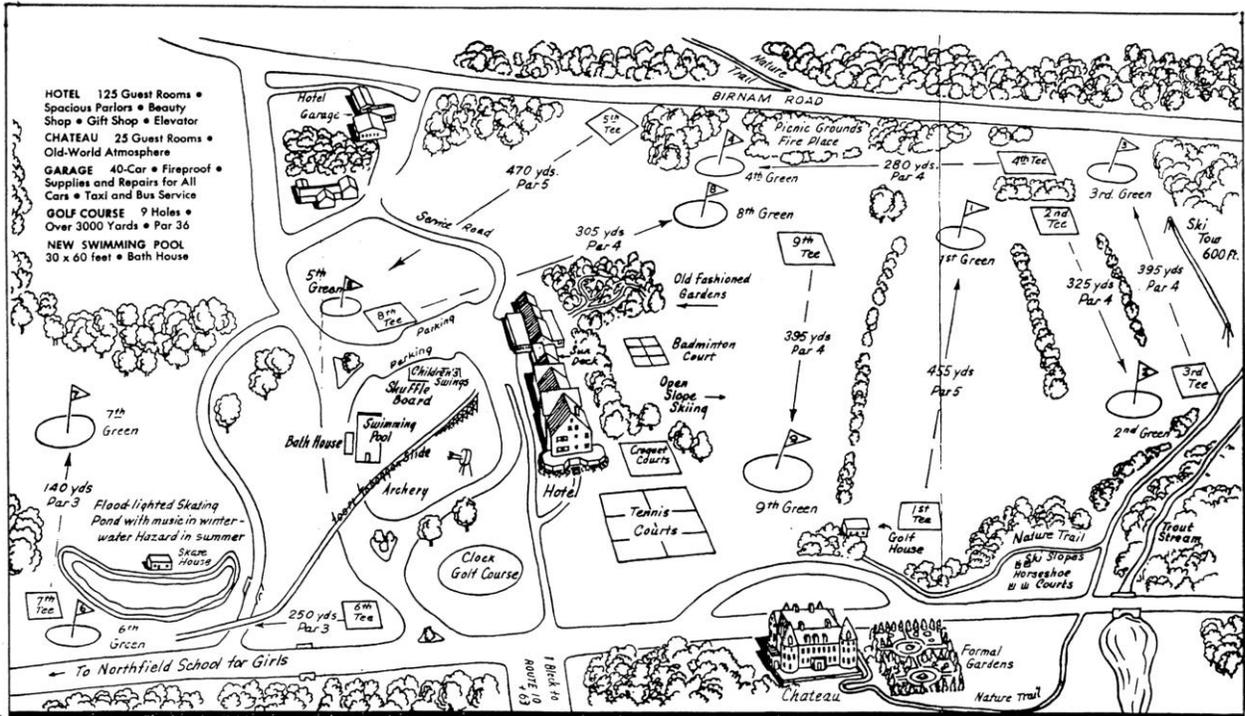
"Thanks again," I said as I held the door of the car for him.

His wife, who had been listening quietly, gave me a smile and a wave of the hand when he drove away.

Not all of life's lessons are learned so painlessly. Few are learned with such a fine bonus.

"Nil Nisi Honestum."

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THE NORTHFIELD HOTEL & CHATEAU, BUILDINGS & GROUNDS
 (North is at left)

END OF
 VOLUME I - PART 1