

Thanksgiving, 1945, we did indeed have something to be thankful for in spite of the mountain of luggage that arrived with the reason for our thanks. There was much to be done, all with high priority. The job issue was settled first. Instead of returning to the railroad, he chose Club Aluminum Products as Traffic Manager. Civilian clothes had to be bought because the wardrobe had been ignored from Pearl Harbor Day. Something had to be done about living quarters before somebody got squashed. And we both agreed, in the interest of good family spacing, a sibling for Jack should be started.

The new job didn't start until after January 1, 1946, which gave Dad a month to snap 100's if not 1000's of pictures of Jack, take him along to the barber, the post office, the library, and the neighborhood bar. Although I had worked on Jack's saying "Daddy" to a photograph of Johnny, and he said it beautifully to a black delivery man, he screamed his head off when the stranger in uniform tried to pick him up on Thanksgiving Day. The friendship started an hour later.

With customary business acumen I had sold our car because there was neither the desire nor the gas coupons to really go anywhere. So we went on a list for a new car. Luckily we lived within 2 blocks of bus, el, streetcar, and taxi stand.

Walking down the street one evening we bumped into Ted Abbot of the old Five Bachelors group. He was back in his old job in Chicago but planning to look for a house in the suburbs for his wife and daughter, a year older than Jack. After a couple of beers and lots of catching up on events during the 3-plus year interval, we made a date to house hunt together using

his car. Our family was increasing the next November, and a move was very necessary.

It took a few Sundays of concentrated looking, but we both decided on Des Plaines -- a completed house for the Abbots and a larger one under construction for us to be available late summer, 1946. This was my first experience with unions and the combination of their strange rules and the postwar shortages of building material was frustrating to say the least. Jill was born on schedule, November 5, 1946, and we added a bassinet to our already crowded apartment.

Jill gave me a moment's fright I still remember vividly. Although not particularly superstitious, I changed grocery stores because the one I really liked better had a cross-eyed cashier, and each time I paid my bill I thought of the old wives' tale about marking children. When the nurse brought Jill to the room so I could see her for the first time, she opened her eyes and they were crossed as could be. Even though I knew that babies don't always focus perfectly, -- "Oh! No!"

To compound our crowded situation, when Jill was 2 months old the neighbor from downstairs arrived at our door with 1 year old Skipper and his suitcase! The mother had been suffering gall bladder attacks for months, but because it wasn't considered an emergency she went on a list for a hospital bed. The call had come that there was a bed available for immediate use, so the older boy went to a kindergarten classmate's house, and we got Skipper. The logistics for eating, sleeping, and airing was challenging, but when Skipper woke up two days later with chicken pox, that relieved me of

one airing. Jack popped out a couple of weeks later, but Skipper was gone by then and Jill had new baby immunity.

Finally came September, 1947, still no car, but the house was ready for occupancy. What luxury to have a dining room without a bed or a crib or a bassinet in the corner, and Johnny and I had a real bedroom and a real bed and a door that could be closed. So much for the pull down bed in the front room with no doors and in direct line to the only bathroom. Pure heaven!

Woodbridge Road was one block long, very little traffic, and a tremendous esprit de corps among the residents. The ages and the incomes appeared to be comparable. In September, 1949, we added one to the population of Woodbridge Road. While Jean spent her days sleeping in Jill's old bassinet on the first floor, Jack and his friend Jamie shouted "Bang, Bang" and almost tipped over the stagecoach as they crawled around the bassinet with their toy guns.

It was this same year that the Yeiser family moved two doors away and an enduring friendship began. Their four children and our three meshed pretty well in ages, and we had similar philosophies about discipline, respect for elders, and all the old-fashioned values. In retrospect I expected too much of young children and was too fast with the Ping-Pong paddle applied to the seat of the pants. But at the time I sincerely felt I was doing the necessary thing for good parenting. I knew I had been badly spoiled and too protected to have the toughness and spunk that would have been desirable, so I swung the pendulum the other way.

Inasmuch as the three J's are around and have their own memories of the next segment of my life, I'll just telescope those years. With the exception of a few childhood diseases, a couple of broken bones, and my back leaving the home keys from time to time we were a healthy family. Cub Scouts, Brownies, Girl Scouts, Little League, Pony League, Y.M.C.A., music and dancing lessons plus trips to the doctor added to the birthday parties and recitals kept things humming at a pretty good rate of speed.

Too many people have been too important as threads in the fabric of my life to mention them all, but during the child rearing days Bob and Helen Muchow and boys figured importantly. The card playing, square dancing, charades playing, skeet shooting and Christmas nights together were all more fun because of their being with us.

For the first year in Des Plaines we were still on the list for a new car, so in desperation we bought an old Packard, replete with 'coon tail and American flag, which limped along until our new Studebaker finally became available. No more hauling groceries and babies by bus or wondering if the car would make it home!!

Johnny became an Army Reservist, worked his way up through full colonel, and had reasonable expectation of making brigadier general before retirement. Travel was pretty limited to visiting the other grandparents in Nashville or following Daddy to camp at Tomah, Wisconsin.

We did manage one trip to Florida, and on this trip we tried to get a few licks in on the value of money. The J's had

to spend their own savings for the restaurant meals. The "What! 25 cents for orange juice!!!" etc. etc. could be heard all over the restaurant. Another rule was that anyone requiring an unscheduled stop treated the crowd. The only weak bladder in the group was over-coffee'd Mother's. The trip was cut short a little bit because the 2nd and 4th graders didn't want to miss a day of school after Spring Vacation. We were surprised at such dedication. The family bread winner felt he could be away from his desk for several more days.

The moments for pride far exceeded the few disappointments. School grades and musical accomplishments were mostly above average. The school friends were desirable and welcome. We had a parade of dogs -- none very well trained -- played games -- went through driving lessons -- and oh so quickly, time for college.

Looking down the road to the possibility of three in college at one time, and at least one in college for a period of one or ten years, it looked like a forthcoming austerity program or the need for some extra income. Whether it was Old South philosophy or just John C. Williams philosophy I'm not sure, but when I located a respectable teaching job, he reluctantly agreed that his wife could "go out and work." Just as it was with the American Hospital Association where I started with no training or experience in office skills, here I went again with no training or experience -- only a provisional certificate that almost any literate person could have secured. Family and friends who knew me well laughed uproariously to hear I'd be teaching geography inasmuch as I couldn't even read

a road map and did well to find my way around the house. But I managed to keep a page ahead of the kids, enjoyed U.S. History, and the English was undiluted pleasure. The principal and fellow teachers were great, and with few exceptions I felt tremendous warmth for these girls who had somewhat disadvantaged backgrounds. The experience was rewarding in many more ways than financial. My pay check went into a special account and was used only for college bills and the expenses I wouldn't have if I weren't teaching. There was to be no getting used to two paychecks!

Meanwhile Jack finished at Ripon College and went to Nashville for a Master's degree. Jill accelerated her Ripon years so she could graduate and be married in December, 1967. Jean started at Oshkosh so she could be near but not with the other two. I left the job at Park Ridge School for Girls at Christmas vacation before the December 30 wedding and planned to go back to my bridge playing routine.

The monthly poker game was at our house in January of 1968, and I noticed that toward the end of the evening Johnny wasn't kidding around when people won the pot he'd stayed in or flashing his usual grin to the one who called him "cheater" if he won the pot. When the door closed on the last guest he said, "I thought they'd never leave! I've been in agony for the past two hours." We rushed to bed because it was Army Reserve Sunday and early rising for us the next day. But within an hour he was making trips back and forth to the bathroom, and I could hear him vomiting. At 5:00 A.M. he asked me to call his Exec. and ask him to run the Reserve meeting.

My fear at the time was that other members of the poker group had been "poisoned" too and I'd be getting calls of accusation later.

The next few days weren't good -- a little improvement -- then trouble again. Our health had been so good we only knew an obstetrician, a pediatrician, and my osteopath. We called Grandma's doctor, but he was out of town, so we ended up with his totally strange and very busy partner. We couldn't have stumbled onto a better bit of luck under our unlucky circumstances. The doctor was outstanding.

Hospitalization followed by surgery determined there was a cancerous tumor on the colon which was removed, and a colostomy bag was necessary for a few weeks until the resection. Jill and John just happened to arrive that evening in time to join me and Bob Muchow and Diane Yeiser and the preacher of our church plus some friends who happened to notice us in the waiting area. There was much morale support when I heard the shattering word CANCER. Privately the doctor and surgeon said that there was a 50% chance that it had metastasized, but in view of the very recent onset of the problem and the history of good health in our family, I paid little attention to the remark.

During the recovery period Grandma went to the hospital for a mastectomy, and I had either two patients in the hospital, one at home and one in the hospital, or two semi-patients at home. At least there was no teaching job to be released from. Jill and John had been transferred from Indianapolis to Texas, the other two J's were in their

respective schools, and their father's progress didn't seem as fast or as sure as I'd expected although he was getting to the office most days.

Then there was more surgery to see if adhesions were the cause of the pain. But sewing up the incision was all that could be done, and the prognosis was "about a year to live." That proved out almost to the day.

The only remotely good thing about the Viet Nam War was that John Bishop was sent there during 1969 and Jill came back home to live. Jean left Oshkosh and took a job in Chicago's Loop and also lived at home. Jack checked in from Nashville when he could -- and incidentally we began to hear his friend Mary mentioned a bit more.

The climax of this horrible period came one day while Johnny was lying on the front room couch, in agony, and Grandma went into some sort of unconscious state in the back bedroom. I ran back and forth and prayed for the girls to hurry home. Grandma died on May 19, and Johnny died on June 10, 1969.

To my great shame, I had hoped there would be a time when Johnny and I could be alone like we were first married, and I could be the real Lady of the House. To my credit, I never said a word about the resentment for having to share 29 of my 30 years of marriage and my children's upbringing. John was unfailingly kind and considerate and never once made Grandma feel other than totally welcome. After a few months I discovered that I missed her and the sweetness and softness that I inherited very little of, and the dominant feeling was guilt for not taking her out more or even just listening to her



talk more. (That partly explains this literary effort -- nobody has to listen.)

Words cannot describe the feeling of losing a "good right arm" even though I'd known for a year it was coming and certainly did not want any more of the quality of life he was having. Everyone seems to experience guilt with a loved one's loss, but mine was relatively shallow like "I should have been a better housekeeper" and "I should have gone sailing more often" etc., etc., etc. The big challenge now was putting a new life together.

Settling two estates took up most of the summer. Jean started a nursing course at a commuter college that fall, and I went into Chicago to get full teacher certification and another major, this time in literature. John Bishop came back safe and sound and took his wife and the sheltie dog to Minnesota. It was a question whether I missed Jill or the dog more because that dog and I grieved together, studied together, took midnight walks together, and I'll never forget her.

Consistent with the luck I'd been having, after finishing all the stupid courses and the rotten experience of practice teaching in an avant-garde junior high school with its "mods" and "pods" and kids signing contracts for what they chose to study -- there weren't any jobs for English teachers in the area except for young men who could also coach a secondary sport.

Since I couldn't make money I decided to spend money, and Jean and I went on a brief trip to Europe. After that, things began to look up. I found a job in the bookstore at Maine

West, the J's alma mater, which was an easy drive, and I was surrounded by books and had contact with kids without responsibility for lesson plans and grades. This time I only had to learn the mysteries of a cash register so it wasn't too difficult. Like the other two jobs, I made some great new friends and the job was 100% pleasure.

The other tremendous good fortune was Claire Kraft coming into my life. She needed a place to stay until she found a room or apartment -- but she didn't look any farther. We discussed our fabulous rapport in spite of the age difference and decided it was because I never scolded or tried to correct her (as I would to the J's) and she felt free to tell "all" (which she wouldn't have to her parents). Over the years she has called me when her father died, when her mother got throat cancer and her mutilating surgery, and when her sister took her own life. I call or write her about my less dramatic but to me important events. It's a great friendship.

In time Jean graduated and moved out, Claire left, the house was too big and in need of repairs, so I decided to execute the plan Johnny and I had made in the 40's -- retire to Florida. After ruling out the East Coast and any area of Florida where I had friends or acquaintances who might feel obliged to "launch" me socially, I found heavenly Longboat Key. The J's seemed to be doing all right and I seemed far from needing them, so miles didn't make any particular difference. But almost to the day that I finally sold the house and could start planning the move to Florida, Jill called that she was making me Grandma in November, 1974. Without leaving the phone

I dialed Jack to tell him he was going to be an uncle and -- Thank Goodness for my strong heart -- he and Mary were making me Grandma and also in November. Suddenly I wondered about leaving the big old house about midway between the two new babies, but the die was cast.

Before the moving van arrived I had met some of my new neighbors, and before the first week was over I was involved in bridge playing and have wished for more hours in the day and more days in the week ever since.

About the middle of November I was so antsy about the doubleheader Grandma business, I took off for Nashville to be there for the first one. Not so -- the first one arrived in Minnesota, Sara Jean. By the time the plane reservation and time of arrival got settled, Hannah Jane arrived in Nashville. Babies have always seemed life's greatest miracle, and I stood outside the nursery window and gazed at my claim to immortality and wished so much her grandfather and great-grandmother could be sharing this moment. I could hardly pull myself away from my beautiful granddaughter. Just as I used to feel pulled between being a good wife, daughter, or mother and at times finding it mutually exclusive, I had the same feeling about leaving one new baby household to go to the other new baby household with my assistance, such as it was.

Among my card playing friends on Longboat Key were Fran and Ed Selman. Fran and I were on the same wavelength immediately with our love of bridge and reading and our school teaching backgrounds. In February, 1980, Fran was diagnosed as a metastasized cancer victim and given six months to two years

to live. It turned out to be about seven months, September, 1980. The next summer Ed and I discovered the joy of Elderhostel - sight seeing and by this summer of 1988 have covered most of Continental U.S.A. and Canada plus a bit of Alaska and a lot of Europe. It has been another wonderful friendship I couldn't not mention.

There are so many friends I'll never forget, not to mention my love for Pat my "sister," and even the great folks we've met at our Elderhostels -- it would require a small directory just to mention them all.

Of the five Bachelors only two are left, Ken and Brownie, who are both in Florida, and we keep in touch.

Glancing back over what I've written I find the syntax, paragraphing, sentence construction and punctuation barely worth a passing grade. But the fun I've had doing it and the spontaneity are A plus, plus, plus, and I don't propose to do it over properly. When you are retired and in your 70's, I heartily recommend your doing something similar. The memories you dredge up are terrific.

I love you,

Grandma W.