

A Woman's Journey



With Flavorful Memories

By Elisa Wiedeman

*To mothers and daughters everywhere.
May we find our way together,
through compassion, humor, and love.*

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Introduction

Family stories of adventures and misadventures have entertained me for over forty years. At the kitchen table in the midst of most verbal narrations and exclamatory comments, my mother usually sits in quiet contemplation, politely listening. It's when the two of us spend time together, alone, that she opens up and her unique and interesting tales unfold. The following random vignettes, images, and corresponding recipes are intended to capture the essence of Betsy Jean Wendle Smith and her journey through life.

Betsy was born to Grover and Mildred Barr Wendle on May 25, 1930 in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. After losing three children from a previous marriage to influenza, Grover vowed never again to raise a family in the cold northern climate. Growing in popularity as *The World's Most Famous Beach*, sunny Daytona offered both a warmer climate and economic opportunity. So in the summer of 1930, the family of three established themselves in Daytona, Florida. Brothers Ray and John were born three and seven years later.

Betsy's early memories embody a brand of resourcefulness and sustainability that can only be achieved through life experience. As a child living through the Great Depression, she acquired the knowledge and wisdom from parents working to find their way through difficult times. Betsy's mother, Mildred, provided

all of the family's domestic needs. Besides fishing and clamming, Grover worked in the fast-growing sheet metal industry. At the onset of World War II, he worked in a number of shipyards. The era and economy required versatility and mobility. Betsy recalls attending twelve different schools from the age of six through fifteen.

All of the children lived briefly with their mother in Pennsylvania after their parents' split. In 1940, Grover took the children back to Florida to live with him. Mildred died eighteen months later. After Mildred's death, Betsy assumed primary responsibility for cleaning, cooking, and the care of her younger siblings. Periodic housekeepers and neighbors provided the children with additional assistance and friendship. One woman, Mrs. Beach, led Betsy to the comfort and joy of a Christian faith.

Meeting her husband, Ed, and moving north, significantly altered the course of Betsy's life. Besides climate and geographic changes, cultural differences existed. Peoria, Illinois offered broadened employment opportunities and more racial, political, and religious diversity. During her first years in Peoria, Betsy worked at two premier hotels which afforded her an opportunity to meet local and national dignitaries. She also acquired an impressive collection of big band leader autographs.

Transitioning to rural life carried special responsibilities and intrinsic benefits. Betsy assisted in the building and remodeling of homes, raising and preserving garden produce, and processing and cooking wild game and domestic livestock. Ed and Betsy's commitment to family vacations led them through 45 states as well as semi-annual trips to Montana, Pennsylvania, and Florida. Big game trophy hunting nurtured special long-lasting friendships in Montana. Betsy's long-term organizational affiliations include Girl Scouts, Daughters of the American Revolution, and various Peoria area Christian churches.

Working and living in the Peoria area also contributed to the couple's rich network of friends and family. Besides raising Betsy's younger brother John from the age of nine, the couple adopted two children, Karen Sue and Cathy Lee in 1959. Elisa was born in 1960, and Edward II, arrived in 1963. Betsy and Ed remain active mentors and cheerleaders to thirteen grandchildren and sixteen great grand children.

Gourmet Fisherman's Delight



*Grover holds a grouper
caught off of Daytona Beach, ca. 1935.*

My father was small in stature, yet big on ingenuity. During the depression, he sustained our family by fishing and gathering oysters. Florida backwaters offered extraordinary fishing opportunities and ongoing outdoor adventures. He

shared two memorable events about the early years when I was just an infant. One cool February morning, Mom and Dad fished a few feet away, while I laid peacefully sleeping on a soft blanket. Suddenly startled by splashing and laughter,



*Mother holds my hand to
help me stand, 1931.*

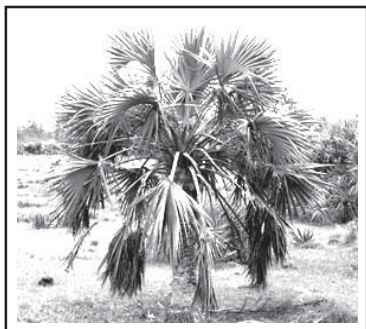
they looked in my direction, to find me floating and wriggling in water - well over my head.

“At first, we just stared in amazement. Every few seconds, you would lift your head above the water and laugh,” Dad said.

From that point on, my parents never took their eyes off me while around water.

Alligators were another danger that Mother soon learned to avoid. Dad recalled one day fishing when he and Mother waded knee-deep in familiar Florida backwaters populated with cypress trees and swamp vegetation. Mother, with an observing eye, commented on a peculiar, large log floating just a few feet away. Dad grabbed her and pulled her away from the suspicious form ... which was a large alligator.

One common meal Dad prepared after a fishing excursion included palm cabbage, fried fish and hushpuppies. As soon as we arrived at a carefully chosen fishing spot, Dad cut down a small, native palm tree. Using a sharp machete, he chopped off the outer branches to reveal the palm heart. The celery-type vegetable was about eighteen inches long and six inches thick. He placed heart chunks, along with onion and bacon, into a boiling pot of water. The simmering ingredients cooked down into a tasty stew. We enjoyed the distinct texture and flavor.



As kids, we pulled off fronds from palm trees that grew around our home. We chewed the inner edges, which tasted a lot like celery.

While tender when cooked, palm was also delicious raw. As kids, we pulled off fronds from trees that grew around our home. We chewed the inner edges, which tasted a lot like celery. Though no longer a food staple, Florida natives referred to cooked sabal palmetto hearts as swamp or palm cabbage. The tree grows to about 40 feet and has a single trunk with a crown about 15 feet in diameter. When the trees were plentiful, locals harvested them and removed the hearts for stewing. Today they are highly valued and protected.

Ironically, the term hushpuppies originated in Daytona Beach. It's told that hunters fried up the cornmeal morsels and threw them to baying hounds while chanting, "Hush puppy!" Memories of the sweet, warm and slightly gritty texture still linger. Dad originally made them from corn meal, milk, onions and salt. He dropped the mixture into hot grease, alongside a frying fish. He rolled the fish fillets in corn meal too, and seasoned both with salt and pepper. The fish, hushpuppies and swamp cabbage were a true gourmet fisherman's delight.

Hushpuppies

Beat together:

3 cups corn meal

2 tsp. baking powder

1 ½ tsp. salt

1 ½ cups milk

½ cup water

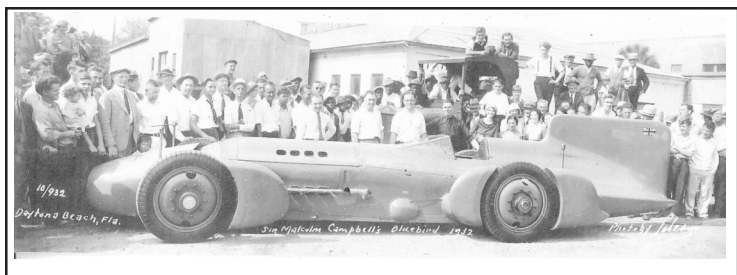
Blend in:

1 egg

1 onion, finely chopped

With hands, mold mixture into little cakes (about 1 Tbl. ea.). Fry in about 1" deep fat until well browned (1 ½ min. on each side). Drain on paper. Serve hot.

The Blue Bird



Blue Bird race car exhibit, Daytona Beach, ca. 1938.

Grover holds two-year-old John, far left.

Daytona was once coined, *The World's Most Famous Beach*. It drew tourists from around the globe, and locals loved it, too. Of course, Daytona had always been famous for its race track. The Daytona speedway of yesterday was quite different from today's ultra modern facility. The first track stretched along two miles of beach. Races were scheduled when the tide was low and the sand was packed hard. People stood or sat in wooden stands. Eager to turn their attention away from a failing economy and threats of war, everyone hoped to witness a new land speed record. In 1935, British race car driver Sir Malcolm Campbell set the world record at Daytona - 300 mph.

Campbell also went on to set several water speed records in a series of boats named “Blue Bird.” His son, Donald, raced and, together, they set eleven speed records on water and ten on land. The Blue Bird race car is on permanent display at the Daytona International Speedway Nascar exhibit.

The track eventually evolved and Highway A1A served as the west side of the race track. The two ends turned into the hard, sandy beach on the east side. Spectators always filled the stands. Coveted seats were on the curves.

When driving to the beach, we traveled through a tunnel that supported the impressive Riviera Hotel. While driving through the tunnel, we taunted Dad into honking the car’s horn, to signal our arrival. When walking to the beach, we crossed the Main Street Halifax draw bridge. The wooden and steel structure included a narrow pedestrian lane that spanned the same freshwater tributary that my father fished. I remember the salty sea air, misty breeze, and blowing sand. Sprigs of tall sea grass sprouted from sand dunes. The beach constantly moved and changed. After a storm, shells and sea beans laid scattered along the shore.

After one storm, my dad made me a belt from collected sea beans. Some pods were heart shaped. Others were disc shaped and about the size of a quarter. After gathering them, he dried and buffed each into a smooth, gleaming jewel. He drilled tiny holes through each bean and strung them together

with fishing line. He used dried kelp seeds as spacers. The belt had a nice “eclectic” look and I proudly wore it around my waist.

*Heart and disc shaped
sea beans, like these, lay
scattered along the shore.
My father drilled tiny
holes through each bean
and strung them together
with a fishing line.*



Daytona Beach’s annual Fourth of July celebration also left distinct memories. The day included car races and a watermelon festival sponsored by the chamber of commerce. The excitement began early. The beach was lined with tables filled with sliced watermelon. The melon was free, and we ate until our stomachs were full and our clothes were drenched with sweet, sticky juice. To clean up, we simply ran into the surf and the waves licked us clean. Fireworks over the dark ocean sky concluded the day’s celebration.

Watermelon Salad

$\frac{1}{2}$ medium watermelon
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh mint leaves, chopped
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup crumbled feta cheese
3 Tbl. extra virgin olive oil
1 Tbl. balsamic vinegar
1 handful baby greens

Slice the watermelon and remove the rind, trimming away the light colored portion next to the rind. Leave only the sweet, bright red flesh. Cut the watermelon into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cubes.

Arrange the watermelon cubes on chilled plates. Sprinkle with crumbled feta, baby greens and mint leaves. In a glass bowl, combine the olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Whisk until combined. Drizzle the salad with vinaigrette and serve right away. Makes about six servings.

Sebastian Inlet



*Feeling the hard, lumpy shells with the bottom of his foot,
Dad knelt down and scooped his gloved hand through the sand
tossing oysters, one-by-one, into the boat.*

Florida backwaters produced delicious oysters. We gathered them from the Halifax River, near Sebastian Inlet. We began at High Bridge, north of Holly Hill. My brothers and I played in the sand and helped Dad recover thousands of the elusive, tasty creatures.

The vision remains clear to this day – Dad walking the bay wearing old shoes, and pulling a row boat behind him. Feeling the hard, lumpy shells with the bottom of his foot, he knelt down, scooping his gloved hand through the sand and tossing the oysters, one-by-one into the boat. When the boat became too heavy to maneuver, we returned to the river bank to bake and eat a few oysters before returning home.

Oysters provided extra income, as well as, delicious meals during the depression years. Dad shelled the oysters and placed them into pint jars with lids. Unlike the oysters harvested today, they were large and meaty. Three or four oysters completely filled one pint jar. My brothers and I sold them door-to-door. Compassionate neighbors bartered and purchased each others produce and seafood. They especially loved Dad's oysters and the friendships they nurtured.

After a day of digging, Dad built a huge fire in the back yard. When the fire's edge turned to white embers, he placed the oysters around the edge. As they cooked, the shells slightly separated. We pried them open with a knife, picked the meat out with a fork, and popped them into our mouths. Some preferred placing the meat on soda crackers, along with a dab of catsup, before eating them. The oysters always satisfied a crowd of hungry friends. The neighborhood gatherings prompted shared memories, stories, and laughter. Everyone forgot about their money problems during our oyster bakes.



After the Great Depression, Dad (front row, fifth from left), enjoyed recreational fishing aboard the Miss Juanita, just off Sebastian Inlet Harbor.

Oyster Cooking Tips

- Oysters are naturally salty, so avoid additional salt
- To make shucking easier, first place them in the freezer for 15 minutes.
- Young, small oysters are the most tender.
- Overcooking oysters will make them rubbery and tasteless.
- Herbs that go well with oysters are thyme, fennel seed, paprika, and parsley.

Oyster Stew

5 Tbl. butter

3 dozen oysters, shucked and with liquid

2 Tbl. Worcestershire sauce

1 tsp. salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. seasoned pepper

6 cups of whole milk or half and half cream

$\frac{1}{2}$ bundle of parsley minced

Paprika to taste

Heat the butter in a deep, heavy skillet. When it bubbles, add the oysters, Worcestershire sauce, salt, and seasoned pepper. Cook until the edges of the oysters begin to curl. About 1 minute. Slightly heat milk. Combine with the oysters and simmer for no more than five minutes. Let stand until slightly cooled. When reheating, do not boil. Top with additional paprika, parsley and a dab of sour cream or butter.

Haw Creek



No one's sure where the term "cracker" originated. Some think it comes from the act of cracking corn into meal for cooking purposes. Most think it comes from the sound that a rural farmer makes when "cracking" a whip to drive cattle and horses.

It was a long drive to Haw Creek. Dad, my brothers, and I traveled over a rough and sandy road to Andy Hull's place. We parked our '37 Chevy there and hiked fifty yards or so to one of our favorite fishing spots. Dad and Andy were outdoorsmen and I think they enjoyed the occasional

camaraderie. Andy was a middle-aged bachelor and a Florida cracker who survived in the backwoods by fishing and raising razorback hogs. He lived in a small wooden house with a wide, deep shade porch. Dad and Andy liked to sit on the porch to discuss fishing, politics, and local happenings.

Andy's house was a simple, wooden structure. It was constructed of cedar and cypress trees – common to the area. Oyster shell and lime brick pilings elevated the house. A wide covered porch, open crawlspace, and multiple windows kept the place cool and breezy.

A fence enclosed Andy's hogs and about thirty wild orange trees. The hogs were tall and skinny, with protruding backbones. They gobbled up the sour oranges and their hooves and rooting snouts kept the ground rough and textured. Like Dad, Andy valued his self sufficient lifestyle. While we stood in the shade and peered into the lot, Andy shook his head and sighed with disappointment.

“The oranges ain't good for much - just hogs and marmalade.”

Andy was far from cultured, and when I was ten or eleven, I remember one particular visit when Dad's joking words somewhat frightened me.

“Betsy,” Dad said. “Andy needs a housekeeper and cook. How would you like to stay here and work for him.” He laughed.

Andy was kind, but he lived in the swamp. There was no way I would consider working for him.

Change is inevitable, and U.S. highways began to drastically reshape Florida landscapes in the late '40s. A new bypass, Nova Road, now directs traffic away from Daytona Beach and runs directly through Andy's homestead.



The hogs gobbled up the sour oranges. Their hooves and rooting snouts kept the ground rough and textured.

Orange Marmalade

6 Seville oranges	1 pinch of salt
1 navel orange	8 cups sugar
10 cups water	

Wash and dry the whole oranges. Cut oranges in half, vertically. Place a mesh strainer over a bowl and squeeze the orange halves to remove the seeds. A few may have to be removed by hand. Securely tie seeds in cheesecloth. Cut each rind into three pieces and use a sharp knife to cut the rinds into thin slices or cubes. Each piece should be no larger than about 1/3 inch in length.

In a large pot (10-12 qt.), add orange slices, seed pouch, water, salt, and juice. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook until the peels are translucent – about 30 minutes. Remove mixture and let stand overnight. Stir the sugar into the mixture. Bring the mixture to a full boil again and reduce heat to a gentle boil. Stir occasionally to avoid burning. After about 20 minutes, remove the seed pouch and discard. Continue to cook until jelled, about 200° Fahrenheit. The recipe makes two quarts.

To test the marmalade, cool a table spoon sized sample in the freezer. Check it in a few minutes. It should be slightly jelled and a bit wrinkled. If not, continue to cook mixture until a freezer sample appears ready. Ladle marmalade into jars and store in a cool, dry place.

Mother's Wild Grapes

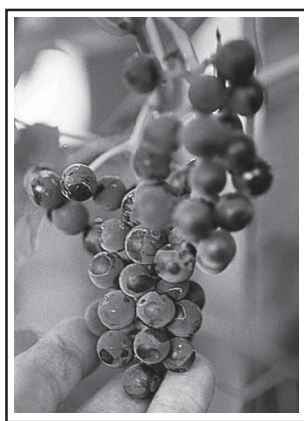


Mother was kind and soft spoken. Her dark eyes sparkled when she smiled, and she was always quick with uplifting words.

Wild grapes grew along the Halifax River, and my mother picked them to make jelly in the late summer. Being the oldest, I tended to my young brothers, John, and Ray, and occasionally helped myself to the small, tart purple berries.

The vines grew high and twisted in and around the sycamore and ash trees. We picked grapes all morning, and by noon, we were famished. So, we sat in the shade to eat our picnic lunch of bologna and mayonnaise sandwiches. After we filled two baskets with grapes, we returned home to admire our harvest.

Mother was kind and soft spoken. Her dark eyes sparkled when she smiled, and she was always quick with uplifting words. She had straight, dark hair and wore cotton flowered



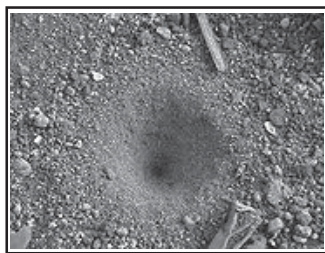
The vines grew high and twisted in and around the sycamore and ash trees. I occasionally helped myself to the small, tart purple berries.

dresses and white sandals. She performed most of her daily tasks under the cool shade trees in our back yard.

Our yard was large and sandy, and while she processed the grape jelly, we played in the sand and marveled at the ant

lion circles. The reclusive insects had sickle-shaped mandibles. They intrigued us, as we patiently waited for one to emerge from its lair to capture prey.

Mother made our clothes. She used a scrub board and lye soap; she boiled our laundry to keep our clothes clean and



*Ant lions intrigued us, as we patiently waited
for them to emerge from their lair.*

bright. She hung most on the line. But, I remember her carefully placing our nicer articles across the shrubs to dry in the afternoon sun.

Mother taught me how to change a diaper when I was seven. And, when I was eight, she took me to the theater to see *The Hurricane* starring John Hall and Dorothy Lamour. The show left quite an impression, when the lovers tied themselves to palm trees to keep from being swept away in a tsunami. A few days after the movie, Mother peeled the shaggy bark from

a palm tree and made a grass skirt for me. She taught me to hula dance, and I remember how we stood, side-by-side, reaching our arms out and gently rocking back and forth to *Honolulu Baby* playing on the radio.

Mother always kept in touch with my teachers, signed my report cards, and attended PTA meetings. My father taught



John, Ray, and me, playing at home.

my mother to drive. I remember how beautiful she looked as she peered into the rearview mirror, before backing out of the driveway.

When cooking and baking, Mother wore a simple white bib apron that tied in the back. She used a kerosene stove with four burners and a side oven. I remember her leaning down to light the wick with a match before placing a pot or a pan on the burner.

But it was her methodical movement and attention to detail when baking that made us yearn for her homemade jelly rolls. Mother spread the sugar and jelly evenly across the pastry surface and her fingers curled gracefully around the roll, as she sliced it into eight warm, delicious pieces. While savoring the pastry, I remember Mother pouring us a cold glass of milk and kissing our jelly laden mouths.

Jelly Roll

4 eggs

1 tsp. lemon juice

1 cup sugar

¼ cup milk

1 Tbl. butter

1 cup pre-sifted all purpose flour

1 tsp. baking powder

¼ tsp. salt

1 cup grape or strawberry jelly

Preheat oven to 400°. Grease a 15x10 inch pan and line with wax paper. Whip eggs until thick. Beat in lemon juice and sugar. Scald together milk and butter. Blend or sift together dry ingredients. Sift dry ingredients over egg mixture alternately with hot milk, folding gently after each addition.

Turn into prepared pan. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Turn out immediately on a towel. Sprinkle with icing or powdered sugar. Remove wax paper and roll the hot cake up in a towel. After the roll cools, unroll the cake, removing the towel. Spread jelly evenly over the surface and re-roll. Using a bread knife, cut into pieces.

The Telegram



Happier Days. Mildred and Grover, Ca. 1930.

I was thirteen. My mother and father were separated and I was home alone the day the telegram came. I remember the knock at the door. It was a young Western Union courier who delivered telegrams by bicycle. Three weeks earlier, he brought sad news to an older couple who lived next door. Soon after,

they exchanged the blue star hanging in their window for a gold one - a symbol of honor and death. Rationing had become a way of life; soldiers came home in boxes; and many relationships teetered in the balance. I had corresponded with my Uncle Jack, in the 23rd division. Uncle Jack tousled my hair and kissed my forehead each time we met. My mother dearly loved her youngest brother. I opened the letter gingerly, as if his life depended on it. I read it and dropped to my knees. It wasn't about Uncle Jack. It was my mother. She had died.

I spent the following week vacillating between grief and disbelief. I remember pulling the shoe box that held all of her letters out from under my bed. I untied the string that secured the lid and read each letter, one-after-another. I hadn't seen her in almost two years. I sobbed knowing that my brothers and I had planned a reunion with her in August – only two months away. We had corresponded regularly, and in her letters she explained how someday I would better understand why things were as they were. However, her letters also revealed that moving back to more familiar surroundings was little consolation for a mother separated from three young children.

Mother worked at Walworth Valve Company. As the largest employer in Greensburg, Pennsylvania the facility stood at the junction of South Main Street, Huff Avenue, and the railroad. Like most U.S. manufacturing companies during

that era, it supported the war efforts. She worked on an assembly line producing artillery shells. Medical reports later revealed that she had died of a brain hemorrhage caused from inhaling airborne metal shavings.



While our teacher played the piano, we sang a collection of Steven Collins Foster songs. I remember my Mother's gaze and reassuring nod as I sang.

From under my bed, I pulled a second box which contained a white satin dress with a blue sash that tied in back. It shimmered under the light the same way it shimmered under the stage lights just three years earlier. There, she sat with my father and brothers in the middle of the audience, smiling

and proud. It was the school spring concert, and while our teacher played the piano, we sang a collection of Steven Collins Foster songs. I remember my Mother's gaze and reassuring nod as I sang:

*Beautiful dreamer, wake unto me.
Starlight and dewdrops are waiting for thee;
Sounds of the rude world heard in the day,
Lull'd by the moonlight have all passed away.*

I was unable to attend my mother's funeral. I knew it would be a three-day trip, and would be very expensive. I tucked the dress neatly back into the box and cried myself to sleep.

Mint Tea

(A recipe to sooth an aching heart)

4 tea bags
8 fresh mint sprigs
4 cups boiling water
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup fresh lemon juice
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh orange juice
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups sugar
3 cups hot water

Bring 4 cups of water to boil. Add tea bags and mint; cover and let steep for 10 to 15 minutes. Combine remaining ingredients in a 2-quart pitcher. Remove tea bags, stir. Serve heated or iced.



There are two lasting bequests we can give our children. One is roots. The other is wings.



Boardwalk Photo Studio



*I laugh when I think about how many wallet photos
with my image circulated around the country.*

Economic conditions in the 1940s required women to reinvent existing wardrobes. This meant mending, patching, and altering clothing to make a fashion statement. Slender, yet curvy female silhouettes were in vogue. Two-piece suits, skirts, and blouses were common. In the warmer Florida climate, we wore a lot of searsucker and cotton fabrics. Synthetics had become popular and, of course, everything had to be ironed.

In the summer, we spent a lot of time in shorts and swimwear. The summer of 1944, I purchased a beautiful white bathing suit with adjustable straps. The light color really emphasized a dark tan. But one afternoon, I hung it out to dry - and it disappeared right off the clothesline. I guess everyone loves fashion.

Makeup trends included warm red hues. Female starlets all wore carefully applied eye pencil, intense red lipstick, and rose cheek color. I was fortunate to have naturally wavy hair because styles included an upswept full hairdo to frame the face. Hats were popular, too, and were usually fastened with pins and placed slightly tilted to one side. I wore Waltz perfume by Cody, cut my own shoulder-length hair, and wore it in a pompadour. Two side combs and a couple of bobby pins secured it.

Like most young women of the day, I followed Hollywood fashion trends modeled by stars such as Ginger Rogers and

Greta Garbo. One day a boardwalk photographer must have appreciated my fashion sense because he asked me to pose for portraits. He used the pictures in his display, and in return I received a free photo package. I ended up working at Don's Studio and assisted the owner with day-to-day operations.

The studio was small. It included a bench with draped fabric against the back wall, a smaller photo booth, and two character boards. Miscellaneous props were also available and included stuffed animals and an assortment of hats. Don took the pictures, processed the film, and printed the photos. I cut and packaged the photos, handled sales, and helped customers.

Don also owned and maintained a boardwalk photo booth. High school friends and sailors often had their photographs taken there, and it was not uncommon for them to request my presence. I find it humorous when I think about how many wallet photos with my image circulated around the country.

Sweet Potato Fries

(A healthy version)

4 cups sliced sweet potatoes

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt and pepper

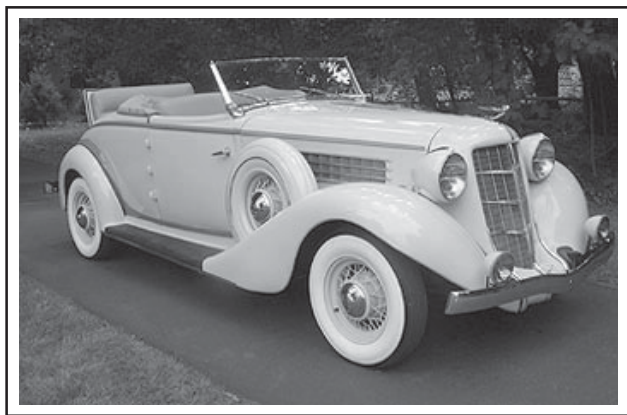
4 Tbl. olive oil

Preheat oven to 375°. Scrub and dice sweet potatoes into narrow strips (use the entire length). Steam or microwave for 7-10 minutes before baking. Lightly coat fries with oil and place on a cookie sheet. Bake 20 - 25 minutes or to desired crispness. Season the fries with salt and pepper. Serve and enjoy. The recipe yields about four servings. A cut paper plate rolled into a cone shape works well for a walk-and-eat container.

*You don't stop laughing
because you grow old. You
grow old because you stop
laughing. - M. Pritchard*



Eager Beavers



*We were typical teenagers. We rode with the top down
and cruised the beach. We sat around a driftwood fire at night
and body surfed ocean waves during the day.*

In the summer of 1944, a warm breeze prompted us to the beach more often than previous summers. One afternoon, my stepsister, Esther, and I were crossing the Main Street Bridge when a flashy yellow convertible approached from behind. As it passed, a couple of wolf whistles rang out. The car pulled over at the end of the bridge and, as we approached, a friendly hello and exchange of conversation ensued.

I knew Bob, the driver, and Jean, his wife. They introduced us to two men dressed in civilian clothes who sat in the back. We assumed they were local boys, but soon found out they were sailors on leave. The group was light-hearted and courteous. With over a mile yet to walk, we accepted a ride to the beach. Ester sat next to Bill. But with no room for a sixth passenger, I opted to sit on Ed's lap. Conversation was casual. We talked about local venues and laughed about our random meeting. We stopped at Steak-n-Shake where we sipped Cokes and ate burgers. Then we headed to the beach to meet other friends. As we rolled across the sand, Ed stole a kiss.

We all got along so well that our gang of six began to meet regularly. Because we were always up for an adventure, we claimed the title The Eager Beavers. Bob owned the car. He was quite a creative fellow, and even devised a catchy tune that defined our happy-go-lucky gang:

We're eager beavers.

We're crazy as heck.

We're nothing but...

A pain in the neck.

We drive around

In a Packard coupé – all day

Yea!

We were typical teenagers. We rode with the top down and we cruised the beach where locals and servicemen gathered for fun and recreation. We sat around a driftwood fire at night and body surfed ocean waves during the day. The convertible transported us to area freshwater springs for swimming and site seeing. We especially enjoyed the boardwalk novelty shops and seafood restaurants. Sometimes we stopped at roadside smokehouses and fish stands to purchase boiled peanuts and smoked mullet.

On occasion, we all chipped in to create a mouthwatering seaside meal right on the beach. Back then, the ocean was loaded with shellfish and mussels. On several occasions, we patronized fresh fish stands to purchase crab meat and shrimp. Locally caught shrimp measured about five to six inches in length. It didn't take too many skewered and roasted shrimp to satisfy us. The gang especially enjoyed my homemade crab cakes and we ate them until we could hardly move.

I cherished the friendship and time we all spent together. But the summer eventually ended. Bob and Jean moved north; Ester and I returned to school; and Bill shipped out. The best part of the Eager Beavers was that it led to a lifelong relationship with Ed. While stationed at Cape Canaveral, we met whenever possible. We corresponded when we were apart, and on January 26, 1946, we married.

Crab Cakes

1 lb. crab meat

¼ finely chopped green pepper

¼ finely chopped onion

¼ cup mayonnaise

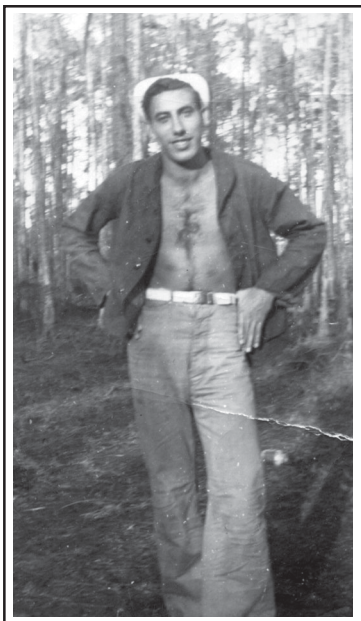
1 egg

½ to ¾ cup bread crumbs

½ tsp. dry mustard

dash of Worcestershire sauce

Combine all ingredients in a large bowl. Be careful about adding too many bread crumbs. You only need enough to hold a cake together. Hand shape into patties and fry in butter. Cooking spray and a drop of olive oil will reduce the fat content. Serve hot with your choice of side dishes.



Love needs no map, for it can find it's way blindfolded.



Melborne Diner



We were married in the Daytona Bay Street Methodist Church. Two other couples, close friends, witnessed the event. I wore a light blue wool pinstriped dress and a white pillbox hat embellished with netting and tiny carnations. Ed wore his winter Navy blues and tightly clutched his sailor hat behind his back throughout the ceremony.

After the “I do’s,” we kissed, and received warm congratulatory wishes from our dear friends. Ed paid the pastor ten dollars, and I’ll never forget Pastor O’Steen’s heartfelt reply.

“May God bless you, and may all of your troubles be ‘little ones’.”

When we gathered our wraps to leave, I looked down at Ed’s hat still clutched in one hand. Though he appeared composed and relaxed, he had unknowingly revealed the intense gravity of our union. Ed had twisted the cotton hat into a shapeless form. We both laughed, kissed again. He ironed it flat with his hands and placed it back on his head.

Our wedding party drove to Sherbert’s Tavern. We ordered dinner and toasted our future with bottles of Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer. A Whirlitzer juke box churned out song after song and we all danced to “Sioux City Sue.”

We had paid one month’s rent on a small apartment at the Melborne hotel. On Monday morning, Ed reported back to the base and I began waitressing at the diner, located next to the hotel. Like all diners in those days, it was an authentic railroad dining car with shiny aluminum siding and a large windows that stretched across the front. The diner included a serving counter, two large griddles, and a small addition that housed a dishwashing station with a pass through

window. People liked diner food. It was fast, easy, tasty, and cheap. We served mostly military personnel, their families, and construction workers.



People liked diner food. It was fast, easy, tasty, and cheap.

One morning, the fry cook called in sick. So, I naturally assumed his responsibilities, anticipating his return by noon. My first customers were regulars. They wore typical work attire: jeans, chambray shirts, and light colored jackets. The order was typical too, coffee, eggs, ham, grits, and pancakes. Grits were, and still are a Southern breakfast staple.

Diners always served grits with eggs and waitresses were apologetic if they were not available. Pancakes were especially popular because they really “stuck to your ribs,” so said the regulars.

The grill was hot and ready to go. I picked up the heavy, oval shaped bowl filled with pancake batter. The bowl must have weighed at least seven or eight pounds. The regular cook was a strong man and handled the bowl with ease. But I must not have had a good grasp, because as I began to ladle out batter, the bowl slipped from my arms and batter spilled across the entire surface of the griddle.

I was upset and said, “Oh no! I ruined everything.”

One worker smiled and said, “That’s all right, Betsy. Just cut them up into squares and we’ll eat them just as they are.”

So I did just that, and the men happily consumed the eggs, grits, bacon and square pancakes.



*He who goes to bed hungry,
dreams of pancakes.*

Old Fashioned Pancakes

1 ½ cups all-purpose flour

3 ½ tsp baking powder

1 tsp salt

1 tbs sugar

1 ¼ cups milk

1 egg

3 tbs butter, melted

In a large mixing bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder and sugar. Add milk, egg and melted butter. Mix thoroughly, until smooth. Heat a lightly oiled griddle or frying pan over medium heat. Pour or scoop batter onto the griddle, using a ¼ cup ladle or measuring cup. Brown on both sides and serve hot. To avoid a tough texture, never flip a pancake more than once.

Silver Service



*What was I saying?
I needed the job and was eager to work.
But I had no experience with silver service
and I had never worked at the Riviera Hotel.*

I moved to Illinois with Ed in early April. I packed everything I needed in two suitcases which fit snugly into the train's luggage rack, next to Ed's duffle bag. The trip took three days and we disembarked at Champaign/Urbana. It was freezing cold - too cold to wait another four hours for a bus. I was dressed for Florida weather and wore no stockings, so we decided to hitch a ride to Peoria. Cars passed us one-after-another. I finally had Ed stand back behind the bushes while

I thumbed for a ride. In no time at all, a pickup with a deer strapped across the hood stopped. The two hunters were friendly. We climbed in and headed west on Route 150. We passed miles and miles of agricultural farmland, through numerous small towns, and down a brick road called



*A night out at Peoria's Sazerac Club. Notice
Ed's handknit argyle socks and matching tie.*

Caterpillar Trail in East Peoria. Turning west, we crossed the Cedar Street Bridge into Peoria.

I remember the corner of Washington and Cedar Street, where a tall tower housed a man who manually controlled the electric

traffic lights. I'd like to say that my first impression of Peoria was good. But we entered Peoria on the southeast side. It was industrial and dirty. The air was hazy and filled with distillery and stock yard odors. Railroad tracks lined both sides of the river, and a two-tone horn blast rifled through the air signaling plant shift changes.

I missed Florida. The contrast was stark. Daytona's business district featured brightly painted signage, flashing neon lights, and lush, tropical landscaping to attract tourists. Peoria's bare-bones economy supported a blue-collar community much like my parent's hometown, Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Peoria's buildings were worn and well-used. Besides Caterpillar Tractor Company, major employers included: National, Hiram Walker, Pebble Springs, G&W. Quaker Oats, Rozell Dairy, Armour and Cudahay Packing Houses. Peoria Cordage Company and Peggy's Dress Company also employed thousands of workers.

In retrospect, I realize that Peoria sustained people just like the people who raised me - hard-working and persevering. Unlike cities in the South, Peoria neighborhoods, in many ways, were more progressive and more racially integrated. Ed's sister, Jenny, lived in such a neighborhood and she welcomed us into her home. We later moved to an apartment on Moss Avenue and I ventured regularly into the city and suburbs, where I discovered an array of refined and well-groomed neighborhoods.

I had always wondered about the popular phrase, “Will it play in Peoria?” I quickly learned that the term became popular during the Vaudeville era. Peoria had long been viewed as a good representation for mainstream America. If a show was a hit in Peoria, chances are it would be successful anywhere.

In the fall of 1946, Ed enrolled at Bradley University and I waited tables in the Peoria Room at the Père Marquette Hotel. I acquired the position in a rather unusual way. One morning, I walked into the hotel to inquire about a job. The hotel was more sophisticated and formal than any place I had ever worked. White tablecloths covered every dining surface, crystal chandeliers sparkled above, and the clinking of silver service filled the air. Businessmen and touring entertainers frequented downtown Peoria restaurants. The Père Marquette and the Jefferson Hotel were both desirable places of employment.

“Do you have any experience?” asked the restaurant manager.
“Yes,” I said.

“Do you have any experience using silver service?”

“Yes,” I replied. “... from the Riviera Hotel, in Daytona Beach.”

What was I saying? I needed the job and was eager to work. But I had no experience with silver service and I had never

worked at the Riviera. He raised his eyebrows, smiled, and hired me on the spot.

The first thing I did was partner up with a highly professional waitress named Zoe who taught me the finer tips of using silver service. I used the knowledge and experience to work at both the Hotel Père Marquette and the Jefferson Hotel, Peoria's finest.

Silver Service Protocol:

- . Always serve food from the left.
- . Serve drinks from the right.
- . Entrées are served from platters, not placed on plates in the kitchen area.
- . Always serve guests positioned to the host's right first.
- . Continue serving clockwise, around the table.
- . Clear plates from the right.
- . Fill glasses from the right.
- . Clear dishes, beginning from the host's right.
- . Place glasses diagonally, to the right of the plates, in order of use.
- . Always place water glasses in front of wine glasses.

Candles, chaffing dishes, and serving carts...they became second nature after a few short weeks. The menus were equally impressive and included: Lobster Ala Newburg, Chicken Florentine, and French Onion Soup.

French Onion Soup

2 Tbl. butter	3 soup cans water
2 lbs yellow onions, finely chopped	½ cup burgundy wine
5 cans (10.5 oz) condensed beef bouillon	¼ cup port wine
½ tsp. sugar	2 Tbl. flour
2 Tbl. vegetable oil	1 tsp. salt
ground pepper, to taste	8 slices, toasted
2 cups grated gruyere cheese	french bread

Add the oil and butter to a five quart pot. Heat until butter melts. Add sugar and onions. Cook over a medium heat for 25 minutes, or until the onions are browned. Stir occasionally to prevent sticking. Scrape glaze off the bottom of the pan, using a wooden spoon. Blend in with onions. Stir in flour and cook for one minute. Add the water, beef bouillon, and seasoning. Bring soup to boil. Turn heat down and simmer soup for ½ hour. Add port and red wines. Taste and adjust seasoning as desired. Preheat oven to 450°.

Ladle soup into high-temp soup bowls. Place toasted bread on top. Sprinkle cheese over the toasted bread and bake for 15 minutes. Finally, broil to melt the cheese. Serves eight.

299 Gomo Street



Ed holds a neighbor's baby in front of our home at 299 Gomo Street.

*We lived among a larger community of trailer dwellers –
all young veterans, their wives, and a scattering of children.*

Ed and I purchased the 22 foot long by 7 foot wide trailer in 1949. The primitive, very affordable structure sat among a larger community of trailer dwellers. We later learned that the trailers were transported north from a military operation in Oakridge, Tennessee. They originally housed employees who worked on the assemblage of the atomic bomb.

My youngest brother John, nicknamed “Duke,” came to live with us and space was precious. Ed and I slept in a pullout sofa in the back, while Duke slept on a sofa in the front of the trailer. An oil stove provided us with heat. And, if we forgot to light it before a sudden temperature drop, a thin layer of ice would form at the bottom of the kitchen sink and in any partially filled water glasses.

A hand-pump gas stove fit snugly into the maple wood veneer cabinetry, topped by worn green linoleum. The same linoleum covered the kitchen floor. The stove top featured three small burners and a baking space that would barely accommodate two pie or square cake pans.

A three-gallon container connected to a single spigot positioned above the sink provided a small gravity fed stream of water for drinking and washing dishes. We walked to the end of the lane to use a community bath house and a laundry building with 30 coin machines that served the entire complex. In warm weather, we hung our clothes out to dry on a clothesline stretched between two utility poles in the back.

An old fashioned ice box stood against one wall. It held a 25-pound block of ice and we placed a card in the front window to signal needed deliveries. Later we purchased a small electric refrigerator, a stainless steel percolator coffee pot and an electric pop-up toaster.



Duke with his pet raccoon at 299 Gomo Street

Duke lightened our days with humor. At breakfast time, he positioned the toaster on the breakfast table so that he could peer into the slightly convex surface. While eating cornflakes, he contorted his face into a range of expressions that brought us to laughter.

Duke loved my homemade biscuits. I used the kitchen drop leaf table as counter space when kneading dough. I still remember how he intently watched as I mixed, kneaded, and spoon dropped the biscuits into the pan. While lingering in the kitchen, he enjoyed listening to evening radio shows. His favorite program began with a familiar introduction:

“Sergeant Preston of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with his trusty dog Yukon King.”

The heroic radio duo patrolled the northern gold rush region protecting settlers and prospectors alike. Duke's character imitations must have further whet the his appetite because he ate with a vengeance. He split each biscuit with a knife and applied a generous layer of oleo and grape jelly onto each piece. I remember how he eagerly consumed every crumb.

The trailer walls were thin. The fragrance of cooking meals traveled quickly from one trailer to the next. Economic conditions made bacon somewhat of a delicacy and its aroma always tantalized surrounding neighbors.

Drop Biscuits

2 cups flour
3 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. salt
6 Tbl. Shortening
1 cup milk

Preheat oven to 450°. Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. Cut in shortening. Stir in the milk. Use a pastry board to round-up and lightly knead dough. Drop about 1 tablespoon size dough portions, about one inch apart onto greased cookie sheet. Bake till golden brown - ten to twelve minutes.

Little Girls, Little Girls



Cathy's outgoing personality complimented Karen Sue's quiet, contemplative nature. "Would you like to come home and live with us?" I asked. "Oh yes," replied Cathy. Our hearts were filled.

I'd often heard that children are "the living messages we send to a time we will not see." Ed and I wanted children. We experienced so many wonderful things and witnessed so much beauty in our lives together. We longed to share them with children of our own.

We finished dinner and nestled into the sofa one evening, when a special television news report delivered a story about a

family of neglected children. The images were painfully explicit. In the midst of brisk October, a camera captured several children in a cluttered, unheated home. The tiniest two played happily together, despite their surroundings. The reporter mentioned the name of the detective who discovered the home.

“Hey, I know that detective,” Ed said. “I went to school with his son.”

After the report, he flipped through the phone book and called the detective to inquire about the children. The detective referred Ed to a social worker who explained the necessary procedures to become a licensed childcare provider. Within the next few weeks, we completed the forms and acquired certification. In January, we received a call from a woman at Baby Fold, an Illinois foster care agency. She wanted to meet us.

While walking towards the agency’s main entrance, a small red-headed girl with a shrill voice darted towards a window and cried out in our direction, “There’s my mommy and daddy now.”

We entered the building through two large doors and were greeted by a young social worker, Miss Martin, who directed us into a small waiting room with several chairs and a sofa. A few minutes later, she entered the room with two little sisters – one with striking red hair and a smaller child with

bright blue eyes and lighter hair. Ed and I looked at each other in amazement. They were the same children we saw in the evening news last October. The toddlers each wore simple cotton dresses and dark oxfords. They were timid at first. But within thirty minutes, both had climbed onto our laps.



A winter outing.

Cathy's red hair and outgoing personality complimented little Susie's quiet, contemplative nature. It was easy to see that they were both hungry for love and attention, which we were ready to give.

“Would you like to come home and live with us?” I asked.

“Oh yes,” replied Cathy.

Our hearts were filled.

We visited the girls on one other occasion. Late that evening, over a hot cup of coffee and slice of pineapple upside down cake, we contemplated our roles as possible caregivers and parents. Our prayers were answered. The girls came to live with us and we were finally able to adopt them in the spring of 1959.

Pineapple Upside Down Cake

(The girls' favorite)

Bottom layer:

1 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar

½ cup unsalted butter

1 can (20 oz) sliced pineapple

Top Layer:

1 ½ cups flour

6 Tbl. cake flour

6 Tbl. pecan halves

¾ tsp. salt

1 ¾ cups sugar

1 cup unsalted butter – at room temperature

4 eggs

¾ tsp. vanilla extract

¾ cup sour cream

Preheat oven to 325°. Begin by making the caramel topping: Combine brown sugar and butter into a saucepan. Heat until sugar dissolves and mixture bubbles. Pour mixture into a 10 inch, stick free cake pan or iron skillet. Arrange pineapple slices in a single layer on top of the caramel mixture. Place Maraschino cherries within pineapple rings and scatter pecan halves throughout.

Whisk the flours, baking powder, and salt together in a mixing bowl. In a separate bowl, use an electric mixer to beat the sugar and butter until light. Add eggs one at a time, beating after each addition. Beat in vanilla. Add dry ingredients with sour cream. Mix thoroughly. Pour cake batter over caramel and pineapple into pan. Bake for sixty minutes – or until the insertion of a toothpick comes out clean (may take an additional 15 minutes, depending on the oven). Place the pan/skillet up-side-down on waxed paper. When completely cooled, the cake will have dropped onto surface. Serve with ice cream or whipped cream.

And We Prayed



Each woman had a unique perspective on the world, yet all wanted to make the neighborhood a better place for their families.

While living at North Woodland Knolls in Germantown, the spring roads were wet and muddy and the winter roads were icy and drifted with snow. So each morning neighborhood mothers and grandmothers walked their children to a common crossroad to catch the school bus. And each

afternoon, they met them and walked them home. Some walked fifty yards, while others walked a quarter of a mile. There, six women and fifteen children mingled for 20 minutes each morning. Conversation often focused on the weather, health, education, and the economy. Each woman had a unique perspective on the world, yet all wanted to make the neighborhood a better place for their families.

We came from a range of church denominations: Pentecostal, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Lutheran, and Methodist. We decided to begin a weekly nondenominational prayer and Bible study group. One fall day we met at Fern's home – a brick ranch at the end of a winding lane, nestled in oak trees. Fern led our meetings and guided us as we opened our Bibles in search of truths to help us cope with day-to-day obstacles. Most of all, we prayed for wisdom.

The Bible study group grew over time, as did our prayer list. We prayed about our families, school teachers, improved roads, employment, union negotiations, safe travels, financial crisis, food resources, the weather, national and local leaders.

Because shallow wells often went dry, and deep ones were very expensive, we prayed about water. Once, we prayed for a local family who lost their child in a house fire. The family Christmas tree had ignited and the couple lost their three-year old daughter. I also remember praying for one member of our group who desperately wanted children. As a new



Out and about.

parent, I was also able to comfort her and share the joys of adopted children. She and her husband eventually adopted a beautiful baby girl.

We shared our talents and resources with each other. Fern played the piano and accompanied us in song. She gave home hair permanents and let neighborhood children ride her ponies. Because we lived fifteen miles from the city, we often traveled together and ran errands for each other. We shared garden tips and garden produce. Marilyn's apple orchard

supplied neighbors with good pies and canned fruit. Ella offered baby sitting services – at no charge. Ione taught us how to design and produce costumes for school plays. We all exchanged children's clothing and offered them to other families in need.

Over the last fifty years, Ed and I have belonged to other close-knit spiritual groups. The friendships nurtured and brightened our lives. Most concluded with prayer and peach cobbler.

Amazing Grace Peach Cobbler

1 ½ cups flour	4 whole peaches, peeled and
1 ½ tsp baking powder	sliced
3 Tbl. shortening or butter	¾ cup sugar
½ cup milk	

Crust: Sift together flour and baking powder. Work in 1 tablespoon of shortening, mix, and add milk. Mix peaches, sugar, and remaining shortening (2 tablespoons). Place peach mixture in bottom of pan. Over everything, place dough patted out into about ¾ inch. Preheat oven to 400°. Bake for 40 minutes, until crust turns brown. Cool slightly, serve with ice cream or whipped cream.

Mill Creek Farm



*Each out building and the home were constructed
of the rough sawn lumber cut from Vernon's mill.*

In 1963, Ed and I purchased 97 acres in rural Metamora and we still call it home today. Ed hunted squirrels on the property as a youth. He worked two jobs and saved for five years for the initial purchase. The farm included twenty acres of tillable soil, bluffed hillsides, a lush valley that harbors a rich variety of trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. A meandering creek runs through the north and northeast sections, which flows almost year-round.

We enjoyed the peace and quiet of the rural countryside. We visited the owner and tenant, Vernon Phillips, several years prior to the purchase. Vernon was an older, shy, and friendly man who appreciated our company. He sustained himself on the place for over thirty years by operating a steam-powered saw mill, raising chickens, and growing vegetables and fruit trees.

We traveled a remote, primitive road to get to the farm. Parallel ruts ran down the center of the road during the wet season, making it difficult to pass oncoming traffic. This was a minor concern because only a handful of cars traveled the road each day. In the summer of 1963, we began cleaning out the buildings in preparation for our move.

A large oak tree at the end of the driveway shaded the house and surrounding area and it cooled us on hot summer afternoons. Often, I brought an electric skillet, chicken, and an assortment of condiments to the farm. We kept a garden there and I cooked the produce on location. I remember the satisfying noon meals under that oak tree, sipping iced tea and eating pan fried chicken and homegrown vegetables. The corn was especially tasty – cooked, yet mildly firm. Salty butter rolled off the kernels and down our chins as we discussed the afternoon tasks.

Each out building and Vernon's home were constructed of the rough sawn lumber cut from the mill. We tore down

unstable buildings that once housed hay, grain, and machinery. A 1949 red Chevy pickup that came with the purchase served us well when hauling away miscellaneous debris.

Site cleanup took the better part of one summer. Usually, Ed stood in the pickup bed, while I tossed him items to be either saved or discarded. Early on, I held each item and looked closely to determine its value. More often, it joined a growing heap bound for the dump. We hauled away outdated canned goods, old pots and pans, newspapers, broken egg crates, and furniture. Three boxes of well-worn dungarees were a testament to Vernon's hard work and determination, and a collection of receipts chronicled his strategic use of the land. The local Santa Fe railroad had delivered fruit tree saplings and transported Vernon's vegetables and eggs to Chicago. Sears receipts reflected his farm machinery purchases and a meager collection of household items.

I came across a large stack of unusual looking boxes. Worn red and black lettering ran across each side of the metal containers. They were small enough to pitch two-at-a-time, without breaking our productivity. With one robust underhand motion I hurled two through the air, one-after-another. Ed caught each and quickly surveyed them. His face turned pale and his eyes widened.

“Betsy, stop! You’re tossing me dynamite blasting caps.”

Upon closer examination, we discovered that each box contained one-hundred Atlas blasting caps. The partially disintegrated caps were highly combustible – and extremely



Mill Creek homestead, ca. 1948.

volatile. We quickly and safely disposed of the materials. Since then, we've laughed about the potentially explosive situation over many a cup of coffee.

We began building our home on the original site that fall. Incorporating the original house and root cellar into our plan, the 20' x 20' structure served as our kitchen and sitting room. We added two more bedrooms and two bathrooms - which

doubled the size of the home. In 1968, we added a 22' x 36' garage that supported a large great room with a larger-than-life fireplace. Ed and I both loved a more primitive, western



Mill Creek home, 1968.

style. We closely discussed each step of the construction plan and kept a tight rein on finances to achieve our dream. We scavenged the greater Peoria area for vintage brick, lumber, and support beams to maintain a “lodge” look. Unique antique lighting fixtures and hand-planed hardwood floors graced our home. Over the years, the home harbored many family gatherings, Christmas, and homecoming parties.



A newly remodeled kitchen makes life so much easier, 1968.



Mill Creek, January, 2010

If it weren't for the rocks in its bed, the stream would have no song.

Fried Chicken

2 frying chickens, about 2 ½ to 3 lbs, each cut into serving pieces

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 tsp. salt

½ tsp. ground black pepper

1 cup milk

vegetable shortening

1 Tbl. bacon drippings

Wash chicken and pat dry. In a heavy brown paper bag or large food storage bag, combine the flour and salt and pepper. Shake to blend. Pour the milk into a wide shallow bowl. Heat two to three inches of shortening in a deep heavy skillet over medium heat, or electric fry pan set at 375°. Add the bacon grease. Test the temperature with one drop of water. When hot, it should spatter. Dip some of the chicken pieces into the milk then place the pieces into the bag and shake to evenly coat chicken. Arrange chicken pieces in the fat. Be sure not to overcrowd the pan.

Fry the chicken until the outside is golden brown and crisp, about 15 to 20 minutes. Turn the chicken once to brown both sides. Reduce heat to 350° and fry until cooked through – about 15 minutes longer. Turn again, and drain chicken on brown paper or paper towels. Add more shortening and bacon grease, if necessary. Regulate temperature for each batch. Transfer the chicken to a larger serving platter.

The Growing Season



*Caring for cucumbers is a lot like caring for children.
Though they require special attention,
the rewards surpass all of the trouble.*

Over the years, food preservation has stretched our dollars and rewarded us with nutritious meals – even in the winter months. When the children were living at home, I averaged 500 quarts of preserved vegetables each season. Home canned

tomatoes were a staple when making chili on cold winter days. They also tasted delicious in spaghetti, soups, and sauces.

We purchased a hand tiller and riding tractor when we planted our first garden at the farm. A deep well provided an ample water supply, and we used the back porch to hold our muddy shoes and hand tools. Over the years, we have cultivated and harvested: green beans, corn, potatoes, radishes, lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, beats, squash, melons, cucumbers, and a variety of other vegetables.

Quite sizeable, the garden occupied about a quarter of an acre. Twelve, 200-foot rows began near the barn and stretched south, about twenty yards short of the creek. Ed and I tilled the soil and planted in the spring. The kids and I weeded, hoed, and harvested throughout the summer. The farm's sandy soil sometimes required additional watering, but asparagus, rhubarb and raspberries absolutely thrive here.

I've always had a close affinity with the cucumber patch. Seed companies offer a broad range. We raised common garden varieties. Though mostly comprised of water, cucumbers pack hefty doses of Vitamins A, C, and folic acid. They also contain important acids that prevent water retention. I guess that's why cucumbers are popular in preventing swollen eyes, burns and skin irritations.

In some ways, caring for cucumbers is a lot like caring for children. Though they require special attention, the rewards surpass all of the trouble. Cucumbers become more brittle and difficult to handle in the afternoon sun. So, it's best to work in the early morning – while the dew still glistens on pods and the vines are more flexible. Shoes are cumbersome, and cucumbers die when vines are inadvertently crushed or broken. So I usually worked in bare feet. Not only do you feel the rich soil against your skin, you remain sensitive to the

*I opened a jar, pulled out
a pickle with a fork,
closed my eyes and slowly
bit down. Firm, slightly
sweet - yes, even I enjoy a
good pickle.*



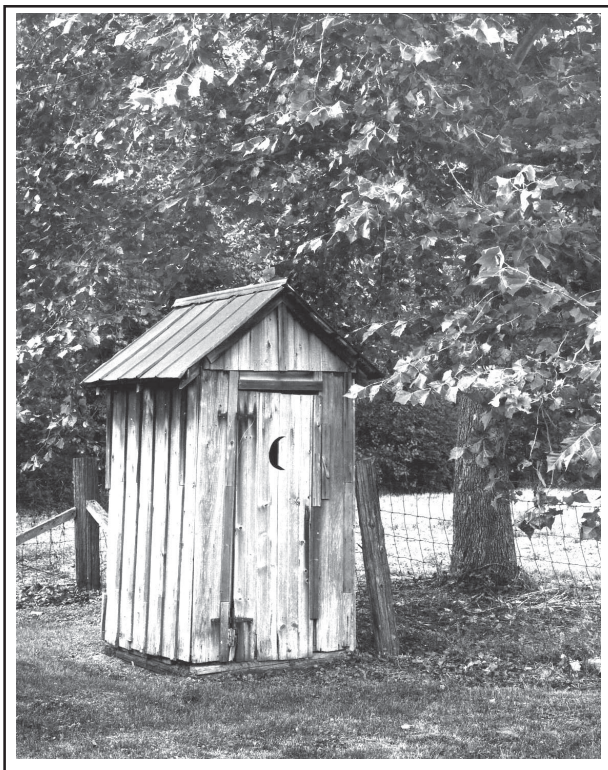
vulnerable pods, vines, blossoms, and leaves sprawled across the soil.

Stepping carefully among the plants requires caution and surefootedness. When the vines began to creep outward, migrating towards other vegetables, it's time to redirect. By carefully lifting the prickly plants and placing them closer to the primary stalk you also protect them from insects and

rodents. Cucumbers are sensitive to temperature and should be planted in the late spring or early summer when the risk of frost is low. Mulch helps retain moisture and fertilizing is essential. We used organic materials right from the barn.

As soon as the first cucumbers are pickle size, I began making pickles. A good pickle should be slightly crunchy – never rubbery. They should always compliment and never overpower an entrée. Each pickle recipe calls for a unique blend of spices. The range is vast and includes: cinnamon, mustard seed, bay leaves, allspice, dill seed, cloves, ginger, peppercorns, coriander, mace, and cardamom.

My pickles received local acclaim in 1976 – the year of our nation’s bi-centennial. County fair planners sponsored a range of exhibits and competitions that included baked and canned goods, log splitting, and beard and mustache growing. I’d never thought about entering any type of food competition. The opportunity intrigued me, so I opened a jar, pulled out a pickle with a fork, closed my eyes and slowly bit down. Firm, slightly sweet - yes, even I enjoyed a good pickle. I entered the competition, and the judges awarded me a blue ribbon. As an added bonus, Ed walked away with a blue ribbon for having the “Best Handle Bar Mustache” in Woodford County.



*The garden was a good fifty yards from our home.
On Mothers Day 1967, Ed built an outhouse for me.
Within close proximity to the garden and barn,
it served our family for many years.*

Bread and Butter Pickles

25 cucumbers, thinly sliced	5 cups white sugar
6 onions, thinly sliced	2 Tbl. mustard seed
2 green bell peppers, diced	1 ½ tsp. celery seed
3 cloves garlic, chopped	½ tsp. whole cloves
½ cup salt	1 Tbl. ground turmeric
3 cups cider vinegar	

In a large bowl, mix together cucumbers, onions, green bell peppers, garlic and salt. Allow to stand approximately three hours.

In a large saucepan, mix the cider vinegar, white sugar, mustard seed, celery seed, whole cloves and turmeric. Bring to a boil. Drain liquid from the cucumber mixture. Stir the mixture into the boiling vinegar mixture.

Remove from heat shortly before the combined mixtures return to boil. Transfer to sterile containers. Seal and chill in the refrigerator until serving.

Chicken Haven



*Ed was performing his morning barn duties around 6 a.m.
when two boys hiked down to investigate the chicken coop.*

Each emerged, holding a freshly laid egg.

On the farm, chickens provided us with eggs, meat, and memories that last a lifetime. We ordered chicks that were delivered via train – just as Vernon had done over thirty years earlier. We nurtured and fed them under heat lamps, and we used the existing chicken coop to house the adults. The hens

roosted on poles and nested in boxes. We fed them grain from a feeder, and tossed table and garden scraps over the fence into the adjoining chicken yard. Each evening, Elisa wrangled twenty-five hens and a rooster into the coop and slid the wood plank door across the entrance – chickens were easy prey for snakes, coyotes and wild housecats. We also raised bantam, (banty) chickens. The free roaming fowl became family pets

Specks paced back and forth upon the stone water trough, waiting for Elisa to come home from school.



and reproduced offspring that often raided our garden. We soon discovered that we were not the only creatures that enjoyed ripe, juicy tomatoes. The banties' speckled, colorful feathered coats sprang in multiple directions when we ran to "shoo" them out of the tomato patch.

The banty population grew exponentially over the years. They roosted in the barn and treetops at night. And they were skillful scavengers. It was not uncommon to find strategically pecked holes in the sides of juicy vegetables from mid July through early September.

Though fairly wild, banties were gentle when regularly handled. One hen named Goldie produced a brood of chicks each spring and each spring I brought them to Bible School to share with the children. They loved the brood and enjoyed many farm stories that revolved around the animals at Mill Creek Farm.

Elisa adopted one of the young banty roosters, and it became a family pet and her close companion. In the afternoon, *Specks* paced back and forth upon the stone water trough, waiting for Elisa to come home from school. When she held him close he crowed contentedly.

Our children were not the only ones who liked the chickens. Ed invited a work associate and his Boy Scout Troop to camp at the farm one spring weekend in 1970. The boys were primarily from the inner city and had little to no exposure to a rural environment. They arrived in clusters, and we gave them permission to adventure freely while setting up camp near the pond. It was refreshing to observe their encounter with farm life. They climbed the steep face of the hillside with vigor, tromped in the creek, and explored its micro world. They hung from the fence watching the horses and cows and Ed demonstrated the milking process in the barn.

The troop camped in pup tents, and the next morning, lit a campfire in preparation for breakfast. Ed was performing his morning barn duties around 6 a.m. when two boys hiked down

to investigate the chicken coop. Each emerged, holding a freshly laid egg.

“Mr. Smith,” one exclaimed. “May we eat these eggs for breakfast?”

“Of course you may,” he replied.

The boys bolted up the hill, towards camp. Well, Ed anticipated the next scenario. He pulled three dozen eggs from our refrigerator - already cleaned and ready to go. He placed a few in each nest box. Sure enough, thirty-eight boys clamored down the hill and into the chicken coop – each emerging with an egg in-hand. By mid morning, family cars began arriving to pick up children. One boy stood proudly, holding a chicken close to his chest.

“Mr. Smith, may I please take a chicken home with me?” he asked.

We had not anticipated this request, but quickly discussed the unplanned, opportune moment. “If you catch one, you can keep it,” he responded.

Needless to say, all forty boys launched upon a mission to secure a banty chicken. By the end of the day, each held a chicken, and each went home with one, except one small boy.

“That’s ok, little fella,” Ed responded. “Come back later in the week, and we’ll catch one together.

With little effort, we had effectively reduced our banty population, and later that week the boy did return – with his grandparents. It was after dark. Flashlight in hand, they entered the barn. Ed reached up and secured one bird perched on a beam. He gave it to the boy, and the boy cradled it in his arms. The grandparents thanked us and returned to the city – along with one chicken and one happy little boy.

Betsy’s Deviled Eggs

6 hard-boiled eggs.

2 tsp. sweet pickle relish, minced

2 Tbl. mayonnaise

2 tsp. creamed horseradish sauce

2 tsp. yellow mustard

salt to taste

garnishes: paprika, olives, chives, parsley, and/or pimento

Slice the peeled, hard-boiled eggs in half, lengthwise. Remove egg yolks, and place them in a bowl. Set egg whites to the side. Mash the egg yolks until crumbly. Add pickle relish, mayonnaise, horseradish sauce, mustard, and salt to taste. Mix ingredients until well-combined. Spoon the mixture into egg white halves. Garnish with paprika, olives, chives, and/or pimento. Serves 12.

Western Wanderlust



Ed and his first elk, 1959. Ennis, Montana

Early in our marriage, Ed and I enjoyed traveling throughout the western U.S. – primarily, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. Camping along the way, we fell in love with the vast plains, high deserts, mountainous terrain, lakes, and streams that flow through the canyons. We began an annual

fall pilgrimage and established a close network of friends in Montana.

Montana hunting offers many big game adventures and, over the years, Ed has harvested mule deer, antelope, elk, coyote, bobcat, and even jackrabbit. It was a clear, cool October day when we arrived at the T-O Bar Ranch near Roscoe, Montana. We had practiced target shooting the previous summer and were both ready for the hunt. Locals called the ranch Little Switzerland. Nestled into a mountainous valley with a rapid flowing river and snow capped peaks, it truly looked like the Alps. Two horses and a pack mule came with our cabin. About 6 a.m. the rancher's wife served us a hearty breakfast with all of the trimmings in the main house. After saddling the horses and securing our gear, we rode up the valley in search of mule deer.

Western jays darted from an aspen tree and chipmunks scurried out from under a felled pine. As we journeyed toward Rosebud Lake, Ed spotted four mule deer off in the distance. They stood partially camouflaged behind a mass of scrub oak. We halted our horses, and the four deer walked into the clearing.

“Go ahead Betsy,” Ed motioned.

I pulled my rifle from the saddle scabbard and nestled the butt into my shoulder. The gun seemed particular heavy as I

peered through the scope and positioned the crosshairs on the deer's right shoulder. I squeezed the trigger and the doe fell clumsily. The remaining three deer darted into the timber.

I slid the gun back into place, and squinted at the struggling deer.

"I think you shot it in the legs, Betz," Ed said.

We moved closer; Ed dismounted and finished off the deer with one loud blast.

After dressing out the deer and securing it onto the pack mule, we headed back to our cabin. Ironically enough, the same scenario played out the following morning just a couple hundred yards further down the trail. Again, I aimed for the chest, but shot the deer's legs. Once again, Ed finished the job and we hung it in the barn, alongside the first battered deer.

Ed bagged a larger buck on the third day and we discussed the trip's success over coffee on our last day at the T-O Bar Ranch. We thanked the rancher and his wife. After Ed secured all three deer atop our 1959 station wagon, the rancher's teenage son strolled over to our loaded vehicle. Eight bloody legs protruded out from under a chartreuse tarp. The boy tipped his hat back on his head, honed in on the bloody limbs, and snickered.

“Do you always shoot your deer in the legs, ma’am?”

Caught a little off guard and a somewhat embarrassed, I replied. “Well, of course I do. How else could I slow them down enough for my husband to shoot?”

The boy threw a puzzled look in our direction and strolled back to the barn. Ed and I reminisced about our adventure and laughed about the deer legs as we headed east out of Roscoe, bound for home.



Taking a break from travel.

Venison Chili

(ground beef, pork, or poultry may be used)

- 2 lbs. ground venison
- 2 Tbl. olive oil
- 1 large, finely chopped onion
- 2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
- 3 16 oz. cans tomato puree
- 3 16 oz. cans chili or kidney beans
- 3 Tbl. chili powder
- 2 Tbl. ground cumin
- 2 Tbl. brown sugar
- 1 tsp. salt

Brown venison, onion, and garlic in olive oil, over medium heat. Add tomatoes, stir. Add chili powder, salt, cumin, and brown sugar. Stir till dissolved. Add beans and simmer over low heat for one hour. If too thick, add water to desired consistency. Slowly adding small amounts of instant mashed potatoes will thicken the chili while enhancing taste. Add Tobasco sauce, as desired. The more it's reheated, the better it tastes!

Stitch-By-Stitch



The touch and feel of different fabrics have increased my understanding of compatibility and wear. When I come across a fabric, even in the dark of the night, I know its characteristics.

Ed and I made monthly installments to purchase my first sewing machine. The 1949 Kenmore model sits in a solid walnut cabinet and I used it to sew curtains and draperies for our new home. The machine still works today and handles denim and dense fabrics more readily than my newer machine.

Though it only features a straight stitch, it's reliable, durable and I break fewer needles while using it.

I began sewing in high school, and made my first dress in home economics class. The pattern was simple and I wore the short-sleeved, flowered dress to daytime and evening socials. While in high school, I used one of the school's machines by day, and my Aunt Mary helped me lay out the pattern and hand finish garments in the evenings. I appreciated her guidance and friendship. I remember how Aunt Mary's presence stirred my longing for Mother.

It wasn't until 1968 when I learned to sew more complex projects. Enrolled in a high school sewing class, Karen Sue brought home a lovely blue, hand tailored skirt and jacket. I marveled at its beauty, the fabric, and overall quality of construction. Her teacher, Marian Christians, had taught her well, and I became curious about my own potential as a seamstress.

In January, the high school sponsored an evening adult sewing class. I enrolled. Marian worked patiently, teaching a group of ten novice seamstresses the art of reading patterns and laying out fabric. She extolled the virtues of understanding fabric characteristics and selection. We learned how to alter clothing and modify existing patterns to fit a range of body contours. We top stitched, back stitched, smocked, and appliquéd. The class continued weekly, through May. Not only

did I glean a wealth of knowledge and experience, I constructed a beautiful dark green double knit jacket and matching slacks. Economic benefits followed. Materials totaled about \$20, and similar pant suits retailed for \$40.

I find it amusing when looking back at the styles and fabrics that reigned in the 70's. However, since establishing my newfound skills I've sewn dresses, blouses, pant suites, swimwear, western shirts, leisure suits, blue jeans, hunting ensembles, and a range of miscellaneous separates.

With a teenage daughter in the house, homecoming and prom events signaled the need to locate the perfect pattern and fabric to construct a dance dress. Current fashion trends dictated the fabric and style. But, the true success remained in my ability to alter the pattern, making it unique and photographable.

I remember one dance dress pattern that featured a straight hem and V-neckline. But with a little chalk and scissor work, Simplicity Pattern 5561 became a one-of-a-kind evening gown featuring a curved sweet-heart neckline, handkerchief hemline, and matching bolero jacket.

Cotton, polyester, rayon, satin, flannel, and velour – I've worked with all of them, and more. Over the years, the touch and feel of different fabrics have increased my understanding

of compatibility and wear. When I come across a fabric, even in the dark of the night, I know its characteristics.

But it's when I sit at my sewing machine and glance out of my window to see the golden sun fall steadily into the treetops, that I become acutely aware of the passing of time and the intrinsic benefits of making something by hand. Stitch-by-stitch, each article holds a special prayer of happiness - delivered seamlessly to the one I love.



Smith family portrait, 1978. Handmade clothing articles include: rayon polka dot, ruffled blouse and Eddie's tan, brushed denim leisure suit.

Oatmeal Cookies

(a great snack for a busy seamstress)

1 cup butter, softened
1 cup white sugar
1 cup packed brown sugar
2 eggs
1 tsp. salt
1 ½ tsp. ground cinnamon
3 cups quick cooking oats
raisins or nuts, optional

In a medium bowl, cream together sugar, butter, and brown sugar. Beat in eggs one at a time, and then stir in vanilla. Combine flour, cinnamon, baking soda and salt. Stir into the creamed mixture. Mix in oats (nuts and raisins). Combine well. Cover and chill dough for at least one hour.

Preheat oven to 375°. Grease cookie sheets. With hands, roll dough into balls. Place them 2 inches apart on cookie sheets. Makes approximately 36-60 cookies.

Morels in our Midst



*The plump yellow morels appear when the moist earth
has settled into a warm, mulched medley
of tiny buzzing insects and spring ephemerals.*

It's about the time of year when the Jenny wren begins to survey vacant crevices and high ledges for nesting sites. While watching her diligent gathering of twigs and random fibers for binding, it's easy to recognize that springtime zeal for life and procreating. Dutchman's Britches begin to appear in the early spring. Their dainty, white puffy blooms stand vividly

against the early green grasses that emerge on the wooded river bluffs. When they appear, I know that the morel mushrooms are not far behind. I remember Vernon often commenting on the annual ritual.

“You’ll begin to find morels when the leaves on the walnut trees are as big as a squirrel’s ear,” he would say.

The tiny gray mushrooms sprout first, secretively, discretely among the leaf litter. The plump yellow morels appear a little later when the moist earth has settled into a warm, mulched medley of tiny buzzing insects and spring ephemerals like Jack in the Pulpit and May Apple. Finding the mushrooms offers a magnificent outdoor adventure that awakens all of your senses – and memory. Their unusual shape and texture leave a distinct mental impression. But they are true masters of camouflage, blending into faded grasses, leaves, twigs, and newly emerging wildflowers. Relying on a hiking or “mushroom” stick to push back leaves and spring vegetation helps. However, the real trick is to change your perspective by squatting down low to scan the earth for that familiar cone-shaped, spongy textured form.

It was a Saturday morning in early May when we awoke. The winter had seemed exceptionally long. Over the course of the last few weeks, light showers had intermingled with the increasingly warm days.

“Ed, I have a feeling that this will be a perfect day for you and I to hunt for mushrooms.”

He opened his eyes slowly, winced and drew his hand to his stomach. I knew something was wrong.

“Oh, honey, not this morning. I feel the flu coming on. Let’s see how I feel a little later.”

Not wanting to miss out on the perfect opportunity to enjoy the outdoors on such a beautiful day, I lingered for awhile, kissed him on the cheek and watched him fall into a midmorning slumber.



*When the Dutchman’s
Britches begin to appear, I
know the morel mushrooms are
not far behind.*

The air was warm and the earth was moist and smelled like a freshly tilled garden. I picked up the green berry basket, a walking stick, and headed south into the lower meadow and

adjoining stand of timber. Buff stayed close by my side. She was a loyal dog and she could effectively track and kill small game with ease. With her nose down to the ground as she trotted along, I wondered how great it would be if she could “sniff out” all of the mushrooms that lay hidden, out-of-sight.

Morels rarely grow back in exactly the same spot every year. But out of habit, I did check one of my familiar mushroom hunting spots - and there they were in all of their glory. A scattering of twenty-five or so, large, yellow sponge mushrooms not far from the remnants of a fallen elm tree. I gently plucked them at their base and placed them into the basket. Walking a few yards south, I stooped low and found another smaller group peaking through a mound of wet leaves. My bucket was already full – after only a few minutes of hunting.

As if all of the unfound mushrooms would suddenly decide to duck or run for cover, I rushed back to the house to secure a larger container. There, Ed sat in bed, wincing in pain and gripping the sides of a wastepaper basket. Finding it difficult to compose my jubilation, I brought the basket to his bedside and commented on the shape and size of my treasures. After securing a bread sack, I quickly planned my next course of action.

“Be sure and save some for me to find,” Ed shouted as the screen door slammed shut behind me.

By two o’clock, I’d filled three bread sacks with mushrooms. I rinsed and sliced them in halves. Spread out and drying upon tea towels, they were completely covering the kitchen table, when Ed walked gingerly into the kitchen.

He scanned the table’s surface and commented, “Wow, what a find.”

I placed a kettle of water on the stove for tea, and we sat fingering the collection of randomly sized morels.

“It would have been so much better, had you been along,” I smiled.

“How about tomorrow?” he asked.

“Of course,” I responded. “But, how long does it take for new ones to grow?”

We laughed about the disparity and the day’s events. Together, we sipped tea and talked about the kids and plans for the garden. Then I tucked Ed back into bed, anticipating a quick recovery and another successful mushroom hunting adventure – together.

Pan Fried Morel Mushrooms

about ½ lb. morel mushrooms (large bunch)

3-4 Tbl. butter or margarine

4 eggs

frying skillet or iron skillet

frying pan (non-stick is good...iron skillet is better)

soda crackers

quart size zip lock bag

salt/pepper to taste.

Pre-heat a skillet (cast iron preferred) and about 4 tablespoons of the butter over medium low heat. Crack the eggs into large bowl and beat till blended well. Place a large amount of crackers into a zip lock bag and roll with a rolling pin to finely crushed crumbs. Place crumbs in large mixing bowl.

Dip a hand full of cut and cleaned mushrooms into egg batter. Then, cover each mushroom in cracker crumbs. Place in the hot skillet. Sauté in butter for approx 5 minutes over medium heat, turning as needed.

Add more butter or margarine as needed. Be careful not to over heat the butter or place the mushrooms too close together while cooking. Drain on paper towels. Serve hot.

A Woman's Journey



As we crossed the Sierra Madre Mountains, the vistas were breathtaking, but the roads were dangerously narrow.

As a younger woman, I found it easy to become caught up in arriving at a destination or achieving a specific goal. But over time, I've learned how important it is to appreciate the adventures that life presents - and savor every moment. In July of 1979, Ed's cousin Edith and I embarked on a five

week road trip through Mexico. Edith lived on the outskirts of San Jose, California. There, we packed her camper with all our necessities and began our journey south along the Pacific coastline through Tijuana and Baja, Mexico.

We were two middle-aged women eager to explore the vast cultural and natural beauty of a foreign land. Edith was a university professor who spoke fluent Spanish. I came prepared to assist with cooking and driving the more challenging mountainous terrain. On the first night of our journey, we pulled onto a quiet beach area just south of Ensenada, Mexico. I tossed a fresh salad and warmed a can of soup for dinner. We watched the sun fall into the ocean as we topped off the meal with a cup of coffee. Of course, this was before cell phones. So, we practiced extreme caution and devised some creative methods to deter potential predators over the course of our trip. Edith had always amazed me with her resourcefulness and vast reserve of ideas.

“I think this will do the trick,” she said, as she pulled a large leather gun holster out from under the driver’s seat.

She wedged the sprawling belt across the dashboard. Then she moved to the back of the camper and emerged with a pair of men’s, Size 14 boots. I watched as she positioned them just outside the camper door.

“That should keep criminals at bay,” she laughed.

We slept soundly with no interruption and the next morning we headed south towards Santa Rosalia. Within the village café, we noticed local men seated at a nearby table bantering back and forth. Two Mexican police who seemed acutely aware of the discussion quietly sipped coffee at the counter. Edith sat intently listening, periodically glancing up to observe their body gestures. As we finished our pie, she whispered, “Come on, Betsy. It’s time to go.” As we scooted out of town towards the ferry, Edith pieced together the conversation, which included hints of civil unrest and rioting against the current governing body.

After safely boarding the ferry, we secured the camper and enjoyed the vastness of the Sea of Cortez. We stood at the stern, gazing at the disappearing shoreline. We wondered what the Spanish conquistadors thought as they traveled the new frontier. And I wondered what my family thought about my yearning to fulfill a personal desire for exploration. After twenty years of participating in fall hunting trips, I just couldn’t pass an opportunity to have an adventure of my own, with someone who I loved like a sister, a friend and caring traveling companion.

We camped just south of Ciudad in an American owned campground. The rates were very affordable and included a landscaped freshwater pond for guests to enjoy. The air was hot, so we chatted and lingered in the pool of water as darkness fell. Tree mounted light bulbs provided a warm



*I'd never seen such large, plump amphibians.
There they floated, relaxed and content,
enjoying the nightly ritual just as much as the paying guests.*

stream of light across the water's surface, and we noticed others enjoying the cool comfort. As we chatted, I stopped mid-sentence when I heard a mysterious *kerplop*. We paused, curiously looked around, and continued our conversation. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw two strange objects fall into the water, one-after-another, *kerplop, kerplop*. We pivoted around toward the edge of the pool to see three sets of glowing eyes. The intruders were a trio of ambivalent cane toads searching for a cooler environment. There they floated, relaxed and content, appearing to enjoy the nightly ritual just as much as the paying guests. I'd never seen such large, plump amphibians. Each appeared to be about eight inches long and weigh at least a couple of pounds. Before I had a chance to comment on the unusual guests, Edith had

ejected herself from the pool and stood warily at a safe distance. After returning to our camper, we scanned the floor for interlopers. That night, Edith stayed inside, while I set the boots outside the camper door.

From Ciudad, we traveled down the interior coastline. We toured Mazatlán and Tepic. From Tepic, we traveled inland, through Guadlahara. We met a range of interesting people on our trip. One night we stayed with a retired teacher and his wife. While there, we enjoyed a delicious home cooked Mexican dinner of seafood enchiladas and tacos. We drank margheritas and conversed late into the evening about our families, the beauty of the Mexican landscape and people who lived there. After an early morning departure, we ascended into the high country. As we drove across the Sierra Madre Mountains, we prayed for continued safety. The vistas were breathtaking, but the roads were dangerously narrow and required both of us to effectively navigate the potholes and primitive signage.

Each evening, we stayed at either a campground, motel, or resort. As we headed north through Monterey, Mexico, and crossed the border into the U.S. a calm settled within me. Driving northeast, the terrain continued to flatten, and the familiar fields of corn and green pastures welcomed us. Ed and the children were anxiously awaiting my return, and a banner hung across the garage door read, *Welcome Home Mom. We Missed You!*

As life takes us into charted and uncharted territory, it always amazes me how good reunions feel. After eighty years of living, I've come to realize that home is not really a physical space or place. Home is a state of being. It's when you find yourself in the presence of the ones you love and the ones who love you back.



Ed & Betsy Smith, 1991.

Baja Fish Tacos

½ cup sour cream

½ cup mayonnaise

¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro

1 (1.25 ounce) package taco seasoning mix

1 lb. cod or other white fish fillets, cut into 1-inch pieces

2 Tbl. vegetable oil

2 Tbl. lime juice

1 package (12) taco shells, warmed

toppings: shredded cabbage, chopped tomato, lime juice, taco sauce.

Combine sour cream, mayonnaise, cilantro and 2 tablespoons seasoning mix in small bowl. Combine fish, vegetable oil, lemon juice in medium bowl. Pour into large skillet. Cook, stirring constantly, over medium-high for 4 to 5 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Fill taco shells with fish mixture. Top with cabbage, tomato and sour cream mixture, lime juice and taco sauce. Serves 6.