HOME ON THE RANGE

by Jerome Mark Antil

1.

REMEMBERING THE ECHOES

I remember asking my mother at ninety-four how she was getting along. She rested her salad fork in a moment of thought. Lifting it, she said, "I'm finding my memory much kinder than the mirror."

Be it my mother's wisdom or my father's sense of adventure, I remember their influences on me with clarity. I've lived a memory-rich life and few things have influenced roads I've taken more than listening to stories he told me and to my mother's recollections of my father's youth. I often quip, "*life ain't the road, it's the ride."* After his passing, his loving wife would pen thoughts, poems and prose about him as a husband, father, and provider. They were honest and warm words about her Mike, carefully chosen to document dated diaries and photo albums for us to appreciate decades after her passing—the decades I now find myself in.

Memories were my parent's gifts to me.

He was a tall and gentle man. He was a spiritual man, French Acadian born in northern Minnesota in 1902, the seventh son of a seventh son. My father grew up a self-professed dreamer and he would tell me of the times he would lay in fields at night by a campfire and study the stars as if they were roadmaps for his great

adventures ahead. As a young boy cooking came natural to him and on his mother's woodstove, he would make gumbo with blood sausages and fish he'd catch, and he would make shrimp etouffee with everything but the shrimp. He had the patience for baking, and he could bake cakes, pies, and whip fluffy egg white frostings in a double boiler before he was twelve. He would bake until surfaces were covered with baking sheets of cookies and satisfied every sweet tooth in the farm house, including six older brothers.

He would speak of one day going to the Normandy his mother would tell him stories of while he'd watch her prepare acorn squash and baked ham. He never missed Sunday services, and I can remember long drives with him in upstate New York when I was young. He would tell me stories of his youth and he would treat me with an occasional Sunday morning jaunt across the Ogdensburg Prescott bridge into Canada so I could hear Mass in French. He didn't like talking about his father falling from the barn roof when he was twelve but told me that when his father died, he quit school (ninth grade) and reasoned to his mother and his older brothers that it was time he made his father's memory proud by living the examples the man had set in him. When asked of his plans, he simply said he wanted to contribute to the household and that his father taught him that if he ever needed work to think of food—everybody has to eat. He knew Mondays were particularly busy at the train station.

"I'll ride the trains, Mom. Monday is the day the traveling salesmen boarded passenger trains in nearby Buffalo, Minnesota to start their selling week," he would say.

He'd rationalized that salesmen had to always look nice so he'd fill a large basket with sundries the more forgetful of them might need. He called these sundry items his loss leaders. Items that made a better impression than they would a profit. Items that didn't take much room in his basket, like headache and tooth powders, pipe tobacco, rolling papers, and bags of Golden Grain cigarette tobacco, sewing needles and thread, ten-cent combs, playing cards, and an assortment of hard candies. Most of the basket would be his homemade oatmeal and walnut cookies, tied with ribbon in stacks of three for fifty cents. Growing up the youngest of seven boys he learned his brother's habits and hankerings by keeping a close watch on them. His instincts told him that sewing needles for torn buttons and other sundries would make a nice first impression and be appreciated, and he priced them reasonably.

If his older brothers were testimony, his cookies would be his irresistible impulse item and his easiest sale and they would bring him the most profit. At a time when a hearty sandwich could be bought for as little as fifteen cents, he'd jump on a train, certain to remind prospects examining his wares of the nutritional values in steel-ground oatmeal and hand-shelled walnuts.

When his cookies were near gone, he'd get off the train, catch the first train back and make more sales on his way home. He would sell his cookies out and walk home eating left over hard candy he hadn't given to children on the train while their parents inspected his basket.

At the age of sixteen my father filled two pockets with hardtack biscuits and two with beef jerky and bound books together by strapping them tightly with his father's leather belt slung over a shoulder the morning he started his five-hundred-mile walk-hitch to South Dakota to work the wheatfields.

Once there he let his height speak for itself, and he convinced farmers he could work from dawn to dusk, and he'd sleep under the stars by a campfire. He gave sugar cubes to horses and they would stop grazing and run to him like puppy dogs to be bridled and harnessed. He'd wrap the leather harness straps around his wrists and grip them in callused hands and could shout articulate commands at his team of four horses pulling thrashing machines eventually through the fields of every wheatbelt state, resting and watering them frequently.

At day's end he would climb a badland hill, hang his lanky legs over the edge of the cliff, watch the stars and sing a song his father taught him—*Home on the Range*. He would smile at the echoes, imagining his father listening. On paydays he'd take a dollar and any loose change from his pay envelope, stuff them

into a pocket and hand a postage stamp to his foreman to mail the rest of the money to his mother.

In 1919, at the age of seventeen, he borrowed a brother's suit and took a job as bellhop, babysitter, actor/performer, and swimming instructor at the deluxe Hotel Del Otero resort on Lake Minnetonka. He would greet steamer boats bringing guests to shore and offer his babysitting services should vacationing couples wish time alone in the hotel casino or at the scheduled dances. He was a popular babysitter, not only for his towering height, but for the tall stories he would spin and for the magic tricks and sleight-of-hand he would rehearse on his young, captive audiences.

He was a thoughtful teen. His mother once held him, tears streaming down her cheeks, not for money he sent her, (she put that in a canning jar for him), but for a postcard he took the time to write. Until his first postcard his mother had never received mail from any of her seven sons. He dreamed of going to California and becoming an entertainer, perhaps a magician or singer with a traveling show. He also wondered if he could become a prize fighter with his height. A boxer.

He felt he would be an entertaining interlocuter in the steamboat minstrels, but he was adamant about never doing blackface. He remembered his mother's stories of Normandy and he read of the pathos in *Evangeline,* by

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, of the British expulsion of the Acadians from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick into Quebec and New Orleans, and he felt blackface was a tasteless caricature of another abused culture and not a proper way to get laughs. He would add that it was demeaning and wrong, and one didn't need masks of ridicule to entertain or make people laugh. He promised himself that he would step on each of the forty-eight states before he was thirty.

He kept the promise, but despite all of his dreams, his sense of adventure, the grounding passed to him by his father is why my father never once lost his sense of responsibility for putting food on the table every day. He never failed the task, regardless of his age, of the economic times or the number of mouths to feed around the table.

From his reading, he favored stories of true-life adventures, and he would exaggerate and retell them. In front of his audience he would present himself as a lanky, self-effacing Abe Lincoln-like teller of tall tales. He would sometimes blacken a front tooth or two with road tar and boast in a put-on dialect an *"Aw shucks, it warn't nuttin'"* about his tale of being so tall as a *'pup,'* "*…why I was so tall at "lebbin'"* (eleven) I *could step me one leg over the mighty Mississippi River without ever getting my Sunday going-to-church shoes wet. Just one step was all she took."*

After the mouths in his audience dropped in total belief because of his height, every eye in the room appropriately riveted, gazing up in wonder that he was the tallest boy they had ever seen—he was a giant—he would turn his back to them, remove the tar from his front teeth, turn back around and let the truth come out with a snicker that he was just joshing and that the Mississippi River began as a trickling little spring at Lake Itasca, near his daddy's farm and each and anyone of them could jump over it too. The story would get thunderous applause.

He was eighteen in 1920, when jobs became available for selling phones and for connecting lines from phone poles to homes and businesses. He became a wire chief, drove a company car and wore a harness with holsters filled with wire clippers, pliers and his legs were strapped and braced with lumberjack pole climbing metal spurs. He was a dashing figure with his holsters, spurs, and a motorcar, despite his hand-me-down clothes from shorter, older brothers. He was proud of being able to climb a forty-foot pole without a ladder or phone pole climbing rungs and having a motor car when most were still on horseback or in horse-drawn carriages, but little did this hopeless romantic know that life for him was about to permanently change.

He had spent the morning near the top of a phone pole behind the New York Mills building in Wadena, Minnesota, headquarters of the Regan Bakery. He was stringing and

connecting telephone wires from the pole to the building for wiring of telephones. With one hapless misstep inside the building my dad tripped backward and fell two floors down an elevator shaft. He landed on his back, knocked out and with a broken arm.

Two workers below rushed to him.

"He's alive," said one.

"This is your lucky day, kid," another man whispered. "We just loaded bread on this elevator. That bread saved your hide."

That evening, his arm in a cast, my dad stared out his hospital window up at the stars. What would his father, who had died from falling, tell him to do now? Looking into the heavens he thanked God for saving his life. He prayed, *"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread…"*

At *daily bread*, he paused, as if he were thanking his lucky stars. He had a moment of reflection and, watching the stars, he fell asleep. The next morning, he was visited by Mr. Regan, the owner of Regan's bakery and my dad told him that God wanted him to be a bread man.

"I'll be a good one, Mr. Regan, can you give me a job?"

"I'll give you a job, son, but are you sure you want to be a baker?"

"I'm sure, sir."

"Being a baker is an all hours of the day work, might want to think about it, son."

"How's that? All hours?" Dad asked.

"Bakeries bake nights, we deliver in the daylight," Mr. Regan said.

"I'm sure of it, Mr. Regan, your bread saved my life. That was a sign. I'm meant to be a bread man."

Mr. Regan looked at Dad and smiled.

"You belong in sales, young man."

"I just want to be a bread man," Dad said.

"Tell you what. I'll teach you the business—that I can do—but you belong in sales. You already sold us more telephones than we need. You have sales written all over your face and smile—it's in your eyes and that'll get you through doors, and your height will get people's undivided attention."

"Bread man, baker—which sounds better, Mr. Regan?" Dad asked.

"How are you with horses, son?"

"I drove teams in the Dakotas, Montana and Idaho, Mr. Regan. All through harvest I drove different four-horse teams ten, twelve hours a day. Horses and I get along."

"We do need an extra man. Get mended, and I'll make you our 'extra' man."

"I'll do anything, but what's an extra man?"

"If anyone is off his route, you as our 'extra man' will replace him. We'll teach you the bread business—but I want you to be thinking down the road of the W.E. Long Company in Chicago where you can do the baking industry some good."

Dad counted on his fingers the states he would get to travel through to get to Chicago.

"What's Long company?" Dad asked.

"W.E. Long folks are sales consultants to bakeries. Mr. Long will hone your marketing skills. I'll keep my word. I'll make you a baker."

"Sales, I can do that for certain, but I don't know this marketing."

"Yesterday son, do you remember talking to one of my drivers while you were spooling telephone wire?"

"Ted, I remember Ted."

"We have delivery trucks and we have bread wagons."

"I know, I saw them."

"He said you told him we shouldn't call our wagons, *wagons*—he said you told him the *wagon* word reminds folks of manure wagons—and you also told him that our delivery trucks should be painted white, like milk. Pure white looking like the milk folks trust."

"I remember. He told me they were bread wagons, and I was just telling him what the first image of a healthy food was that any mother thinks of—milk, Mr. Regan and milk is white."

"That's marketing, son. Just because of your talk with Ted we're having our trucks painted white. You're a natural. You're an idea man. You belong in sales and marketing."

"Well, I'll be."

"Tell me, son, if we don't call them wagons, what do we call them?"

"Just call them bread trucks. You've got motor bread trucks and horse-drawn bread trucks."

Mr. Regan looked at my dad's shirt and pants resting on the side chair.

"You got any clothes to fit, son? You're a lanky one."

"I think I'm full grown, Mr. Regan—six-six—but no, the suit I wore working at the hotel was my oldest brother's. I don't fit in it now. My clothes are hand-me-downs, and I've pretty much outgrown them.

"Mike, put money away each week," Mr. Regan said. "Your height draws attention, but a fitted suit will make a good first impression on folks and as tall as you are you need clothes that fit. You won't find your size in any dry goods store. You need a proper suit and overcoat and

hat if you're going to be in sales. I know a good tailor. You might start wearing ties regularly."

"Mr. Regan, thank you for everything."

"Give your telephone company notice so they can find a replacement, son. I'll take care of your hospital bill. When you're mended come and look Ted up and he'll point you around, and get you started."

That was how my father became a breadman in 1921, the summer before his nineteenth birthday.

The three years working for Regan's bakery brought memorable moments for his future yarns. One happened the day my dad was driving the horse-drawn bread truck from grocer to grocer on the main street of a small town in Minnesota. The street was unpaved, dirt and he was pulling his team away from the curb when a revving motorcycle popped a backfire and blasted around a nearby corner and past him, causing my dad's horses to rear up screaming whinnies of fright.

Two grocery stores later, while stacking the bread rack he saw the motorcycle kid buying a roll of Life Savers candy. Dad stepped over and gripped the young man's arm. He was tall, near Dad's height and looked the same age.

"Friend, my horses bucking up could have killed somebody back there! Kids play on these streets. Be careful with that motorbike of

yours and mind it's backfiring in town. You'll hurt a kid someday."

The young man apologized and left the store. Dad finished his business with the grocer and stepped outside to find the young man resting on his motorcycle, waiting. The young man was polite and apologetic, admitted he knew better and wasn't thinking about the kids and he said his name was Charles Lindbergh and he quit college and was working as an airplane mechanic. He said he was going to the Dakotas to learn to fly a plane and maybe carry mail or do some barnstorming.

Dad told young Charles Lindbergh of his own dreams of going to California while he wrote down the name and address of a wheat farmer in the Dakotas who he knew owned an airplane and maybe could help this young Lindbergh fellow learn to fly.

The other grand moment in my father's life happened at twenty-one. He met and fell in love with the woman who would one day become my mother and the mother of my seven siblings, Mary Margaret Holman from St. Paul, Minnesota.

It was love at first sight for them both. Mom, a confident, statuesque six-foot-tall Irish woman adored my dad, and would stand and rest her head on his shoulder. The love of his life was well educated and a well-read woman of accomplishment in her own right. As a child and into her teens my mother starred in the Ice

Follies in St. Paul and would tour the country performing on ice, reading a book a week. Mom once skated with a visiting, young Sonja Henie. Mom wore opulent performance capes and costumes carefully designed and handmade of furs and lush velvets, and she could spin in circles while balancing on the top of a single block of ice.

In summer months she would perform in water shows and was a ribboned speed swimming champion. As a publicity shot for the St. Paul winter follies, she once swam a crawl alongside the gold medal Olympic champion Johnny Weissmuller years before he would begin his movie role portraying Tarzan. Mom's grandmother migrated to the US during Ireland's potato famine of the late 1800s. Mom was born in Cincinnati in 1902, and not ashamed of or unspoken about her mother being with child and abandoned the year she was born, never knowing more about her biological father than that he was Irish. At the age of four, her aunt, Josephine, a housewife and her uncle, Fred Holman, a banker and pilot in Buffalo Lake, Minnesota adopted and lovingly raised her as their own, making my blood grandmother, Catherine, legally my aunt … our "Aunt Kate."

Mom and Dad were dazzling, a dapper young couple, both at six feet or above. Dad not only considered my mother a man's equal at a time it wasn't fashionable for men to think of women's rights, he always thought of his wife as smarter than himself and a perfect partner for

life. Confident and gregarious, they were both secure with themselves and always involved in each other's lives. In years to come, Dad wouldn't think twice about cooking the meals for the family and Mom would step up and run some of their side business enterprises, two dance halls, managing singers on the local radio shows while raising eight children. Long before that and at the age of twenty-one, on their wedding day, November 5, 1923, Dad presented Mom with the keys to her own car, a 1923 Ford Model T. It was fully paid for—a statement of his early success. Mr. Regan's wedding present to the couple was placing Dad in charge of seven bread routes in southern Minnesota.

In time, and forever grateful to Mr. Regan for mentoring him through the years, my father explained his reason for needing to leave.

"Mr. Regan, your college trained sons are coming along and will need jobs."

Dad and my mom decided to travel to California on their first anniversary. They arrived in L.A. the day after the black plague broke out and parts of the city were put under quarantine. Dad came home his first day out with three job offers. It was then when my mom wrote of first feeling life and my oldest sister Mary would be born in Los Angeles.

Dad took a job as routeman for Pacific Baking in Beverly Hills from the fall of 1923 through midsummer of 1924, when word came that his mother died. He wanted to be home, and

they left California to be with his brothers in Minnesota to mourn his mother's passing. His and Mom's next stop with their baby was Chicago. He set an appointment with Mr. W. E. Long.

Dad began a new career as a sales consultant to bakeries at the age of twenty-three. Big Mike, as he came to be known, was so respected in the baking industry he was invited by bakeries and traveled into every state. He was paid $50 a day, seven days a week on the road for his consulting services— $50 a day when bakery plant managers made $30 to $50 a week. He would end each evening on the road writing a love letter home to my mother. He never missed. In the mid-1920s Dad was consulting with bakeries in upstate New York, one of which was Durkee's, a retail bake shop in Homer. He became friends with the owner's son, Albert, and my mom became friends with his wife Florence. Dad and Albert's friendship grew close, like brothers. They admired each other for the knowledge they had gained at young ages with neither being formerly educated. Albert knew the process of baking and Dad knew bread sales.

Mom and Florence, who were on their way to having a combined seventeen children between them would play and have fun at the W.E. Long annually sponsored baking conventions in Chicago, without children.

Durkee's retail store was originated by Albert's mother Lena, popular and successful in the late 1800's. It closed in the early twentieth century. Albert's father was trying to make it viable again in the 1920s. They had an oven that could bake up to forty loaves of bread. On a bakery consulting trip into central New York in 1927, Dad was checking in at the Hotel Syracuse. The hotel's lobby was packed with photographers and press people, a crowd of waiting onlookers. Curious about the commotion, he turned to watch. A group of men circling a tall man were gently pushing through the crowd when the tall man in the center caught Dad's eye, threw his arm high into the air and shouted across the lobby over the heads of onlookers in a high-pitched, crackling voice, "Hey Mike!" the man yelled with a big grin on his face, waving his arm tall and wide. "Hey Big Mike from Minnesota!" It was none other than Charles Lindbergh, Lucky Lindy, who was waving and shouting to my dad. He was the kid on the backfiring motorcycle from Little Falls, Minnesota who had flown nonstop from New York to Paris. He had come to Syracuse on his national tour to make a speech to the Chamber of Commerce. Dad grinned and returned the wave, stretching his long arm up in an exuberant twirl. The two men waving at each other towered over the heads in the crowd.

Dad left W.E. Long to become head of sales for the largest bakery in America, the Continental Baking Company and Hostess Cake

Kitchen out of Hoboken, New Jersey. A second child, a daughter, Dorothy, was born in 1929, the year of the stock market crash. Soon Mom was expecting a third, my brother Mike. In 1930 Al and Florence Durkee drove to Hoboken to spend a few days for a social visit with Mom and Dad. They were best friends since the early 1920s when Dad was with W.E. Long.

Al told Dad he wanted to set up a wholesale bakery. “Best we can do now is bake forty loaves at a whack,” Al said. “I want to build a wholesale bakery, a big one.”

He told Dad that with the expansion of Route 11 and with the train rail through Homer and Cortland they could bring in the resources.

Cigar box factories were the largest number of small businesses in Cortland at the time, and tobacco leaf for cigar wrapping and cold season cabbages were the upstate New York primary farm crops. Route 11 would let them import the flour and sugar they would need. Dad told Al he was happy in Hoboken, working at Continental. He loved calling on the big accounts like Yankee Stadium, Ebbits Field and Madison Square Garden. Between them they bought hundreds of thousands of hot dog buns alone. He said he had a bright future with Hostess and wouldn’t consider leaving unless he had ownership in something. During the visit Mom and Florence, along with Dad and Al, enjoyed some shopping and fun in the Manhattan stores and nightclubs.

Before heading back to Homer and their growing brood Florence encouraged my pregnant mom and my dad not to try the hot summer drive to Minnesota for vacation and invited them to spend it at their family's summer camp on Skaneateles Lake—one of the Finger Lakes near Homer. Mom and Dad took them up on the offer and drove north for a few weeks.

One lazy summer evening I can see Al and Big Mike sitting on the lake bank listening to the frogs and croakers. Dad would have hummed his favorite tune, *Home on the Range*. Looking up at the stars, the two friends would have talked about the times they've had through the 20s, about their wives and growing families. Al might have mentioned remembering the Pump Room at that fancy hotel in Chicago. "The Ambassador," Dad would have said, "the Ambassador hotel." Young Al told Big Mike that he crunched the numbers and if he could raise a few thousand to buy a Peterson Oven and the five to seven thousand for a building and to have it installed, wired and ceramic tiled in, wouldn't that be something? ($155,800 in 2021) "I'll never be able to get ahead baking 40 loaves an hour."

"Wholesale baking, done right is big business, Al," Dad would have said, "It takes a big oven—it takes a Peterson, but a Peterson takes electricity to pull conveyor racks through a big oven. You don't have electricity, Al. You'd have to build a generator and that'd be more than the oven and building."

Al talked about the electricity that was coming to Homer. Up until then if a company or university wanted electricity in Cortland, Homer or Prebble, they had to build and operate their own generators. The Cortland Trolley company had a generator and was shutting down in February of 1931. They were going to sell their electricity to local industry. “I want to lock in a contract with them,” Al would have said.

“That’s a lot of money,” Dad would have said. “How about your folks?” Dad would have asked. “I want to do this on my own,” Al said. “I want you to be my partner.” Sitting on the bank of the Skaneateles Lake I can imagine two friends shaking hands with an understanding that, between them, they would try to raise money enough to buy and install a Peterson oven—an oven so large it could fill a building and take weeks to preheat. They were confident that Al knew baking better than most and Dad was the best there was at bread sales.

“Your pop’s a good businessman,” Dad might have said. “Would he run the business side?”

“If we can figure out how to put it together,” Al might have said, “we’ll give him a piece to handle the business and accounting side.”

The two friends agreed that if they could find the money, they would build a wholesale bakery. They also spoke of the depression and the times and they agreed to create a strong

retirement pension for employees to help attract and keep the best. A portion of any profits they had would go into the employee pension fund. It was a year later in 1932 when my dad drove from Hoboken to Homer to meet with Al and his dad in private. He pulled papers from his valise, contracts with the Federal government to supply bread to the upstate New York 'soup' kitchens. Continental couldn't serve upstate New York and they gave the contracts to my dad. Dad talked them into renaming the "soup kitchens" in the paperwork and to call them "Bread Lines." He had contracts to serve bread, cakes and pies to Pine Camp, a military base in northern New York. (Fort Drum) He had a contract to serve the soon to be created FDR depression era work camps, called the CCC camps and others like them throughout upstate New York with bread, cakes and pies. Using the government contracts as collateral, the bank said yes to financing the Peterson oven and its installation. The bank gave them the second floor of their building for the bakery's business offices. Dad and Mom moved to Cortland and rented a place while they built a home on Helen Avenue.

Dad and Al signed contracts in 1931 and began to organize their dream. They incorporated and became equal partners and stockholders of MRS. DURKEE'S CAKE KITCHEN, INC., in Homer, New York. The wholesale bakery started with Al as general manager and Dad as sales manager. They were a team. When they turned the oven on Mrs. Durkee's Cake Kitchen,

Durkee's Domestic Bakery became one of the largest independent bakeries in the country. In the early 1930s they began baking more than 80,000 loaves of bread a day, 365 days a year. The flour, eggs and milk for that volume of bread changed the upstate New York farm landscape of crops from leaf tobacco to wheat—three carloads of wheat a day—and tank cars of milk. Butter and eggs by the truck load.

Al's father died in October of 1933. On his death, inheritance transferred his shares of 10% to Al's mother, Lena.

Seven-day weeks of eighteen-hour days in the early 1930s never took a toll on Dad or Al. They loved being partners and they loved baking. I remember riding with Dad to Homer on Saturdays, sitting in the car and watching Al and him meet. Al would rest his glasses on top of his forehead and he and Dad would walk two blocks up the sidewalk, pause and talk and then walk the two blocks back talking. They would stand and talk some more, shake hands and go their separate ways. Sometimes they would take a break from work and families and go to New York City for respite, sometimes taking the wives, sometimes taking coworkers. They would see shows, go to the Copa Cabana and other night clubs.

It was the Depression, and Al would carry rolls of new pennies and if he met kids, he would give them two shiny new pennies for candy and he'd tell them not to give up—to

shine shoes, wash windows, run errands, do anything but just don't give up. Dad would show off by getting Al into the Madison Square Garden through the "vendor" entrance he used when he was with Hostess Baking and supplying the Garden with hot dog buns by the tens of thousands every week. They watched the Max Baer and Primo Canara fight, and Dad got to shake Mr. Carnera's hand. Mr. Carnera was also six foot six, like Dad.

In those Depression years my brother's Fred and Dick were born, bringing the Antil children count to five. In 1935, with the help of army and navy veterans (WWI GIs) and naval semaphore flags, Dad built the Durkee's Bread sign on the side of a tall hill between Homer and Tully. He once told me he was inspired to build the sign from the HOLLYWOODLAND sign he saw in Los Angeles. The 'D' alone of his sign climbed three hundred feet up the hill. New York City newspapers reported the sign a wonder of the world.

Dad told me the secret of how they built the sign. One man with semaphore flags would stand below the hill in a farm field on the other side of Route 11 and he would use signal flags to direct men high up on the hillside who each had a long scythe. They would follow his signals and cut the pattern of the letter in the heavy field of grass one letter at a time. Once a letter—like the three hundred foot tall 'D'—was cut in the heavy grass, men would watch the semaphores below and lay and secure two rails of lumber like train

rails throughout the letter. Then, like building a picket fence lying flat on the ground they'd cover those rails with six-inch-wide siding board tracks and whitewash them.

To my dad, frequent visits to every customer was a religion. (I remember that from the all-day road trips I would ride with him in the later 40's and early 50s from Binghamton to Ogdensburg, listening to his stories, singing songs, visiting grocery stores and some fishing holes along the way).

He would never own a Cadillac because his store owners and managers didn't have Cadillacs, and he would never join the country club, as they didn't allow Italians, Jews, or Blacks in, and his bread customers were a total mix of all races, creeds, and colors. From the "one horse" village grocers (he would call them) to big chain store managers, every CCC work camp and the Pine Camp military base were the same to him. They were important. He would drive the state visiting each, shaking hands, telling anecdotes, learning names and about their families and where the best fishing holes were and what bait should he use. It was while my mother was expecting Paul, their sixth, that Dad was visiting a CCC project in Cazenovia and met the team making hiking trails and installing split log steps up a side cliff close to two waterfalls. The men, some Canadian, were building a line of "cook out" brick fireplaces and wood picnic tables on the lawn in front of a waterfall. They were creating a public park—the Delphi Falls

Park. It was meant to be a free public access park to enjoy two waterfalls, and it included two pavilions for community gatherings or family picnics. It was Depression work in return for three meals a day and a fair and honest wage that came with a stipulation that 95 percent of the workers' pay got sent home to their wives.

The park was a nice idea and it was built with a good purpose in mind, (honest work, safe housing and the feeding of hungry men who could send money home to their families) but as a park, it was ahead of its time. My brother Paul was born in 1939, the year dad bought the park with plans of converting the pavilion into a home with space his family needed. It was also the year Germany invaded Poland. FDR enforced a Defense Act that froze consumer flow of raw materials and moved industry to building weapons and bombs. New construction was prohibited and the selling of building materials curtailed. Our home at Delphi Falls was put on hold. My mother, father and their six children would gather in the living room on Helen Avenue listening to radio speakers scratching whistle ladened voices of war correspondents— *"This is Edward R. Murrow in London."* They would broadcast news about London's nightly bombings and of the twenty or more ships Germany was torpedoing each week.

The following year the war news got worse and my mother was pregnant again— this time with me.

I was born Jerome Mark Antil, the seventh child of a seventh son of a seventh son in Cortland County Hospital. Jerome for St. Jerome the librarian who translated the bible, my father's favorite book. From Mark Twain, my mother's favorite writer (as a teen).

I can remember the first time I climbed from my highchair with a smell of oatmeal and banana and crawled across the kitchen's warm linoleum floor into the hallway with a side chair next to a telephone on a shelf in a cubbyhole in the left wall and the hall closet door on the right. I remember the feel of varnished hardwood on my hands and knees and the scratchy Oriental rug in a living room with its sofa, two chairs and a piano and bench and a mantle with framed pictures on top. I loved when the floor model Zenith radio's lighted dialed glowed a golden hew with music and voices coming out like magic. In a family of nine I'd often find my adventures crawling in diapers through forests of legs, some with trousers some bare and in bobby socks and penny loafers.

I can remember taking everything in by listening to and watching six older siblings and their friends talking, laughing, and growing up. Some practicing on their violins, the piano or clarinet, some getting dressed for a school dance, borrowing a tie from my father or a brooch from my mother. I remember the voices with some combing or brushing their hair while edging for position in front of the only bathroom mirror to check for Colgate tooth powder smudged smiles

while listening to distant sounds of the downstairs 78 RPM record player and Glenn Miller's music.

I remember record album jackets on the floor in front of the Zenith. I attribute my incredible memory to a simple premise that happiness in this time of a world in disorder and in the shadows of fear, children were best seen and not heard. I could and would crawl about, at will, listening in rooms filled with people talking about the inevitability of war, about rumors of gasoline rationing and the coming of coffee and sugar shortages. I heard the US Army was drafting teen boys into military service and I heard who asked whom to the school dance and who gets to change my diaper and give me my bath.

I liked my bath. A bar of Ivory soap was my toy boat. It floated. In the early 1940s, until I could walk, I'd crawl about listening and learning from room to room, in my highchair at the supper table or when someone took me to the backyard to crawl in the grass while they hung washed sheets and diapers on the line. I was a good listener.

On December 8, 1941, eight months, exactly 242 days after my birth, I remember my father holding me on his knee with the family gathered around in chairs or on the floor. I don't remember the words but I do remember the fear in their eyes, staring in tears at our Zenith radio

while President Franklin Delano Roosevelt told the world that Japan had attacked America.

I remember wartime and seeing soldiers and sailors in uniform everywhere in Cortland. I remember talk of Mom and Dad having square dances in the pavilion they owned in Delphi Falls and that musicians played music and called square dances for the local farmers and men in uniform on Saturday nights. I remember my oldest sister singing with a band, the Round Up Ryders on WNDR radio every morning before she'd walk to school. I remember people watching the skies for enemy bombers and the grownups pulling the shades at night to hide the light. I remember being in the backyard with my brother Paul and the sky suddenly blocking out the sun because of low-flying bombers. I was four and I can remember thinking they were German bombers as the ground shook with the roars of their passing overhead. I remember screaming in fear, feeling we were going to die and I waited for bombs to drop.

Later I learned that American bomber pilots flew the plane they trained in from the training bases first to Long Island for fueling and then across the Atlantic to their assigned air base in England. I learned that the bombers and fighter planes that flew over me were required to fly low in the states so enemy spies couldn't count them easily. The movie newsreels showing the German atrocities in Europe and the Japanese terror in the Pacific were frightening.

Children in the 1940s were encouraged to be independent. We were lectured on avoiding crowds of people so we wouldn't catch Infantile Paralysis (polio). At four I was enrolled in kindergarten at Saint Mary's Catholic School. I remember the mile walk to school, sometimes with brothers and sisters and sometimes alone. After school Sister Mary Francis had me hold a little girl's hand and Sister would stand on the school steps and watch me help the girl across Main Street. I had to wait on the other corner until her mother came and then I'd walk home alone.

When Durkee's FulMilk Bread became Sunbeam Bread I was five and in the first grade at St. Mary's. Before the morning school bell rang, I'd kneel on the ground in knickers and my newsboy cap with other boys beside the school and we'd shoot marbles and see who could win marbles and who lost marbles. When the last school bell rang and school was over Sister would tell us if there was a fallen soldier next door. I remember that "fallen" was a polite way of saying "killed," and I remember the funeral home, stepping up the steps, opening the door and kneeling by a soldier's or sailor's body. I remember watching their faces and praying one *Our Father* and one *Hail Mary* at every casket before walking home.

On Catholic Holy Days of Obligation, I remember my sister Dorothy taking me to early morning Mass and afterward treating me to hot chocolate and a glazed donut at the Community

Restaurant. Grownups had to fast (not eat) from midnight until after they received their Holy Communion, and that's why there's a donut treat after Mass. While we sat in the booth at Community, I remember Dorothy telling me what it will be like when I do my First Holy Communion that year. That Mommy was going to take me shopping for my first pair of long pants, a nice coat and a tie like Daddy wears but it'd be dark blue like the other boys doing their First Communion. No more short pants or knickers if I didn't want them. I'd be a big boy after my First Holy Communion.

I remember rehearsing what I had to say when I go into the confessional, kneel down and the Father opens the little screen door. When the day came, I remember the heavy velvet curtain closing behind me and kneeling down in the dark. I remember the wood frame of a small door sliding open and I said into the screen, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. This is my first confession." I remember the Father saying something and my mind going blank and making up a sin, "I took a pencil." That seemed to work and it got me two *Our Fathers* and one *Hail Mary* before the little door closed again. But it came with communion at the altar that Sunday in my long pants and hot chocolate and glazed donuts at Community with the family, and I remember Dad making spaghetti at home later that day.

I remember scythes hanging from a beam in the garage. Dad's crews used them to trim

high grass from around the Durkee's Bread sign on the hill. I was playing and poking the scythes with my finger to watch them swing back and forth and one fell, gashing my right ankle. I remember the blood and my brother Fred carrying me into the house and my dad holding one of my hands and Mom holding the other as the doctor clamped my muscles and skin together with metal clamps and his taping my ankle.

I remember my dad often taking me to the shoe-shine parlor on Main Street next to Community and my climbing up into the chair for a shine while he'd stand on the sidewalk reading the parlor man's morning newspaper. I remember the time I was with him waiting for an elevator. I remember it being on a second or third floor because I could see cars on Main Street below. I remember the cigarette smoke and some men making grown-up morning noises, and I remember thinking noises for old men were like I'd hear sometimes while following the mule that pulled the strawberry man's cart down Helen Avenue in front of our house.

The memory of that morning waiting for the elevator made an indelible positive impression on me that made sense to me as I aged. I was a five-year-old standing among men waiting for an elevator. It was a statement of how my father respected me when I was five. He treated me not as an adult but as an equal, a capable person. He wouldn't dote, hold my hand

like I was a child or lift me up to perform or show me off like I was a puppet. He'd let me stand among his coworkers with their morning gas, throat clearing, and cigarette smoke and wait for the elevator, and when it came, he would say, "let's go, son," as the elevator door opened. I remember when ladies were on the elevator, he'd politely remove his hat, hold it over his heart, and say *"Good morning."*

I remember my dad teaching me how to make a Palm Sunday cross. I remember my sister Mary wanting to marry Donald G. Lederman, who flew B17s and bombed Berlin. I remember when Don's father died, I was sad and I made a Palm Sunday cross and Don put it in his father's hands in the casket. I remember Mom cutting her birthday cake and, in the center, she felt a lump. She carved it out and found a ring box and it was a ring for her from my dad. I remember on my brother Paul's seventh birthday Dad, with a long scarf wrapped around his forehead pretended he was a birthday swami and put Paul on top of the dining room table, in the middle. He would use a mysterious low voice and the birthday swami would command Paul to get on his knees, and then to stay on his knees but lower his forehead down on the table and not to move and to "listen to the great birthday swami and repeat every word, I, the great swami say."

"Are you ready, birthday boy?"

"Yes."

"Yes who?"

"Yes salami," seven-year-old Paul said.

The room, including the great swami, broke into gales of laughter.

"I am the great birthday Swami—that's S-W-A-M-I." Dad spelled it out with an exasperated annunciation.

"Sorry," Paul said, giggling.

"Are you ready, birthday boy?"

"I'm ready, Swami," Paul said.

"Birthday boy, repeat after me."

The room was hushed in silence.

"I know my heart," the swami said.

"I know my heart," Paul repeated.

"I know my mind," the swami said.

"I know my mind," Paul repeated.

"I know that I …" the swami said.

"I know that I …" Paul repeated.

"Stick up behind," the swami said.

Paul repeated the 'Stick up behind," with a guffaw turned giggle while burying his face in his hands and flattening himself on the table with laughter and applause filling the dining room. Then everyone sang Happy Birthday while he composed himself and got to blow out the candles and have the first piece of birthday cake.

I remember the time my brother Fred was supposed to watch me and he and Bobby Grumman took me to a scary movie with dungeons and men in chains and leather whips and screaming. I remember hiding on the floor at the movie house crying. I remember telling Mom how scared I was and her telling my dad. I remember Dad filling a large milk pitcher with water and handing it to my sister Dorothy with instructions to teach Fred a lesson. I remember going upstairs with Dorothy and watching her open a bedroom window and emptying the pitcher of water on Fred sitting on the lawn below with Bobby Grumman.

"Shame on you!" she shouted down. "He's five. Such a movie for a five-year-old!"

She closed the window with a slam, turned to me and winked.

"That'll fix his wagon!" she said.

To this day, the city of Cortland, my memories of kindergarten and peeing in the sandbox, the airplane bombers over our back yard, and my first grade at St. Mary's are with me today.

I had turned six in 1947 when our family moved to the Delphi Falls Park and eighty-four acres of woods and waterfalls. I remember Dad having to drive to Carthage for the second Durkee's bakery that had started in northern New York.

I remember watching carpenters build bedrooms and two bathrooms in what was the dance pavilion. The carpenters put four-foot by eight-foot glass windows where wooden, tilt-out shutters were. I watched Mr. Rowe build a brick fireplace. The walls were natural wood, lacquered with a varnish. The ceiling was natural, a beaded plywood varnished. I had a bedroom of my own and a small desk. It had two beds in it so my side of the closet and the three drawers were on the right. I remember the screen doors letting in loud noises of the waterfalls all night and waking me up early the first morning we lived there. I remember finding a vicious looking animal on the living room carpet before anyone else was awake. I remember stacking sofa pillows around the wild animal to trap it in and thinking I should poison it and giving it a bowl of milk mixed with spices I could reach in the kitchen cabinets to do the job of saving the family from its vicious attacks.

I went to get my dad and when he came out the animal was gone, leaving a trail of milk on the linoleum by the back door.

"See that?" Dad asked.

"What?" I asked.

"That wet line on the floor. That's a tail line. I think you saw an opossum," Dad said. "They have long tails."

I remember my dad taking an encyclopedia off the shelf and showing me a picture of the opossum. “That’s it,” I said.

I remember Dad telling me the opossum was probably more scared than I was and not to be afraid of the woods or the animals, and someday he would get us some animals, maybe a horse.

I was six, starting second grade, but Mom wasn’t certain what school I belonged in on my first day at school so she dropped me at a two-room schoolhouse in the Delphi Falls hamlet. On the third day a school bus, number 21 came to our front gate that Mr. Scullin drove, and Mike, Fred, Dick, Paul and I got on and went to Fabius Central School. I met my second-grade teacher, Mrs. Heffernan and the thirty-eight kids I would grow up with.

Dad took me with him to Carthage and I remember listening to Arthur Godfrey on the radio and I got to stay at the Imperial Hotel across from the railroad station and fish in a rowboat at Sandy Pond.

Life changed at the falls. In Cortland we were a family of ten around the supper table. In Delphi Falls, with the two girls in college, married and gone, and two oldest brothers about to graduate and go away to college, there were six of us most of the time—Mom, Dad, Dick, Paul, me, and my younger brother, Jimmy Joe.

I remember the week school started with Dad and Mom setting down the rules and handing out chores for each of the boys. Dad rule number one: All of his sons will know how to cook and sew before we were fifteen. We had to know how to take care of ourselves after we leave home.

Dad rule number two: Each boy from twelve on up had to pay rent during summer vacations. He explained that rent was fifty percent of what we earned, and it didn't matter how much it was as long as we found jobs during summer vacations when we turned twelve. (All of our rent would go into a savings account for our college tuition.)

Dad rule number three: We each had chores. Mine was walking a mile to Mr. Pitt's house over on Delphi Falls Road once a week and picking up as many eggs the egg basket would hold.

Mom rule number one: We had to come to the dinner table with the family every night, no excuses, and wear a shirt with a collar.

Mom rule number two: We had table manners, no elbows on the table, say please and thank you when food is passed, and not leave the table without asking to be excused.

Mom rule number three: Each of us had to be sitting at the desk in our rooms every night from seven to nine, reading a book or doing homework.

Mom rule number four was we never miss Mass.

They both added that we'd always hold a door open for *anyone and everyone* (male or female), and we'd always walk on the street side of *anyone* (male or female) we were walking next to on sidewalks, and we'd always offer an arm to an elderly person to cross streets or to climb up or down stairs. Always carry a clean handkerchief, and it didn't matter what we wanted to be when we grew up, that if we worked hard at it and did the best we could, we'd always make a good living.

I remember a small movie house seven miles away in Cazenovia next to the Lincklaen House hotel and my brother Fred forgetting me and leaving me alone there the day I watched John Wayne in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* four times in a row. I was eight and I kicked Fred in the shin. I remember my dad leaving me in a grocery store in the country somewhere and driving off thinking I was asleep on the back seat of the car. When he came back for me, the grocery man had given me a popsicle to keep me from crying, and I remember Dad laughing at forgetting me and we sang *Put Another Nickle in, in the Nickelodeon, All I want is Loving You and Music, Music, Music,* with the car windows open … I remember I wasn't scared anymore. Singing with my dad did that.

I remember Mom telling us that Mrs. Durkee wanted to introduce her daughters to the

Antil boys and I was taken to a movie with a Durkee girl and we got two bags of popcorn and sat next to each other with a chaperone (my brother) sitting behind us. The movie was *Snow White,* and I remember not being interested in the Durkee girl because I was already in love with Olivia Dandridge from the *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* movie. I had even painted my bicycle yellow with house shutter paint.

I remember when Walt Disney called our house and the man who played Donald Duck's voice in the movies, Clarence Nash, stayed at our house. He had a Donald Duck costume that he let me wear in a Halloween costume parade in our school gymnasium. I remember a big theater stage in Syracuse with a Donald Duck show with an orchestra behind my Dad on stage introducing Durkee's Bakery's all new Donald Duck bread.

I remember Mom telling us that Dad and Al Durkee were leaving and going on a long trip all over the country to promote Donald Duck Bread for Walt Disney, and they went to the Alamo in Texas and she showed us the pictures of them promoting Donald Duck Bread on the streets of San Antonio with someone in a Donald Duck costume. Dad brought home four live Horned Toads and a baby alligator.

I remember being at the radio station in Syracuse with Dad when I was listening to a piano player playing music in the background while an announcer read a script into a microphone and they recorded radio

commercials for Donald Duck bread. When they finished, Dad and I walked to the car where I told him I didn't understand why they didn't play Walt Disney music.

"What do you mean?" Dad asked.

"They should play music like *Hi Ho, Hi Ho it's off to work we go*," I said. "Every kid likes Walt Disney, Dad."

I remember him turning the car engine off and taking me back inside and asking me to tell the piano player and the announcer my idea, and they recorded new radio commercials with Walt Disney music and telling me, at nine, what a good idea.

I remember being nine when the Korean War started, and I was afraid of bombers coming again. My dad drove me to Tompkins Airport in Ithaca one early morning and put me alone on an American Airlines DC3 plane, telling me not to be frightened, that it was going to be my big adventure. I remember being the only passenger on the plane, that my ticket said $11 and the pilot let me put my hands on the steering wheel. I remember the stewardess bringing me milk. I remember the thrill of watching the propellers spin around, taking off, flying high in the air and then coming down for a landing in Syracuse. I remember looking out the window of the airplane and seeing my dad standing next to the runway waving as he watched the airplane land. I remember Dad telling me that I never had to be afraid of airplanes again.

I remember going to the bakery every Saturday morning with Dad and he would let me take the Post Office box key, cross the street alone and collect the bakery's mail. I could go into Leonard's Coffee Shop and have a hot chocolate or a Mexican Sunday. (Ice cream, chocolate syrup and Spanish peanuts) I remember Carthage and going to it with Dad, and we would stay at the Imperial Hotel across from the train station and we would always fish at either Pleasant Lake or Sandy Pond in a rowboat.

I remember 1950 was the year my dad's life changed. That was the year when his partner and best friend, Al Durkee died. It happened that Al had a congenital heart disease that took him young and would also take a number of his sons at young ages. I remember seeing my dad weep three times … when his brother Hubert in Minnesota died … when his partner Albert Durkee died … and the third time, you'll be reading about soon enough.

I remember Dad having me drive a wooden motorboat alone from his friend's camp on the Black River, a full three or four miles upriver to Carthage. I remember that boat ride as one of my biggest adventures (I was ten or eleven) and my driving a small motor boat through three miles of tall, jungle-like wilderness on the winding Black River where there were bald eagles overhead, bears and bobcats in the woods. I remember seeing my dad waiting on the

bridge in his car in Carthage. He was asleep, with his head back.

I remember his not being as happy ever since his friend Al Durkee died. Dad didn't like the man the Durkee's brought from the Carthage bakery to help run the main bakery in Homer. The man was a close friend of Lena Durkee, and Dad suspected him of lying to Lena. Dad didn't trust him and felt that if Al were alive, he would agree the man wasn't right for the Homer bakery.

Mother's notes and accompanying photographs show that in the early 1950s Roy Parks, a man who owned many newspapers, brought a man named Duncan Hines to meet Dad and asked if Dad could create a bakery product using the Duncan Hines name as a brand. I remember dad telling me that he created a smaller but "premium" loaf of bread. He explained a "premium" loaf as thinner sliced (with more slices) than regular bread. People will look at it as more valuable with more slices and will pay more for it, he told me. Duncan Hines bread was created at Durkee's Bakery, and Dad traveled around the country talking about it to the baking industry. With it the Duncan Hines baking brand was established. Two years later Mr. Parks and Duncan Hines sold the name DUNCAN HINES to Proctor and Gamble for baking products.

I remember when I was ten Dad waking me at two in the morning and driving me to Brewerton, New York. I helped him put a warm

loaf of Sunbeam bread and three Indian head bonnets on every front porch in Brewerton. Dad told me that was called "sampling" his product. That was in the early 1950s, and Procter and Gamble said in 1960 that "Sampling" was genius marketing. I remember when I was twelve and was complaining that I only made $1.50 a week mowing a lawn in the summer and Dad driving me to the Hotel Syracuse, taking me down to the basement and introducing me to a Mr. Blume, who gave me a summer job (even though I was underage). I mopped floors and carried garbage cans up to the street on the sidewalk elevator, steamed them clean and threw paper and cardboard in the furnace. I remember earning $38 a week at the age of twelve that summer, when $50 could buy a car that worked.

It was after that summer when it happened … when my dad's world changed.

Dick, Paul, Jim, and I stepped off the school bus to the blanket of powdery snow covering like confectioner's sugar on a refrozen layer of the melted crust that lingered from a thaw earlier in the week. We started walking the long driveway to the house when we first saw the car. We didn't recognize it; it didn't belong to anyone we knew, and it began driving from the house down the long, snowy drive toward us. The snow crunched under its tires and we could tell by the stature of the person's silhouette we could make out that it was our dad in the back seat. A stranger was driving and what appeared to be a hospital nurse with a white nurse's cap and navy-

blue cape snapped around her neck was sitting on the passenger side of the front seat. We stopped walking as the car approached so we could say hi to our dad, but the car didn't stop. We bent down to look in through the closed car windows as best we could in the glare of the sun. Dad was waving at us, but the driver didn't slow down enough for eye contact or a courtesy wave. All the windows were closed tight, and the car kept moving. It didn't slow, it didn't stop the entire distance to the front gate. We turned to watch as the car drove off.

Maybe he didn't open a window because there was snow on the ground and it was cold. Maybe he wasn't feeling well. He'd been coughing a lot lately. Maybe they were going to the doctor to get him some penicillin.

We could see Dad turn around in the back seat and wave at us a gentle, sad wave. His eyes squinted from the tears we saw glistening in the light. Dad was weeping and we didn't know why or where he was going. We stood and watched him out of love and respect, just in case he was still watching us, until the car turned down Cardner Road. It picked up speed and drove out of sight. I started to cry. Our dad looked so sad staring back at us. He had never left us without saying goodbye like this before—that's just not how he was, and we had no idea why now. Why didn't he stop to talk? We ran as fast as we could into the house to find Mom standing in the book den, staring out the front window in tears.

"Where's Dad going, Mom?" Dick asked.

"Why wouldn't he talk to us?" I asked.

"Why was he crying?" Paul asked.

I was eleven and I never felt quite as alone as I did at that moment. Never. Without taking her eyes from the long driveway Mom told us to get out of our school clothes and meet her at the table. She made hot chocolate for when we got home so we could sit and talk. After we changed, Mom had us come into the kitchen and get our cups and take them to the table. Now seeing us with her she was smiling a little. I think it was because we were home and she wasn't alone anymore. Mom had not been separated from Dad since the day they met and fell in love in 1923. If he ever traveled on business, he would write her a three or four-page letter every day he was gone.

She sat at the end of the table.

"Boys, I have something to tell you. I need you to be strong and to be my men of the house. We will get through this together," she began.

The phone started ringing. We let it ring.

"Your father and I chose not to tell you about what I am going to share until we were sure."

"Is Dad sick?" Paul asked.

"We didn't want to worry you."

"What's wrong, Mom?" I asked.

"Tell us, Mom," Dick said.

"Your father has tuberculosis, and it's a very bad disease."

"TB," Dick said.

"Yes, TB. When he passed you on the driveway, the hospital nurses were driving him to the TB sanitarium, where he will have to stay until he gets better."

"Is that why he was coughing so much, Mom?" I asked.

"Yes, dear. Tuberculosis attacks the lungs and it affects people's breathing."

I started to tear up.

"Is that why he wouldn't talk to us or say goodbye?" Paul asked.

"Oh no, son, and I don't want any of you to think that. Please don't think that for a minute. It's just that they don't know a lot about tuberculosis. They think it may be highly contagious in the early stages, like polio, but they're not sure. Once the people from the sanitarium came today and told your father they confirmed he had TB, he couldn't and wouldn't risk exposing you to it. That's why he could only wave. He loves you so very much—he would never not want to say goodbye to his children. Your dad asked the driver to wait until he saw the school bus come so he could at least wave goodbye."

Our minds could get around this a little better, but the air was still tense. Dick, Paul, Jim or I couldn't conceive not ever being with our dad again.

"Can we go see him?" Dick asked.

Mom looked down at her hands to gather her thoughts.

"I'm sorry, boys, but you can't—not until he's better—not until they know it's safe for you to see him and for them to confirm that he isn't contagious. Just pray for your father every day. Pray that he will be safe and come back to us healthy and strong."

"How long will Dad be gone?" Jim asked.

Mom looked at each of us.

"It could be a year—it could be …"

Knowing the statistics, that TB was the number one killer in America, Mom wept. She was a strong woman, but her face dropped into her hands in a despair we had never seen before. Dick jumped up and ran in to her and Dad's bedroom and came back with a handkerchief.

"Thank you, dear," she mumbled.

Mom looked at the tablecloth as she wiped her eyes, avoiding eye contact that would start her tears all over. We stood, pushed our chairs in, and walked around by Mom. We each put a hand on her shoulder as we walked by and went to our rooms. I lay on my bed and stared at

the ceiling. I kept thinking of Dad looking around in the rear window of the car, a tear in his eye as he waved. I turned over and buried my face in the pillow so no one could hear me cry.

The next morning was Friday. When the school bus came, we weren't out at the gate. Mr. Scullen honked the horn a few times, and then drove off. None of us got out of bed until later in the morning.

Mom didn't say a word about our missing school. She felt that this was a time for us to be together and wanted us close to her in case any of us had any questions. The house was quiet all day. Dick was sitting on the floor looking in the encyclopedia to learn about tuberculosis. Paul was playing the piano and Jim was in his room. When it was time to get ready for supper, we went into the kitchen and fed ourselves. Most of the afternoon and even now, Mom was on the phone talking to our aunts and cousins about Dad going to the sanitarium and about the TB.

Dick made a salad for Mom and warmed up two meatballs he found in the refrigerator and put them on a plate, in case she was hungry. Neither of us said a word to each other all day. We walked around in a trance and looked out windows and teared up when we'd see a picture of Dad on the piano or the one of him on the wall in the hallway.

After dark we went to bed again. I knelt by my bed and said prayers so my dad would get better, not be in pain, and be home for my

birthday or for Christmas or anytime. Just so he came home.

The next morning, Saturday, Mom woke us up smiling. She had made breakfast and asked us to come as she had it on the table. It was like she was a new person. She told us that God would answer our prayers. She got us out of bed and told us now was the time for us all to be strong and that our dad had been through worse than this in his life. With the Lord's help and our prayers, he would get through this, too.

"What was worse than this, Mom?" I asked.

Mom looked around at each of us and told us something we had never heard before. She asked us never to bring it up unless our dad did first.

"It was a difficult time for your father when his daddy fell off their barn roof in Minnesota. He died when your dad was just a boy like you. Your father was the youngest of seven and so hurt by losing his father like that he could never bring himself to talk about it or think about it."

"Is Dad going to die, Mom?" I asked.

"All your dad would want now is for you to do the best you can, in everything you do, and to go on with your lives just as he taught you. If you do that for him, it will give him the strength he needs to get well again."

We promised we would. I asked her if we could write him.

"It would be better to tell me things for him. I'm allowed to visit and I would relay things you want him to know and news from us. That way, we can talk longer during my visits, and I could keep his spirits up. I could keep his mind busy with all the things we want to tell him. It's important we make sure he keeps positive and wants to get better and come back home."

We understood this.

I told Mom I was going camping.

"In the snow?" Paul asked.

I got up from the table, went to my room to get dressed, and grabbed my knapsack and the lantern my friend and our egg man Charlie Pitts gave me before he died.

I felt like a grownup and not a kid anymore. I remember blocking everyone out of my head to think for myself. I couldn't explain it. I was only eleven, but it was just not the same as before, somehow. I grabbed my knapsack and bedroll and headed out to the barn. Our two horses were standing close to each other, getting warm, soaking in the morning sun, but not moving or eating their broken bales of hay lying on the ground before them. Horses could sleep standing up, so I wasn't sure if they were asleep.

I slid the stable barn door open and went

in, stuffed my knapsack with as much hay as I could stuff in it, and then got Jack's saddle down off the rack. I brought it to the opened doorway and put it on the floor. I went back to get the saddle blanket. I paused and walked back to the door and looked out at Jack. Jack was a tall gray gelding who loved a ride and the climb up our hills. His winter coat was thick and feathery. He lifted his head up and looked at me like he was waiting for me to make up my mind as to whether we were going with a saddle today or going bareback. It made no difference to him.

"Bareback," I said. I put the saddle on the rack and threw the saddle blanket over the stall door where it belonged. I adjusted the straps on my knapsack, hooking the lantern to them, put it on my back and stepped out of the stable, sliding the door closed. I put Jack's bridle on and led him away from Major's side. Major was Dick's horse. I needed enough space to jump on Jack's back with the help of a cinder block.

We rode the driveway and down Cardner Road, across the small bridge at the creek and a right into the snow-covered alfalfa field. Jack raised his head high, his nostrils flaring puffs of morning air. He shook his head as though he were waking himself up. Jack knew we were going to climb the steep hill to go to my campsite next to a spring behind the cliff. He liked to go camping with me. He was a smart horse and knew his footing wouldn't be as sure on snow-covered ground.

We got to the back edge of the field. From there it was a steep, near straight up climb. I decided to grab a tight grip of his mane, hold on and ride him up to see if I could stay on while he climbed the hill. Jack's thick coat helped my legs get traction, and the bare, leafless trees let me see ahead. I squeezed with my legs and held a bunch of his mane in my fist. Jack's nostrils snorted steam every time his legs sprung forward like claw hammers, pulling us higher, while his hind legs pushed like springs, kicking snow until we reached our trail at the top that was more level to our campsite. Steam pounded from his nostrils like a coal train engine. We got to the site and I slid off his back, dropping the reins to the ground.

I took off my knapsack and looked about in the snow near my fire hole for where I wanted to sleep. The shallow hole was covered in snow. I dragged my knapsack around a square patch of ground to brush the snow away. Once clear, I packed the remaining snow solid to the ground with my feet. I gathered armfuls of dry leaves and made a mattress. I hung my knapsack on a tree branch and gathered logs, building the fire bigger than usual so there was more heat glowing off for both Jack and me. When it was going strong I gathered and stacked enough wood to take us through the night.

I mounted Jack again and told him we were going for a ride. When I was on his back, I realized that, for the first time, I'd mounted him with no help of any kind—no cinder block, no

hand up.

We headed deeper into the woods by the upper waterfalls, which were frozen. A small amount of water was trickling over the falls, dripping down massive icicles that were melting in the morning sun. I rode through the woods to the back fence on our property line and turned left to go north as far as we could. It was a longer ride than I had planned—a ride I had never done on horseback. When we came out of the woods into a clearing, we were across from where Charlie's old place was before they burned it down.

I rode Jack to the edge of the field that faced across the road to Charlie's property and we stopped. We stood there. Jack snorted puffs of steam. I remembered walking to Charlie's to collect eggs. I thought about the good times he and I'd had together. How he let me play in his barn. How nice he was to us all the time. I remembered when he got sick and Dad would come back from work to drive him to a hospital in Rochester, so he wouldn't be alone for treatments before he died. I remembered when he died. I wondered if Charlie had tuberculosis.

A tear blurred my vision—thinking of Charlie and wondering what I would do if my dad died. I pursed my lips, wishing both he and Dad could be here right now so we could all go ice fishing at Pleasant Lake.

A breeze kicked up. Jack turned and followed our tracks back to the camp. I took his bridle off and hung it with the knapsack. I

stacked more firewood. I had my heavy coat, my corduroys, two blankets, a pile of dried leaves for a mattress. So with the fire, I had all I needed. I unbuckled the knapsack and pulled out a quarter bale of hay I had stuffed in it. I didn't pack any food for me. Jack leaned his head down, smelled the hay, then lifted his head and turned toward me to thank me. He started munching on it. His back leg sprung as he relaxed. Horses can lock their knee joints. They will balance on three legs, resting one in case they must move suddenly in the night. The horse's natural predator is the wolf. Their defense is speed. They always keep one leg unlocked so they can move quickly.

I didn't need the lantern. I sat on a log by the fire and made some mourning dove calls for a while, trying to warm my hands.

"Whoo—eee—who—who—who—"

"Whoo—eee—who—who—who—"

I watched a squirrel carry an acorn up the side of a tree and wondered where he had them buried for the winter.

As darkness came, I unrolled my blankets and, lying back, I watched the stars over the creek side of the cliff, and I listened to Jack munching on his hay.

I looked at the North Star beyond a silhouette of a single dead leaf hanging from a branch surrounded by a full moon above, the leaf twisting in the breeze. I wondered what my dad was doing.

I wondered if he was coughing a lot.

I wondered if he was losing any more weight. I wondered if we would ever go fishing again.

Watching the stars that night I made the decision I wasn't going to talk about this with anyone at school other than Holbrook, Barber, or Mary, Randy, or Bases. I trusted my friends. My friends wouldn't mention my dad unless I told them I wanted to talk about it. Holbrook loved my dad, too.

I fell asleep that night knowing the rest of school that year and the next wouldn't be the same. School would never be the same again.

On Monday I was walking down the school hall, pulling my jacket off. I noticed a girl I had never seen before. She was walking in my direction, looking like she was lost. She was tall and slender and had curly brunette hair. She had a plaid pleated skirt on and a green sweater over a white starched blouse. She had a pretty sparkling smile, and I could see a smile in her eyes. I told her my name and asked for hers. She told me she was Judy Sessions, new here from Baltimore, Maryland, and she was staying until next November while her parents were doing something—traveling or something, I don't remember.

She was staying with her uncle, Ted Dwyer, who lived around the corner from the Conway farm.

I asked her if she had a locker.

"Not yet," she said.

"Use mine," I offered.

"Really? Thank you," she said.

"I never put a lock on it, if that's okay."

"I don't need locks," she said as she placed two books on the top shelf and hung her green sweater on one of the hooks, closing the door.

"Thanks for sharing, Jerry—and it's nice to meet you," she said. She smiled, turned, and walked away.

That same day, when I got home, a letter from my brother Fred, at Cornell University was lying on my bed. In it he wrote that every week he was going to send me a new word to look up in the dictionary to learn and use in a sentence. His first word to me was "pedantic." I didn't know what it was, so I got the dictionary and looked it up. His second was "copious." His third was "prevaricate." This was fun. Every week his letters and new words would take my mind off worrying about Dad a little, and I got to learn a new word.

On Saturday I saddled Jack and rode down past Doc Webb's place to the end of the road and up the back hill to the big corner. Just across the road was Ted Dwyer's place, where Judy was living until she had to go back home to Baltimore.

Jack and I crossed the road at Gooseville Corners and onto their snowy front yard. I dismounted and knocked on the door. Judy came out.

"Want to go for a ride?"

"Hold on while I put something warm on. Want to come in?"

"Nah, I'll wait out here."

When she came out, I mounted Jack, took my foot out of the left stirrup, and offered a hand so Judy could use it to climb up. Now she was just behind the saddle with her arms around me, holding on. Judy was older and in the eleventh grade, but it didn't matter to me, I liked her. Right now, we were on my horse riding down the hill to my house for some hot chocolate. We passed the Reynolds's place, the Shaffers', Don Chubb's place, the Butlers', and then the doc's. Doc waved and shouted for me to check out his new syrup cabin when I had a chance. I waved back that I would as we rode on past.

Mom was at home when we got there. She said hello to Judy and they talked about Baltimore while I heated some milk. We drank hot chocolate and Judy and Mom talked.

Later I took Judy out back to see the waterfalls. They were frozen over. We walked to the barn garage and I brought Jack out so I could take Judy home. Before we mounted, Jack moved his head around and nuzzled Judy like he liked her and wanted to say hello. Judy put one

hand under his chin and with the other patted his nose and then the side of his neck. They became fast friends.

On the way to the Dwyers', Judy rested her head on my back. I could hear her humming a song I couldn't make out, but I liked hearing her voice. We didn't talk the whole ride back. She held me close.

When we got to her house Judy slid over to where she could reach her foot into the stirrup, I had taken my foot out of. She held onto the back of the saddle and swung around slowly. I turned to help her and she paused, looked me in the eyes and kissed me. She kissed me a wonderful long warm kiss. Then her head moved back, and she looked in my eyes.

"I had fun, Jerry. Thank you for thinking of me."

She lowered herself to the ground, rubbed Jack's velvety nose goodbye, and ran into the house, waving at me just before she closed the door.

If it weren't for my dad being at the TB sanitarium, this growing up could be a good thing, I thought.

When I got home and unsaddled Jack, my world was shaken again. Mom was packing a suitcase. She told me that the sanitarium had called while I was out riding, and Dad might need surgery. They wanted to remove a part of his lung. She had to go stay near him for a couple

of days while he went through tests and they talked it over with the doctors.

Mom kept packing and told me to tell Dick to please be mature and tell the others to behave while she was gone, and that she would be back in a few days.

After she drove out, I walked behind the swings and pulled Dad's Oldsmobile door open. It hadn't been used since he'd gone. I sat in the driver's seat and thought of him sitting there. I held the steering wheel like it was him driving and I could smell him in the car. I thought about wanting him to meet Judy.

I went inside and heated up a tuna and noodle casserole for my brothers for when they got home.

I told Dick about Dad and the operation he might have to have—taking some of his lung out.

Dick said he didn't think someone could live without both lungs.

I bolted around in a blind rage, running toward him, and pushed him in a slam against the wall so hard his head bounced off it.

"You take that back!" I screamed. "You take that back!"

Dick stared at my fists, my jaw clenched, tears in my eyes. I just gave him a cold stare. He apologized.

We went to our rooms to calm down. I fell asleep without eating.

Judy and I went riding as often as we could and liked each other. I didn't know what love was so we didn't talk about that—I just knew that when we were together, we were happy, and when we weren't together, we couldn't wait to be together again.

One time when Mom visited Dad, he told her how to get me a job if I wanted one. I said yes—Dick, too, if he wanted a summer job away from the Lincklaen House. She told us at supper. Dick was all for it, so Mom said she would take us to the place on Saturday, introduce us to the owner, and see if it worked out. She said Dad wanted it to be a surprise, so she would tell us about the summer job when we got there. It would be for the whole summer, from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

On Friday night I went to a school dance with Judy. We danced every slow dance. We square danced when they played one that sounded easier than most. We would pair up with Mary Crane, a school friend and her boyfriend.

I told Judy that in the morning I would be looking at a summer job my dad had arranged. I knew nothing about it yet, as he wanted it to be a surprise. Judy told me she was praying for my dad every day to get better. She was nice like that.

The next morning Mom drove Dick and me to a place called Snook's Pond near Manlius. It was part of a spring-fed lake that was used as a swimming hole in the summer. It had a building with men's lockers and changing areas on one side of the pond and another with ladies' lockers on the other side. At the end of the pond was a concrete walkway with chairs on all three sides and a diving board. Just at the entrance to Snook's Pond, after the parking area, were two square huts that had big wood-flap shutters that when lifted and held up with wooden poles, showed the counters on the front and sides. One shack was where people paid to get in and rent lockers. The other was a snack bar where you could get hot dogs, popcorn, and soda pop.

Mom introduced us to Mr. Snook, who walked us around the property and gave us the tour. He told us that if we wanted the jobs, it meant running the snack bar and three times a day going around the grounds, picking up empty bottles and papers and raking up cigarette butts. He said both of us could work—but it was seven days a week from Memorial Day, when they opened for summer, to Labor Day, when they closed for the winter.

"Do you want to think about it, boys?" Mr. Snook asked.

"What does it pay?" Dick asked.

"Nothing, son, it doesn't pay," Mr. Snook said, "but it'd be your business for the summer, and you'd run the snack bar as your own and you keep any profits you make. How does that sound?"

"We'll take it," Dick said.

On the way home Dick asked Mom to ask Dad if he could make a list of what we should buy to stock it, where to buy it, and how to pay for it and what we should charge for things like hot dogs and popcorn and pop.

Working at Snook's Pond, the summer flew by. We got to wear swim trunks all summer, take turns selling hotdogs and soda pop or swimming whenever we wanted. We got to drive the orange Allis Chalmers tractor and wagon from our shop to the storage room down the driveway to get cases of soda pop for the snack bar.

On the day after Labor Day, summer vacation was over. I walked around the place doing a final pickup, knowing that I would probably never see it again, and I would miss it. I thanked the place for helping us pass the time so we didn't mope around worrying about our dad and missing him.

When the car pulled up to the house for the last time after the pond closed for the year, I ran to the barn, saddled Jack and trotted down to the Reynolds's hill and up to Judy's. As soon as she opened the door, I took her by the hand. I

didn't say a word, and I led her out to Jack. I started to mount.

"Hold on a second, mister," she said.

She took my face in her hands and gave me a kiss.

"I missed you this summer."

"I missed you," I said.

"Did you have fun at the pond, selling your hot dogs?"

We rode for a couple of hours around the Conway and Dwyer farms. We never stopped talking. I was telling her about the crazy people we saw at Snook's Pond and how to make twenty hot dogs at once so they were always hot and fresh. She told me about the books she read and that she was getting sad because she would have to leave soon. I didn't want to talk about that so we just rode. She held me close.

School started the next day.

Mom had arranged for me to go visit my brother Fred at Cornell. Fred had invited me to come up for a weekend and stay at his fraternity house, Delta Upsilon. It was his senior year and I had grown almost ten inches since Dad went into the sanitarium. I had shot up to six foot three. I packed a bag. Mom drove me to Ithaca and dropped me off. The next week was Thanksgiving, so he told Mom he would drive me home. The weekend was fun and went by quickly.

As soon as we got home and walked in the

door, Mom asked us to join Dick, Paul, and Jim at the table, as she had some news.

"Your father and I thought it best not to worry you, so we kept it from you that he had his surgery last Friday."

"Is he okay, Mom?" I asked.

"I'm happy to tell you that your father is doing fine, and with prayers, he could be home by Christmas if he heals well and has no complications."

I remember looking at Mom to see if her eyes were comfortable with what she was telling us, or if they were nervous eyes and maybe hiding some bad news. She was smiling. I believed her.

"The doctors make him cough several times a day to keep his lungs clear. It is very painful for him to cough—but he knows he has to, so he does his very best."

"Does he still have two lungs?" Dick asked.

"Yes, they only had to take the top portion of one of his lungs—so he still has two lungs."

We were so happy and now couldn't wait to see our dad again, after a year. There was a holiday dance at the school that night. Mom drove me and stopped to pick up Judy. She and I danced all night. This might be the last time we get to dance, we thought, since she might have to move back to Baltimore any day.

We got busy during Thanksgiving with family. Then I started to get letters from Judy. She had moved back to Baltimore. Her parents had come during the school break and got her with no warning and gave her no time to say goodbye. She wrote me a letter that I held all night. We wrote back and forth for months. Judy always signed her letters, Love and Prayers, Judy. I missed her. But I missed my dad, too.

It was the morning of Christmas Eve, but the house didn't feel like Christmas as it always had years before. There was a lot of snow on the ground. We hoped for snow at Christmastime, and it was still snowing heavily, and the house seemed cold now, still and quiet.

I got out of bed and went to the kitchen in my pajama bottoms and T-shirt. Dick was there.

"I'm making your favorite," Mom said.

I knew it was poached eggs. Mom knew I loved poached eggs. I would put one on a slice of buttered toast and eat it like an open-faced sandwich.

Mom asked if we could help fold the clothes right after breakfast so we could get ready for Christmas. She told us Don and our sister Mary were coming today from Harrisburg with our nephews, Tommy, Timmy, Teddy, and Terry. Our sister Dorothy and Norman were coming in from Washington with their daughter, Karen. Our brother Mike would be here.

Mom made no mention of Dad. We were

afraid to bring it up so early.

We didn't want to make her cry. If Dad wasn't here, we thought, this would be the first Christmas without him. We felt the same—there wouldn't be a Christmas without Dad.

We moped around the kitchen, eating, talking, and folding our clothes as Mom piled them on the counter. It was almost two o'clock, and I was still barefoot and in my pajama bottoms and T-shirt. Dick was looking at the pile of presents lying by the piano. Mike had come and was sitting on the piano bench playing "Volga Boatman," he had memorized.

I went in my room and fell asleep.

The next thing I knew, Mom was pulling on my toe. "Jerry, get up, get up. Your dad is coming home!"

"What!?"

"Your father's coming home!"

I sat up and rubbed my eyes. It was dark outside. Mom had a big smile on her face. I wasn't sure if I was dreaming or really awake.

"Mike Shea just called and told me that the man who is driving your father home stopped at the store and went in to buy a newspaper. Mike Shea went out to the car and said hello to him. He said he looks good, but he thought it would be nice to call us and let us know they were on their way—the man and your dad!"

I stood up. I could hear Dorothy and

Norm laughing and talking with Dick and Mike in the living room. I brushed by Mom and went to the bathroom.

When I came out I looked from the hall through my bedroom window. Mary and Don were driving in with their lights on and had a big Christmas tree tied on their car roof. I didn't think we were going to have a tree this year. I started walking down the hall to get dressed when the telephone in Dad and Mom's room rang. I rushed in and picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Hello, is Jerry there?"

"This is Jerry."

"Jerry, this is Doctor Webb."

"Oh, hi, Doctor Webb."

"Merry Christmas, young fella. I thought you would like to know that your daddy just drove past my place on his way home. I thought you would like to know, what it being Christmas and all."

"How did you know he was coming?" I asked.

"Us old fogies have our own SOS system, too, don't ya know." He laughed. "We invented it. Have a BULLY GOOD Merry Christmas, son! Mike Shea called me with the news."

I dropped the phone receiver on the floor

and ran out through the dining room past Dorothy and Norm to the front door and pushed it open.

Mom shouted for me to put something on but I was already out the door and on the porch. I jumped off the front step barefoot and started walking quickly through the snow toward the gate, not taking my eyes off the top of the road up by farmer Parker's hill, looking for headlights from the car Dad would be in. I knew the car Dad was in would be coming over that hill any minute now.

Mary opened the window of her car as I scurried past and shouted, "Jerry, you will catch your death, go put something on."

I kept walking as fast as I could, keeping my eye on the top of the hill.

Finally, almost to the gate, I saw the lights and a car come slowly over the hill, inching down around the curve. The road was not plowed and slick so they were taking their time. I hopped out on Cardner Road. The car turned into the driveway and paused a moment. The back window opened down halfway, and a hand came out for a shake.

It was my dad.

IT WAS MY DAD!

As the car moved forward, I grabbed his hand and squeezed it, walking alongside.

"Jerry?" he asked.

"Yes." I started to cry. I'd grown ten

inches since he saw me last and I wasn't sure he could recognize me. It frightened me to think my dad might not remember me.

"Remember us fishing at Little York Lake, Dad? Remember I rowed us out in the boat at Sandy Pond, Dad? Remember when you beat my airplane to Syracuse, Dad? Remember teaching me how to make desserts, Dad? Can you remember me, Dad?"

When we got to the house the family was outside on the porch waving and cheering. Just then Dad squeezed my hand and I heard him say, "You caught croppies, Jerry me boy, we cooked at the Imperial House, remember, son?"

"Room number six, Dad."

"Room number six," he answered. He remembered me.

The car stopped and Dad got out slowly. He was still tender and healing from his lung operation. When he stood straight, he looked at me and how tall I was. He ran his hand back and forth over my brush cut.

"You sure have grown, Jerry me boy—you sure have grown."

I stared into his eyes. "I'm still the same, Dad—just like you're still the same."

He shook my hand, put his arm around my shoulder, and we walked into the house with everyone cheering, laughing, crying, and all happy again.

Mom barked at me.

"Go take a warm shower so you don't get frostbite."

"No! I'm not leaving my dad!" I barked back.

"Well, at least go put some pants and shoes on."

I did do that, got a sweater, and came out and sat on the chair next to the couch where Dad was resting, smiling, watching everyone all talking at once.

Don, Norm, and my brother Mike were putting up the Christmas tree and Mary, Dorothy, and Mom were bringing out boxes filled with decorations and lights.

Dad asked Dorothy for writing paper and a pen or pencil. He wanted to write a friend in the TB sanitarium and wish him a Merry Christmas.

I thought back, remembering the night I laid on that same couch, when I was poisoned from drinking the creek water. I remembered Dad sitting where I was sitting now—sitting tall, watching over me all night long, his silhouette crested by moon glow.

I sat up taller in the chair.

When I woke it was still dark outside. The house was quiet, and all the lights were out except for the tree. The Christmas tree was a spectacular glow of lights and colors and shiny, sparkling decorations. The presents were stacked

underneath. Dad was still lying on the couch with a blanket over him. He had the pen in his limp hand and paper on his lap—but he was asleep.

I got up and took the pen and paper off him and put them on my chair arm.

His eyes opened and he smiled.

"Can I have some water, son?"

I got a glass of water from the kitchen.

"Want a fire, Dad? I know how to build a good one."

"That would be nice, son."

I moved his writing papers to the seat of my chair and built a big fire with the largest logs. While I built the fire, I could recall the time I left the tin lid filled with ears of harvest cow corn by the fireplace, for Santa.

I stacked enough wood that would take us through the night. I wasn't sure what time it was, but I knew everyone would be getting up soon to celebrate Christmas.

I walked back to the chair. Dad was asleep again. I took the water glass from his hand and set it on the floor beside him. I picked up his writing paper and his pen and sat down in the chair.

I didn't read Dad's entire letter, but I did read one paragraph.

"I'm sleeping on the sofa, the first night home, just to be in the thick of things for Christmas in the morning. My boy Jerry, is

roughing it on a less comfortable chair right beside me while he and I catch up. He doesn't seem to mind. Watching him there makes me recall the many nights he would sleep in a bed roll over the falls here at Delphi Falls. The horses would come around grazing or just snooping far into the night.

Jerry didn't mind horses, woodchucks, squirrels, rabbits, foxes, deer, some bears, and a load of wild birds that roamed the upper falls some of the time."

I stopped reading.

I remember looking up at the glowing tree. I remember looking over at the burning fireplace. I remember watching Dad sleeping. I remember feeling a tear roll down my cheek.

"There is a Santa," I said.

"He came tonight."

Dad soon returned to work at the bakery. He developed new sales with chain stores, but he didn't like what had happened to the bakery during his absence. To him it wasn't the same 'family' feel it once had when Al was alive. I won't dwell on it, but to him the changes were the influence of the man Dad never trusted. In his absence (while at the TB sanitarium) Lena Durkee promoted this man fulltime to run the whole operation. The man got a Cadillac for

himself on day one. Dads not liking the man to begin with was a personal thing. He often expressed that he felt the man didn't share his moral values. He thought the man was dishonest, a self-serving pot stirrer and only out for himself. On business trips the man often embarrassed Dad. Dad would introduce him to female friends of the family, one being Kay Starr, the popular singer at the Copa Club in New York City. The man was improper. I'll leave it at that. Dad told us of embarrassing things that this man did in Homer, Carthage, and in New York City on business trips.

Before Dad went away with tuberculosis (and ever since the 1940s) route salesmen could eat free at the Leonard's Coffee Shop. The new man ended that privilege. Before Dad got TB, the bakery, with its pension and family values was resisting being unionized. That all changed. Dad didn't have it in him to fight anymore. He asked his partners to buy him out in 1955. The bakery (that man) offered him $1,000 a week for life if he'd stay. Dad said no and they bought him out. I saw the check. It was less than one year of his pension would have been. The only people who came to his retirement party were his and Al's old route salesmen, the original bakers and me. I was fourteen. I remember his farewell speech.

After Dad left the bakery, the new man, without my dad's genius, expanded bakery sales by buying up small bakeries around the state. Looking from the outside, this might appear to

increase bakery sales, but it would also increase a bakery's monthly overhead with every bakery purchased.

In 1957 my dad ran a full-page ad in Baker's Weekly: "Mike Antil to come out of retirement." I remember he got thirty telephone calls and we moved to Milwaukee. He headed up sales for Carpenter's Bakery the largest bakery in Wisconsin and got to meet Hank Aaron at the ball park while watching the Braves win the World Series and the fans eating hotdogs in his hotdog buns.

Oral history and several newspaper articles document that the new head of Durkee's Bakery bought a large building on a railroad siding and moved the baking operations into that facility. In a short time, the bakery was past due with the Internal Revenue for withholding taxes. The man closed the Carthage plant and negotiated the sale of the main bakery to investors in Chicago, carving out one of the small bakeries for himself.

Dad, Al, and Al's father had set up a pension fund in 1932 for every bakery employee—this before the Social Security Administration was established. Had (I say 'had' because my dad told me the number while we were fishing) they put ½ cent per loaf in the pension fund for employees, there would have been over $4 million ($38 million) in 2021 money) paid into the fund by the time Dad left in 1956. In the 1970s all the money disappeared

and the pension money mysteriously emptied. People went to prison, and Mom's dear friend Florence lost everything and was ordered to keep working to try to pay it back. The man Dad had never trusted committed suicide.

My father hadn't been back to Cortland in twenty years. He died in Indiana. When his casket was shipped for funeral services at St. Mary's Church and cemetery, thousands came to say goodbye to Big Mike. It was standing room only. Mom asked Florence's daughter Jane Durkee Edlund to find her a cabin on Skaneateles Lake. She and Florence spoke and wrote frequently. My mom went on to earn her Masters and was working on her PhD, and well into her eighties she headed school guidance counseling for a Catholic Diocese. Mother had raised eight. Six having attended college, three published authors or poets. A daughter cofounding a major union AFSCME, another daughter internationally recognized as a teacher of seven years of French and a published poet. Her boys? We all knew how to cook and sew. Each of us made our way, in our own way. My mom was proud of us all.